

Cleaned up triangle gears up for festival

Food and music come to Jackson Heights' Dunningham Triangle

Posted: Thursday, September 13, 2012 10:30 am

by Josey Bartlett, Associate Editor



PHOTO BY JOSEY BARTLETT

Horacio Riquelmo reads his morning paper in front of the newly renovated plaza space that will host a food and music festival on Sept. 21.

The free Viva La Comida! festival on Sept. 21 will bring the community together at the recently improved Dunningham Triangle in Jackson Heights.

The 82nd Street Partnership, a nonprofit charged with beautifying the street from the tip of the triangle — where 82nd Street joins with Baxter Avenue — to 37th Avenue, cleaned up the plaza space on Aug. 24.

Overgrown shrubs were trimmed down, bird excrement was washed away and overflowing trash cans were removed.

“There used to be a lot of bird feces,” a Parks Department employee said. “Now it’s much more attractive.”

The group also filled the triangle with bark chips, which has alleviated flooding, he said, adding that a crew cleans the space every day.



Horacio Riquelmo, an Argentina-native, has lived across the street from the triangle for 33 years.

“It was really dirty before,” he said in Spanish.

Since the park’s makeover, Riquelmo has begun reading his morning paper on the sidewalk surrounding the space. He brings his own chair from his apartment, but would like to see a few chairs provided.

And the staff at the 82nd Street Partnership is listening.

“We are working with the community to shape a vision,” 82nd Street Partnership Executive Director Seth Taylor said.

During the cleanup day, staff collected 65 surveys from residents detailing what they would like to see in the space. The nonprofit has already procured about \$220,000 of grant money to put towards realizing these visions. The group will collect more opinions at the festival, and then create a game plan for further improvements of the space.

Many people would like to see flower gardens, seating and Wi-Fi in the park, said Sofia Davila, 82nd Street Partnership program assistant. Eventually the nonprofit would like to organize dance programs, chess games and language classes, much like those held in Bryant Park in Manhattan.

“Our space is more limited than Bryant Park, but the idea is to have a space that engages the community,” Davila said.

The festival on Sept. 21 will be a step in that direction.

Ithaca Street between Baxter Avenue and 82nd Street will be closed and filled with tables and chairs. Inside the triangle the 82nd Street dance troupe from Mestizo Art Center will perform, Nelson Idalgo and Maria Del Rosario will belt out tunes and the NY Jazz Academy and the International String Duo will entertain. Guests can also watch as members of the Colombian Silleteros de Santa Elena create flower displays, some of which will be used in the Feria de las Flores in Manhattan on Sept. 23, and visit the Jackson Heights Cinema, which will host a pop-up crafts market from Design for You. Custom-embroidered hats will be given away from The Sewing Outlet as well as other giveaways.

Restaurants from 82nd Street, such as Taqueria Coatzingo, Limoncello Italian Restaurant and the grandma slice specialists Louie’s Pizzeria, will offer discounts and set up booths outside their doors.

Jackson Heights resident, casual tour guide and lover of food Jeff Orlick has assembled an all-star team of food carts to set up around the triangle: The Sainted Arepa Lady — who makes Colombian sandwiches with cornmeal pancakes; Tortas Neza — the giant Spanish sandwich maker who is a competitor in this year's Vendy awards on Sept. 15, a competition that names the city's best food carts; Patacon Pisao— a Venezuelan foot cart; The Chipper Truck— the only Irish food truck in the city serving from 1 a.m. to 6 a.m. every night; Peruvian fusion from Morocho; and Tacos la Familia and El Coyote Dormilon — two Mexican food vendors from Roosevelt Avenue.