

AT A GLANCE

BRONX A Bronx tax preparer pleaded guilty last week to preparing and filing false income tax returns.

U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said Rosa Rivera, who operated RNR Tax Service, faces up to three years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on each of two counts when sentenced Jan. 22.

BRONX Astor Services for Children & Families received the first Stefan de Schill Award last week from the American Mental Health Foundation at a ceremony hosted by the Edwin Gould Foundation.

Astor Services serves over 6,000 children and families annually in the Bronx and Mid-Hudson Valley, through a range of programs that prevent and treat emotional problems and facilitate healthy development.

DOBBS FERRY Gary Brown has been elected chairman of Mercy College's board of trustees, school officials announced yesterday.

Brown is president and CEO of CIBC World Markets Corp., the U.S. broker-dealer of Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce.

The private, nonprofit college, founded in 1950, has branches in the Bronx, Manhattan, Yorktown Heights and White Plains.

BRONX Famed jazz composer Arturo O'Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra will perform at a special concert benefiting The Bronx Museum of the Arts on Nov. 5.

The 8 p.m. event at the Peter Norton Symphony Space at the Peter Jay Sharp Theater, 2537 Broadway at 95th Street, will feature the world premiere performance of "Wise Latina Woman," a piece penned by O'Farrill to honor Bronx-born Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

See www.bronxmuseum.org/benefit09.html.

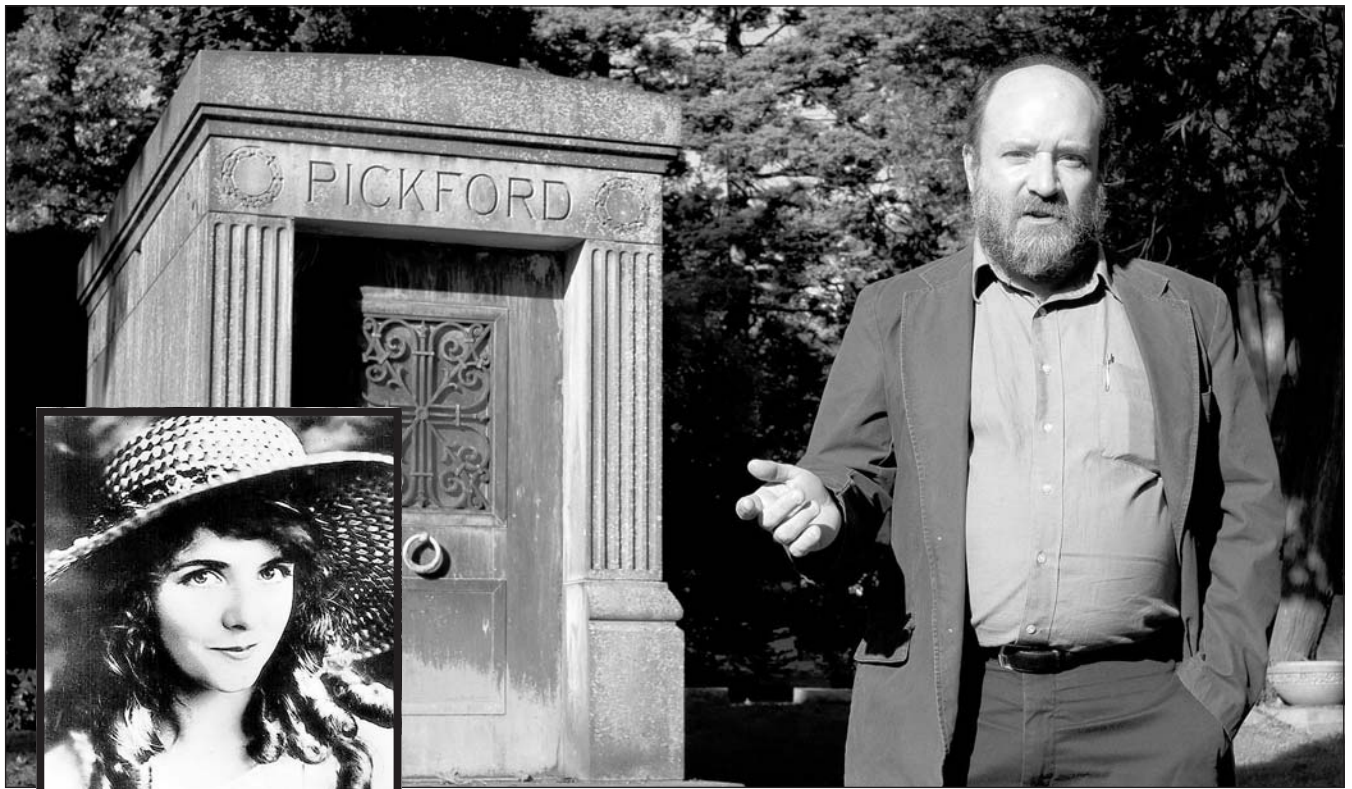
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Historian Paul DeVillo, who has written about New York City folklore, poses in front of Woodlawn gravesite of Olive Thomas Pickford (inset left), who is said to haunt New Amsterdam Theatre. Photo by Alfred Giancarli

