New City Clerk’s Office Opened in Manhattan

On January 12, 2009 the City Clerk’s Office, which provides marriage licenses, conducts civil weddings and issues marriage certificates, began operating out of a new, 24,000 square foot, revamped, state-of-the-art location at 141 Worth Street.

Beyond the new space, many improvements have been made with the customer in mind: a new line-management system that tells customers their wait time; fourteen computer kiosks for online application processing; one-stop windows for service instead of multiple windows; credit card processing (replacing the need for money orders); large restrooms with vanities and full-length mirrors; refinished and decorated chapel space; an area to take photos in front of a backdrop of City Hall; a branch of the City Store where fresh flowers can be purchased, as well as other sundries such as disposable cameras, film, costume rings, and NYC merchandise. The wedding chapels feature artwork on loan from the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the City Hall backdrop was supplied by Duggal Visual Solutions. Literature in the new Marriage Bureau is available in English and Spanish. Customers can also speak to clerks in their preferred language using a telephone interpretation system available in 170 languages.

For more information contact Michael McSweeney at mmcsweeney@cityclerk.nyc.gov.

New Initiative at DOHMH to Prevent and Treat STD’s among High School Students

In March 2006, DOHMH launched STEP-UP (STD Testing and Education Program for Urban Populations), an initiative designed to reach sexually active teens in the City’s public high schools who may have contracted Chlamydia or Gonorrhea.

STEP-UP provides preventive education and free urine-based testing, as well as counseling and treatment for students who test positive for Chlamydia or Gonorrhea, along with their sex partners. During the 2007-2008 school year, 89 schools participated. More than 24,000 high school students were educated, and almost 12,000 were tested for Chlamydia and Gonorrhea - 7.3% (10.1% of females and 4.4% of males) tested positive for one or both of these STDs. Roughly 95% of students testing positive were treated, along with 75% of their sex partners.

DOHMH enhanced STEP UP in November 2008 by creating the web site Teen Health (www.nyc.gov/teenhealth), which focuses on teen health and links students confidentially to their test results. The website also links students to locations of free health clinics, STD facts, what to expect at an STD clinic, hotlines, and DOHMH’s NYC Teen Mindspace, a MySpace.com page focused on mental health problems.

The Department expects thousands of New York City high school students to visit the new Teen Health site each school-year.

For more information contact Sophie Nurani at 212-788-4450 or snurani@health.nyc.gov.
Department of Transportation Reaches Out to Its Customers with “Get to Know Us Day”

“Thank you for a great meeting”
P. Shubert, Rockaway Beach, Queens

“Thanks so much for inviting me to the informative presentation”.
J. Kelly, Crown Heights, Brooklyn

These were some of the reactions from the newly launched “Get-To-Know-Us” day sponsored by DOT’s Customer Service Division, held at DOT’s headquarters. This was a unique opportunity for customers to air their concerns and receive answers directly. DOT offered the two-hour event on November 20th and 21st to accommodate customers’ schedules. Over 20 participants attended.

The Department encouraged participants to use any of the channels available to them, and highlighted writing letters to the Commissioner, using the DOT Website, and calling 3-1-1.

During the event, customers were invited to voice their desires for improved transportation services. For example, some requested speed bumps in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, traffic signals and pedestrian ramps in Queens, municipal lots repainted in Lower Manhattan, pedestrian safety measures in downtown Brooklyn, and “One Way” street conversions in the Bronx.

Customers who attended were extremely pleased to know that DOT took extra steps to give them an opportunity to personally voice their concerns and to follow-up on issues they brought to DOT’s attention.

Participants went home with a complimentary package that included DOT’s Sustainable Streets: Strategic Plan; a 2009 Alternate Side of the Street Parking Calendar; and, a Bicycle Map.

As for DOT, Customer Service managers and staff were happy to know that participants were very satisfied with the extra attention DOT gave them.

The event sent a clear message to DOT’s customers: that DOT’s goal is to assist them the best way that DOT can.

For more information contact Catherine Messana at cmessana@dot.nyc.gov or Desiree Maple at dmaple@dot.nyc.gov.

Call Center Standardized Language

The Mayor’s Office of Operations, in partnership with agencies, developed new, standardized call-center language for all City call-centers. As part of the City’s effort to present a uniform image, call-centers will now use the same language to greet and introduce themselves to the customers and to thank them on the phone. Changes to call-center language are effective beginning January 19, 2009.

