

Human First Presents Beauty And The Beast

By Elizabeth LaBarbera

Most of us know of the classic tale of love conquering all in Beauty And The Beast – but have you ever seen a version where the rivals Beast and Gaston turn out to be brothers? Well, I have while watching a revamped interpretation of this timeless story by Human First, Inc.'s Brooklyn Day Habilitation program and CO/LAB Theater Group. This was the culminating performance of a 10-week on-site workshop with CO/LAB theater group on Wednesday, February 8th at 8814 Foster Avenue.

Human First, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization that provides services to developmentally disabled individuals in Long Island and New York City. The day habilitation program works with adults with developmental disabilities to foster personal growth, improve socialization and interpersonal skills, and help participants achieve their goals through programs and activities.

Constantly on the look-out to expand program offerings and expose participants to new activities, Human First's Dainya Bruno, Day Habilitation Specialist/Events Coordinator, contacted CO/LAB to begin a theater program at the center. Members and volunteers of the CO/LAB Theater Group began working with participants in November 2011 to create this zany interpretation.

Based on the Young Actors' Workshop established at Syracuse University in 1992, CO/LAB's mission is "to offer individuals with developmental disabilities a creative

and social outlet through theater arts." They offer offsite residency workshops throughout New York City at day habilitation programs, community centers and schools. They also offer free onsite workshops at the Bruce Mitchell Studio at ART/NY in Manhattan.

"What we wanted to do was to create fractured fairy tales, we wanted to tell the story of a fairy tale but in different ways," said Arielle Lever, co-director of education and outreach at CO/LAB. The actors used exercises and games in order to create the production. "We built the characters of beauty and the beast and the story of beauty of the beast, and we worked through different genres of how to tell the story in different ways."

The result of their work was a very entertaining story told using the five genres of mystery, musical, opera, soap opera, and slapstick comedy.

"The CO/LAB Theater Group helped our participants learn to express themselves more," said Ms. Bruno, Human First Day Habilitation Specialist/Events Coordinator. "We see a big difference in their self-expression and esteem." The Day Habilitation participants are already excited for the coming fall, when the CO/LAB Theater Group will return to create another performance with the participants.

Working with Human First also meant a lot to the CO/LAB Theater team. Ms. Lever said, "We were really lucky to have the opportunity to come to Human First and work with these



CO/LAB Theater Group members: Neil Andrus (back row, hat), Jordan Siegal (back row, middle, glasses) Arielle Lever (bottom row left), Laura Borgwardt (bottom row right)

wonderful actors."

About Human First:

Human First, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing greater opportunities for people with developmental disabilities toward reaching their personal goals. Our culturally trained and multilingual staff and high staff retention rates are the keys to our success. Our programs reach previously underserved populations in New York communities. Human First offers Individualized Supports, Clinical, and Service Coordination, Community Habilitation, and Day Habilitation for children and adults with a vast array of develop-

mental disabilities. Founded in 2001, Human First serves over 800 families in Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, Staten Island, and Nassau and Suffolk counties. Human First's main office is in Lynbrook, NY, which has served as the primary administrative office as well as the center for NYC service coordination since 2006. Human First also has offices in Brooklyn, NY and in Deer Park, NY. For more information, or to schedule an appointment to discuss our services, please visit www.humanfirst.org, email info@humanfirst.org or call 1-516-823-9500.

Photo courtesy of Human First

Starrett City Water Treatment Plant To Reduce Jamaica Bay Pollutants

By Dara Mormile

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Carter Strickland announced last week that the agency completed construction of an additional facility at the 26th Ward Wastewater Treatment Plant in Starrett City that will reduce the amount of nitrogen discharged into Jamaica Bay by more than 3,000 pounds per day. The facility was constructed on-site near 126-60 Flatlands Avenue, just east of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The nearly \$2 million facility is expected to reduce nitrogen discharges into Jamaica Bay by more than 50 percent over the next 10 years.

In early 2010, approximately 40,000 pounds of nitrogen were being discharged into the bay every day. With the addition of the new facility, DEP will reduce that level by roughly 7,000 pounds. At high levels, nitrogen can degrade overall waterbody health.

"As part of our ongoing commitment to protect, preserve and improve the ecosystem of Jamaica Bay, nitrogen reduction is an important upgrade to the 26th Ward Wastewater Treatment Plant," said Commissioner



Strickland. "DEP has made it clear that the protection of this national treasure is among its top priorities."

The plant went into operation in 1944 and serves more than 283,000 residents and treats up to 85 million gallons of wastewater a day and up to 170 gallons during wet weather events.

New Yorkers produce, and DEP treats, an average of 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater every day. The wastewater is collected through 7,400 miles of sewers that flow downhill by gravity or pumping into large interceptor

sewers, which lead directly to the city's 14 wastewater treatment plants.

"This is the latest step under the terms of our 2010 agreement to reduce nitrogen discharges and provide funding for salt marsh rebuilding projects to restore the bay's critical wildlife refuge habitat," said New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Martens.

"DEC's recent designation of Jamaica Bay as a boating 'no discharge zone' shows our continuing commitment to work with New York

City to improve the recreational value of Jamaica Bay for all New Yorkers," said the commissioner.

Jamaica Bay is a 31-square-mile water body with a broader watershed of approximately 142 square miles, which includes portions of Brooklyn, Queens, and Nassau County.

The bay is a diverse ecological resource that supports multiple habitats, including open water, salt marshes, grasslands, coastal woodlands, maritime shrublands, and brackish and freshwater wetlands. These habitats support 91 fish species, 325 species of birds, and many reptile, amphibian, and small mammal species.

Mayor Bloomberg has made investing in the City's infrastructure a top priority. Since 2002, the City has invested \$8.9 billion in upgrading its 14 wastewater treatment plants and reducing combined sewer overflows. That work has already yielded benefits for New York's waterways, which are the cleanest they have been in the 100 years that the City has collected water quality data in New York Harbor.

Photo courtesy NYS Department of Environmental Protection