GHOST OF A CHANCE AT SEEING 'EM HERE

BY KATY BOLGER
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

IF YOU'RE THINKING about being a ghost in the Bronx for Halloween, look out: you have company.

The borough is reportedly teeming with haunts and spirits.

Whether you believe in ghosts (half of us do), or just want to put on a costume, a ghost story is a good way to keep the past alive.

"Ghost stories are part of what makes a place special and are a way of communicating its past history, before historical markers and such" said Bronx historian Stephen Paul DeVillo.

Spirits can come as a sound, or a smell, or just a cold tingle running up your neck.

Bronx native Julian Garcia, 19, lost his best friend and most frequent companion when his grandfather died 10 years ago. Not long after, Garcia woke up in his Gun Hill Road home and says he saw his grandfather.

"There he is, sitting in the chair, looking at me," Garcia remembered. "I was like, 'Oh, what?'"

"I always slept with my coat over my head, and I jumped back under the coat and I didn't want to get up," he said. "But when I looked again, he was gone."

Many have had the experience of seeing a recently passed loved one, said Dr. Monica Creelman, a clinical psychologist in Manhattan.

"It's a literal double take," she explained. "It's like a momentary forgetting that they're dead and at the same time remembering that they are. Just for a split second, you forget they are gone."

"Believing in ghosts might be a great comfort," said Creelman. "It is similar in a sense to psychological therapy. There is a desire by the patient to be helped, a level of belief and an expectation to get relief."

So do ghosts exist, doctor?

"Your belief exists," she said.

And that may be good enough.

Native Americans figure into many ghost stories across the Bronx. Hikers along the Siwoney Trail in Pelham Bay Park have reported hearing running feet but no runner. Legend has it the footfalls are those of an Indian girl, running down the Split Rock Road in 1776 to warn American colonists of the masts of the British ships she had seen coming up from Manhattan.

Her warning allowed General George Washington to escape from New York; without her, the war might have been won that day by the British, according to the legend.

"I think of ghosts as strictly folklore," said DeVillo, who found "great fun" in researching paranormal phenomena for his unpublished book, "Haunted Apple: Ghosts, Haunts and Reverents from the Five Boroughs of New York."

DeVillo looks for the story behind the story.

A group of ragged "Our Gang"-type young ghosts spotted in the Crotona Park neighborhood comes with the story of 10 children lost in a burning building collapse.

DeVillo tracked down the origin of the Depression era story. There had, indeed, been a fatal fire in 1937 on Grote St. of the ghost gang, but one child — not 10 — had been killed.

"The stories are mangled and twisted through time but they keep that story from the past handed down," DeVillo noted.

One place you might expect to easily find a ghost would be Woodlawn Cemetery. But both head of security Paul May and historian Susan Olsen are quite adamant that there are no ghosts at Woodlawn.

But in a twist, one of the most famous ghosts in Manhattan is buried there.

Olive Thomas Pickford, a Ziegfeld girl and star of early motion pictures, and once named the most beautiful girl in New York, reportedly is sighted frequently at Broadway's New Amsterdam Theater, but never at Woodlawn, where she lies peaceful in repose.

■ Stephen Paul DeVillo will give a free talk on some of the stranger ghost stories of Big Apple folklore on Halloween at 1 p.m. at the Huntington Free Library, 9 Westchester Square, by the No. 6 train's Westchester Square station.

For information, call (718) 829-7770.

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