In an effort to spread the message, the Mayor’s Office of Operations made available to agencies posters and “hot sheets,” briefing their call-center staff on the changes. The standardized language was a product of the Customer Service Steering Committee, involving call-center directors from across the City. Input on the ideal language and method of talking with customers was gathered during the fall of 2008 and underwent many reviews and revisions before appearing in its final form.

Beginning January 19 quality assurance assessments of City call-centers will determine the effectiveness of the project. Customer Service Liaisons serving as part of the Customer Service Steering Committee will take part in the quality assurance assessment, providing an opportunity for agency call-center directors to interact with other City call-centers.

For more information contact Jeff Roth at jroth@cityhall.nyc.gov or Craig Hosang at chosang@cityhall.nyc.gov.
The Department of Environmental Protection has a cadre of workers who staff the Bureau of Customer Services Call Center located in DEP’s offices in Flushing, Queens. New York City’s property owners, building managers, and agents can contact the call center at 1-718-595-7000 for water and wastewater (sewer) billing and account information, or to access a host of customer services including service inspections, repairs and detailed information on incentives and payment options.

Over the last two years, the Call Center team successfully established an improved and consistent trend in two key measures: customer average speed answered (or the length of time before a customer service representative comes on the line) – down to less than a minute from an average of well over 4 minutes in 2006 – and percentage of calls answered – currently averaging above 97%, up from the 2006 average of 91%.

Improving communications between DEP and its 828,000 account holders is a challenge; new initiatives on compliance and collections have been introduced and added to the extensive menu of services already available. The Bureau of Customer Services now plans for peak periods in the year, when initiatives cause customer inquiries to spike. For example; collection notices, water only tax liens and annual rate increases directly cause high call volumes periodically throughout the year. Proper training allows the call Center to successfully manage fluctuations in call traffic and maintain effective levels of service: statistics for November 2008 show the average speed answered was 15 seconds.

What is the key to the Call Center’s success? According to DEP, it’s people. Call Center employees provide customers with specialized help using a combination of computer technology, service skills and specialized business knowledge about New York City’s complex water system – a highly regulated service supported by a vast infrastructure. Since 2006, Call Center staff retention has increased from 80% to 90%, which makes ongoing training easier when new technology is introduced. Keeping the City working faster and smarter will enhance the long-term service relationship that DEP enjoys with New Yorkers.

For more information contact Robert Garcia, Call Center Manager, at RobeGarc@dep.nyc.gov.

New Social Networking Site for Government - www.govloop.com

A new social networking site for the government community was started in 2008 by Steve Ressler, a federal government employee. The site has grown to over 2,000 members and includes a number of blogs and community groups.

In today’s budget environment, online networking sites provide an innovative twist on best practice research. As with other social networking sites, the government community can engage in discussions, upload photos and videos, and add friends. Employees can post a question to many knowledgeable individuals, and collectively find low- and no- cost ideas to addressing your agency’s problems. However, you should exercise prudence when taking the advice of an online network. Common sense and privacy concerns should be kept in mind when you ask questions or respond to other users.

Also, govloop.com has blogs that focus on topics such as Web 2.0, cost-benefit analysis and leadership. Community groups include Government Customer Service, Young Government Leaders and Knowledge Management in Government.

Employees at all levels of government, whether in federal, state or local municipal government, are welcome to join.
In 2008 Harlem Hospital Center became the first hospital in New York City to receive “Baby Friendly” certification. The certification is granted by Baby Friendly USA, part of a global initiative sponsored by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children Fund.

The global Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative selects hospitals and birthing centers that successfully implement the recommended 10 steps of a comprehensive breastfeeding program (see sidebar).

“We want to do all we can to improve the health of the littlest New Yorkers and encourage the use of mother’s milk for the nearly 22,000 babies born in our hospitals each year,” said HHC President Alan D. Aviles.

“I congratulate Harlem Hospital on their progress supporting new mothers,” said Dr. Thomas R. Frieden, New York City Health Commissioner. “By implementing the Baby Friendly Steps program, Harlem Hospital has once again demonstrated its commitment to helping New York City babies get a healthier start in life. There are so many wonderful benefits to breastfeeding for babies and new mothers, and this program will ensure that hundreds of families understand and benefit from this important message.”

In 2008, Harlem Hospital Center delivered close to 1,200 babies and the overwhelming majority of mothers who delivered at Harlem were breastfeeding their babies when they left the hospital.

