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The Bronx's Number One Classifieds

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Photo by Laura Stone

PRIMAVERA PIZZA MAKING

Matthew Careccia of Throggs Neck sprinkles some mozzarella on his self-made pizza at Jimmy's Pizza & Grill on Saturday, December 10. Matthew was one of over 30 students from the Primavera Italian language program who spent the afternoon making their own pies as part of an interactive lesson on one of Italy's most favorite foods.

PONZI VICTIMS TO SUE

Multi-million \$ complaint targets MetLife

BY BILL WEISBROD

About 30 Bronxites who believe they were defrauded out of their pensions, inheritances and life savings by Robert Henry Van Zandt of the Van Zandt Agency are now trying to get some of that money returned.

On Tuesday, December 6, law firm Malecki Law filed a group civil complaint with the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) against MetLife Securities, worth over \$4 million. According to FINRA documents, Robert Henry Van Zandt was registered to sell securities through MetLife from December 2004 through February 2007.

The complaint alleges that MetLife Securities "failed to pro-

vide adequate and meaningful supervision over their branch office, allowing one of their registered representatives, Mr. Robert Henry Van Zandt, to solicit and sell unregistered securities to, defraud and steal from the Claimants in a Ponzi scheme through his position as the owner of the Van Zandt Agency, a branch office of the Respondent as prominently featured on business cards and elsewhere."

Jenice Malecki, an attorney with Malecki Law, said the monetary claim could grow if more individuals join the group complaint:

In April, the New York State Attorney General's Office also launched an investigation into

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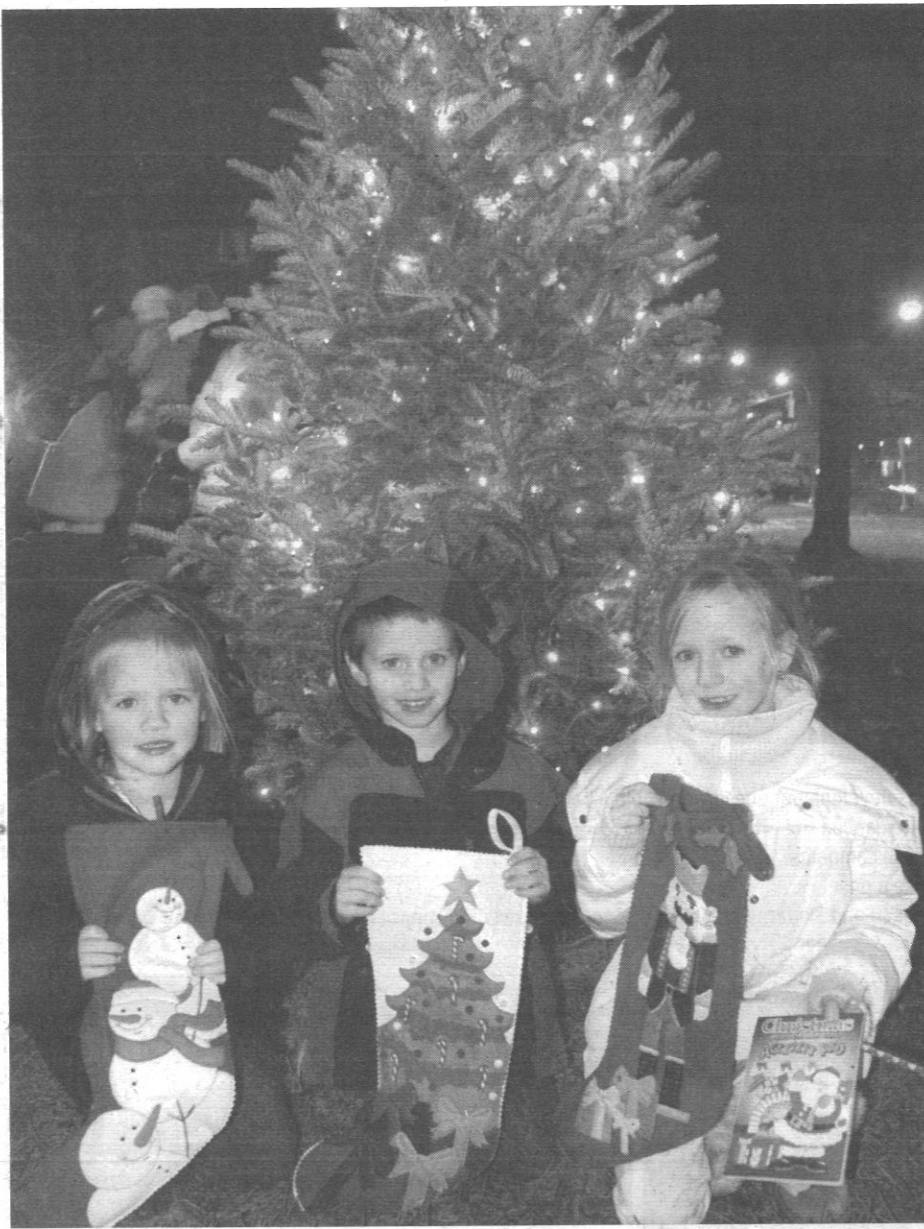


