

Car service centers' exit blocked by DOT

BY CHRISTINA SANTUCCI

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One month after the City blocked off an exit to several Auburndale car service centers – leaving one main entrance/exit for the several centers – the owners have been told that they will need to apply for a special waiver to get approval for a curb cut permit, for a cut that was done several decades ago.

Until the exit is reopened, the owners of three of the service centers are worried that their employees and customers are in danger.

“With all the traffic coming in and going out, there is a greater potential to have an accident and for someone to get hurt,” said Douglas Callahan, the owner of the Helms Brothers Mercedes-Benz service center, one of five situated on four parcels of adjoining properties.

The exit in question, located at the intersection of Auburndale Lane and Station Road – a one-way street heading south – leads out of the Star Toyota and Star Nissan service centers, which share one property, as well as the Mercedes service center.

Cunningham Buick Pontiac GMC and Barron Lincoln Mercury each have their own separate entrance/exit.

John Koufakis, who owns the Star Toyota and Star Nissan service centers with his son, Michael, said he remembered that the curb cut had existed when the property had been the Macy's warehouse, long before he bought the property seven years ago. Several years before Star Toyota and Star Nissan moved in, the property was vacant.

“Given the condition that it was prior, I think we made it really nice,” said Michael Koufakis.

Since the Koufakis' centers opened five years ago, customers have used the exit – going straight onto the one-way Auburndale Lane towards Northern Boulevard. To make sure that no one made a right-hand turn into Station Road – a one-way street headed in the opposite direction – Callahan and



THE QUEENS COURIER/Photo by Christina Santucci
John Koufakis, owner of the Star Toyota and Star Nissan service centers in Auburndale, stands behind the “Jersey wall” installed in September to prevent customers from exiting onto Station Road and Auburndale Lane from the service centers.

Koufakis had placed a sign indicating that a right was not allowed.

With the exit closed, customers and employees must now drive where two-way traffic barely fits.

“You could stay here 10 minutes and be able to see the danger,” Koufakis said. “In the case of an emergency, EMS will have to go around two or three blocks to make it in here.”

Before the exit was closed, the traffic from cars leaving the service centers did not sit well with local residents, who made eight complaints to the DOB. They cited an excessive number of cars, that construction was done without a permit, that there was no barrier between commercial and residential property, and that deliveries were made through the small driveway instead of the loading dock and main entrance, according to the Department of Buildings (DOB) website.

A DOB inspector was sent to the location twice to investigate the complaints, but each one was found to be unsubstantiated during the last visit to the site on Thursday, September 14.

No action was necessary to create a barrier between the residential and commercial properties because the “Jersey” wall barrier had already been

set up to block the exit.

Because the driveway had been created without a curb-cut permit, the Department of Transportation (DOT) blocked off the exit on Friday, September 8.

“[The Jersey wall] doesn't close it off; [drivers] just can't go down that street,” said Craig Chin, a spokesperson from the DOT.

When the service center owners applied for a curb cut permit, their application was referred to the DOT because the exit is located within 50 feet of an intersection. Now Callahan said that they are considering the next course of action.

To reopen the exit, the dealers would need to file an application for a waiver to the 50-foot rule, along with an application for a permit from the DOT to temporarily close down the sidewalk.

“Emotions are very high,” Callahan said, explaining that the service centers have made several concessions and supported changes that benefited the community – changing the hours for deliveries, building a sidewalk on Auburndale Lane, supporting the placement of speed bumps on Auburndale Lane, and calling for the addition of a stop light on nearby Utopia Parkway.

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**Regina Bonolo
Business Consultant, Entrepreneur,
and Mother
Hollis Hills**

JOB DESCRIPTION: Regina Bonolo has been president/owner of Aspire Higher, a coaching and training company that has helped business owners establish, develop and excel in their ventures since 1999. She leads business development sales training and strategic marketing workshops and works privately to assist business owners, entrepreneurs and sales executives to achieve their definition of success.

RESIDENCE: Born and raised in New York City, now lives with her husband of 12 years and their two children in Hollis Hills.

EDUCATION: She holds a Bachelor's degree from SUNY Stony Brook. Bonolo graduated with Dean's List honors. She continues to keep abreast of her field with training in coaching, sales and speech.

CAREER GOAL: To do workshops and seminars for organizations, and to grow her private clientele. Bonolo likes to give back to the community by volunteering her time for the Bayside Business Association and P.S. 188 Kingsbury. She's also a member of the Queens Chamber of Commerce.

PROUDEST MOMENT: When clients tell her that she has enhanced or changed their lives or say, “because of you I took a risk.” She's also very proud of the birth of her children and that she has excellent relations with the people in her life. She feels successful because she has balanced all aspects of her life. “To me balance is success,” she said.

FAVORITE MEMORY: Bonolo's favorite personal memories are of being in the rainforests in Puerto Rico and Trinidad. “I loved it because it was an experiential event,” she said.

INSPIRATION: People that make difference, not just the Oprah Winfreys of the world.

Anyone that gives without expectation of repository. “Oprah is wonderful but there are many others who are of service to other people. There are just so many people who inspire me, not just celebrities but ordinary people. Parents that help kids with stop and drop. They inspire me. They are giving of themselves. The volunteers of the world inspire me,” she said.

Animal rights activist Florence Paul was 82

Florence Paul, 82, long-time animal rights activist passed away on October 15 after a long battle with cancer. She was 82 years old.

A resident of Whitestone, Paul “was a terrific person who fought for animals,” according to her friend of 32 years, Phyllis Onyan.

Her death left “an irreplaceable void in our hearts and an unparalleled legacy of lifetime dedication to her community,” said fellow animal rights activist Jacqueline D'Elia. “Her capacity to take charge, make a difference and innovate change was unsurpassed by anyone.”

An avid animal lover who was also an active member of Grace Church as well as the Greater Whitestone Business Association, Paul was born on June 11, 1924 in Clearfield County, PA. She grew up in a small coal-mining town and moved to Brooklyn when she was a



Florence Paul

teenager.

She married in 1950 and moved to Queens with her husband.

Following his death, Paul opened a ladies' apparel shop in Whitestone.

“She always had a flair for fashion and was a savvy business woman,” said her sister-in-law, Nancy Paul.

When the clothing shop closed, Paul went to work for an animal hospital and later co-founded the pet-friendly organization A.C.T. (Animals Can't Talk).

“She was instrumental in developing and furthering this organization,” said her sister-in-law.

“The decades of relentless selflessness to improve the neighborhood for both humans and animals has left an indelible mark on those she touched,” said D'Elia. “In conversations with me, Florence had often commended [the business] Preferred Floors on the continued compassion and humaneness shown by the owners and staff in community-related issues. Today, they continue Florence's work.”

A memorial Mass was held in Paul's honor at Grace Church. She is survived by a sister, two brothers and many nieces and nephews.