Breastfeeding exclusively for the first 6 months of an infant's life has many health benefits for babies and mothers, including a reduction in infectious diseases and mortality during infancy, improved bonding, and postpartum maternal weight loss. Breastfeeding also helps reduce the risks of common childhood infections, asthma, diabetes and other conditions. It saves time and money for families in both baby formula and medical costs.

For more information contact Sylvia White at Sylvia.White@nychhc.org

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Consumer Complainants Now May Offer Telephone Testimony at TLC Tribunals

Passengers of Taxi and Limousine Commission-licensed vehicles who were typically compelled by due process requirements to attend a hearing at the agency’s adjudication tribunal may now for the first time offer their testimony as a witness by telephone.

While passengers filing complaints with the TLC for any driver-related violation may continue to opt to attend a hearing at its tribunal, scheduled to their convenience, effective December 8, 2008, they may also choose to arrange a convenient date and time to call their testimony in during a scheduled hearing in real-time. Consumer feedback on the new option has been overwhelmingly positive.

The TLC has also announced that, as of December 22, 2008, the respondent, or responding TLC-licensed driver, may likewise opt to testify by telephone from the TLC’s Staten Island satellite facility (but only from that facility) or continue to personally appear at a hearing conducted at a TLC facility in either Manhattan or Long Island City. In order to be eligible for this option, the respondent must waive their ability to use mistaken identity as a defense.

For more information contact Allan Fromberg at allan.fromberg@tlc.nyc.gov.
Parks Department Completes First Survey of Golf Customers

Did you know that the Department of Parks & Recreation manages 13 City-owned golf courses? Each of the outer boroughs has golf courses, and Manhattan has a driving range on Randall’s Island. Fees are as affordable as you can find, anywhere from $28 to $41 if you can do without the cart, compared to $80 to $100 at private clubs. Each course is run by one of six contracted concessionaires who are responsible for all aspects of operating a golf course.

In Summer 2008, the Parks Department conducted the first customer survey of golfers at its courses. In total, 803 surveys were completed. (DPR is also offering the survey on the internet for any duffers who may have missed it on the golf course). The golf survey, created by Parks Department staff, addressed a wide variety of issues including fairways, greens, traps, signage, bathrooms, customer service, carts, and vehicle parking, for example.

Overall, Parks courses scored well, with 83% of respondents rating courses excellent to good, and only 3% giving poor grades. The survey showed that City golfers get out on the course fairly often, with 70% of respondents playing 11 or more rounds per year. True to its reputation as a life-long sport, over one third of players surveyed were over 61 years old.

When it comes to performance, women who took the survey out-shined the guys. Of the women surveyed, 39% said they were bogey or better golfers with handicaps under 20 shots. (Nationally, the US Golf Association reports that 21% of women can score that well.) For the gents, 65% were 20 handicap or lower, as compared to 75% nationally.

In their comments, golfers identified areas where Parks could improve the golfing experience – by speeding up playing time; providing more seating areas; and, replacing more gas-powered golf carts with electric-powered carts, for example.

Parks will share the survey results with the golf operators and use them to drive continued success.

For more information contact Keith Kerman at keith.kerman@parks.nyc.gov.

Parks Department Golf Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bronx</th>
<th>Brooklyn</th>
<th>Manhattan</th>
<th>Queens</th>
<th>Staten Island</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mosholu</td>
<td>Dyker Beach</td>
<td>Randall’s Island</td>
<td>Clearview</td>
<td>La Tourette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosholu Parkway</td>
<td>Dyker Beach Park</td>
<td>Driving Range</td>
<td>202-12 Willets Point Blvd.</td>
<td>S.I. Greenbelt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3700 Jerome Ave. (E. 213th St) &amp; Bainbridge Aves.</td>
<td>7th Avenue &amp; 86th St.</td>
<td>Randall’s Island Park</td>
<td>1001 Richmond Hill Road</td>
<td>1001 Richmond Hill Rd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pelham/Split Rock</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>North of Ichlan Stadium</td>
<td>La Tourette</td>
<td>Silver Lake Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelham Bay Park</td>
<td>2880 Flatbush Avenue</td>
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<td>S.I. Greenbelt</td>
<td>Silver Lake Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shore Road north of Bartow Circle</td>
<td>near Belt Parkway</td>
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<td>915 Victory Blvd. near</td>
<td>915 Victory Blvd. near</td>
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<tr>
<td>Van Cortland Park</td>
<td>Bailey Avenue &amp; Van Cortland Park</td>
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<td>Forest Ave.</td>
<td>Forest Ave.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>South Shore Golf Course</td>
<td>South Shore</td>
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Kissena Park
164-15 Booth Memorial Avenue
Operations.