Photo by Laura Stone

Standing in front of Waterbury-LaSalle's tree with the gifts that Santa Claus brought on Sunday, December 11 were (l-r) Reese Murphy, Jack Murphy, and Riley Murphy of Country Club.

Waterbury LaSalle tree lighting

Ponzi victims target MetLife

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Robert Henry Van Zandt, his late son Robert John Van Zandt, their tax prep business the Van Zandt Agency, as well as other family members and associates, for allegedly running a ponzi scheme. That investigation continues.

Robert John Van Zandt, who had previously served time in federal prison, was found dead of a gun shot wound to the head in a Yonkers swimming pool in September. Yonkers police believe the death was a suicide, but its investigation is ongoing.

All of the complainants

live, or have lived in the Bronx, and most used the Van Zandt Agency for tax prep.

The complaint alleges that Robert Henry Van Zandt built up trust among his customers, and used brochures to solicit them to invest their nest eggs through him with assurances of annual returns starting at 9 percent. It alleges that, in actuality, they were putting their money into a Ponzi scheme and that MetLife Securities failed to exercise the necessary oversight to prevent that from taking place.

"They all feel very betrayed," Malecki said of her

clients. "Even if his business was legitimate, which is a question, what he was recommending to them was not suitable for them. [The investments] were aggressive and high risk."

She said clients had invested proceeds from home sales, pensions and injury settlements with Van Zandt.

FINRA is a private entity that regulates the securities industry.

A spokesperson for MetLife Securities said the company was aware of the case but, as of Monday, December 12, could not comment since it had not yet been served with the complaint.

Driving range to open in spring

From page 1

Island Road, is getting a complete upgrade and Esposito and his team have been renovating the facility since the summer, he said.

"What really drew me to Turtle Cove is that it is bit different than anything else in New York City," Esposito said. "This is more natural. At Turtle Cove I feel like I am hitting a golf ball at a fairway."

The facility stands in sharp contrast to most urban driving ranges, which are often built using an artificial netting system, Esposito said.

tential to be a top notch facility because of its location, in a wooded section of Pelham Bay Park. Esposito operated a similar facility in Brooklyn for eight years, he said.

The overhaul will be completed before it opens in the spring, and there will be 18 new covered and heated stalls for driving golf balls, bringing the number of covered stalls up to 30, Esposito said. There are 50 stalls total, covered and not covered.

"We are going to upgrade the gas heating system inside the stalls so that it will be a lot warmer in the winter if a golfer chooses to come and hit a bucket of balls," Es-

Group planning on including a "party tent" for youth parties. The pitching machines in the batting cages will be receiving new mechanisms, Esposito said.

In addition, the rear fence of the facility is being repaired, and all standing water is being removed from the body of the driving range, Esposito said. The main building is also being completely rehabilitated.

The facility needed work, and its reopening could be helpful for business on City Island, said City Island Chamber of Commerce president Gerard Giacco.

"I think that anything