CSG is part of the Mayor's Office of Operations. The Mayor's Office of Operations, with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) also developing tools to guide agencies in the development of their plans and eventual implementation of their language access services. CSG created plan guidance from best practices research around the nation, and an evaluation checklist for agency plans to maintain quality, consistency, and accountability for agency language access programs. CSG has also created signage and language identification tools in conjunction with NYC & Company, Language Line, and MOIA to both raise awareness of free translation and interpretation services and facilitate the process of identifying a customer’s primary language. These include a Language ID Poster with a list of New York City’s top 22 languages, an I Speak Card for customers that indicates their primary language, and a Notice of Free Translation Services that can be provided with agency documents.

For more information contact Kate Pielemeier at kpielemeier@cityhall.nyc.gov.

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New York City Housing Authority’s HR STARS Shine!

In 2008, the Human Resources Department at NYCHA began an initiative to better assist NYCHA’s 12,260 employees and job applicants. The program, “HR Strategic Transformation And Realigned Structure” – or HR STARS – redefines how the HR department fulfills its mission to improve customer service.

HR STARS goals include: 1) the development of a comprehensive communication strategy and performance measures that ensure provision of necessary services to achieve business objectives; 2) clearly defined points of contact to support direct interaction between HR professionals and their customers; and, 3) the establishment of frequent, two-way communication between HR and business units.

As part of HR STARS two committees were established: The Communications Committee and The Customer Service Desk (CSD) Committee.

To date, the Communications Committee has conducted focus groups and summarized the results of each session, and developed an HR STARS logo and website to allow employees to directly access HR-related information. A host of HR STARS promotional items and a marketing strategy for the launch of the department’s customer service desk in Spring 2009 has also been developed.

The CSD Committee is working to establish an HR Customer Service Desk to serve as a single point of contact for employees. The team has drafted standard operating procedures, created a staffing plan, and selected the telephone system to track and monitor calls. Work is nearly complete on development of a knowledge base and work ticket system.

HR STARS will transform the way business is conducted to better assist internal customers’ experience.

For more information contact: dawn.pinnock@nycha.nyc.gov, or sharon.samuel@nycha.nyc.gov

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Mayor Bloomberg’s Language Access Executive Order 120 Closer to Implementation

Thirty-eight City agencies submitted language access implementation plans to the Mayor’s Office in accordance with Executive Order 120. Each plan includes milestones for plan implementation that will be monitored by the Mayor’s Office of Operations throughout 2009. The plans include 1) Limited English Proficient (LEP) population assessment of the agency’s customers; 2) Identification and translation of essential public documents; 3) Interpretation services – including telephonic interpretation services; 4) Training of front-line workers and managers on language access policies and procedures; 5) Posting of signage in conspicuous locations about availability of free interpretation services; 6) Establishment of an appropriate monitoring and measurement system of language access services; and, 7) Outreach and public awareness strategies for agencies’ service populations.

The Customer Service Group and the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) also developed tools to guide agencies in the development of their plans and eventual implementation of their language access services. CSG created plan guidance from best practices research around the nation, and an evaluation checklist for agency plans to maintain quality, consistency, and accountability for agency language access services. In addition, CSG and MOIA developed guidance documents on how agencies can participate in DOITT’s citywide vendor contract and how to start and maintain a Volunteer Language Bank.

CSD has also created signage and language identification tools in conjunction with NYC & Company, Language Line, and MOIA to both raise awareness of free translation and interpretation services and facilitate the process of identifying a customer’s primary language. These include a Language ID Poster with a list of New York City’s top 22 languages, an I Speak Card for customers that indicates their primary language, and a Notice of Free Translation Services that can be provided with agency documents.

For more information contact Kate Pielemeier at kpielemeier@cityhall.nyc.gov.

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About the Customer Service Group

The Customer Service Group (CSG) was established by Mayor Bloomberg’s Executive Order 115 to support and implement the mandates of the order. CSG is part of the Mayor’s Office of Operations.

Elizabeth Weinstein
Director
Customer Service Group

Jeff Kay
Director
Mayor’s Office of Operations