

**From:** Jill Jorgensen [<mailto:jjorgensen@observer.com>]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 27, 2015 2:06 PM  
**To:** Spitalnick, Amy (OMB); Boeglin, Rosemary; Mayor's Press Office  
**Subject:** Breezy Point pool report

Mayor Bill de Blasio arrived in Breezy Point at 10:50 a.m., wearing a blue striped suit and a red tie—which happened to match the garb of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro, also in navy and a red tie.

The pair were greeted by Arthur (Artie) Lighthall, general manager of the Breezy Point co-op, and Denise Neibel, assistant general manager. “Welcome back again,” Mr. Lighthall offered warmly. “Mayor Bill!” Ms. Neibel greeted.

The mayor began by sharing an anecdote about his son Dante’s travel baseball team, which played a tournament in Breezy when Dante was a youngster, in March. Mr. Lighthall said Breezy is “cool” that time of year. The mayor said cool wasn’t the word for it and recalled the harsh winds off the Atlantic.

“I saw Breezy before, and then the incredible struggles people went through, and the amazing community response,” Mr. de Blasio said.

The night of Sandy, a fire ripped through Breezy Point that destroyed many of its buildings. Mr. Lighthall said 135 homes were destroyed by the fire; since then, 119 have been rebuilt.

The group set off to check out a newly finished home, walking past one house where Build it Back Director Amy Peterson said a school teacher had paid a contractor to elevate her house, only for the contractor to botch it. Build it Back is now involved and will re-do the work correctly.

The group arrived at the home of Eamonn and Roseanne Cunningham—inaccessible by car, on one of those small pathways through the neighborhood. The Cunninghams received the keys to their home today from Mr. de Blasio, almost three years after the home was destroyed by Sandy. “It’s been a long road,” the mayor said.

Eamonn and Roseann evacuated from the house before Sandy—Eamonn stuck around a while but left Sunday night before the storm, when the utility pole outside began to sway violently. “Don’t be a hinderance,” he said he told himself.

When they came back, their home had a dreaded red sticker on it—meaning a total loss.

“We got the red label a couple days later, and that told us everything,” Eamonn, who speaks with an Irish accent, said. They have been staying with Roseann’s mother ever since.

HPD Commissioner Vicki Been then arrived, and Eammon offered her the kind thanks he’d been offering everyone—“thanks for all your help.”

Their reconstructed home, with seafoam green siding, stands 15 feet off the ground—three feet above the base flood elevation FEMA has set for the area, which is 12 feet. There is lattice to cover the empty space underneath, and on the lattice is a sign that says: “This house proudly constructed by Arverne by the Sea LLC under the NYC Build it Back Program. Stronger...Better...Resilient.”

The group climbed up the nice concrete stairs in front and into a brand new home with two bathrooms, three bedrooms, a porch off the master bedroom, and a brand new kitchen.

Mr. de Blasio was taken with the kitchen’s center island.

“You’ve got a fashionable center island,” the mayor said. “My wife is very into this concept.”

The Cunninghams chatted about their young daughters, aged 12 and 9, who had already claimed their bedrooms and begun discussing which posters to hang up.

Eamonn Cunningham thanked the mayor for putting out a report on Build it Back and Sandy recovery in 2014, and said that helped jumpstart some recovery work. For their home, they were told the job would take five months, and they said that was exactly how long it took.

“Our appreciation is so deep,” Mrs. Cunningham said.

Mr. de Blasio praised Ms. Peterson, his Build it Back leader, repeatedly. “Amy’s been hands on throughout,” he noted and the homeowners agreed.

“That’s what we love to see,” Mr. Castro said.

“Thank you for the resources,” Mr. de Blasio told Mr. Castro, whose department is paying for Build it Back with community development block grants. “You’re the man with the check.”

Eammon also praised Mr. Castro for his leadership of HUD, and showed some very impressive knowledge of the history of the somewhat arcane department: “Lyndon Johnson would be proud of you,” Mr. Cunningham told Mr. Castro.

The crew went back outside for a grip-and-grin photo of the mayor handing over the keys to the new, elevated home. The officials also gave the family a gift—a greenish blue sign that said Home Sweet Home, Breezy Point.

The mayor, HUD sec and their entourage walked back out to Breezy’s main drag. On the way an older woman sitting on her porch paused a phone conversation and yelled out the mayor: “Mayor de Blasio, thank you!” The mayor asked her name and chatted a bit.

A little further down the road another gentleman stopped the mayor to say, “I work for you!” He was a Sanitation worker. The group continued walking along the road to Kennedy’s restaurant. On the way, a woman dressed as a convict—white and black stripes—walked by, but the mayor and HUD sec continued unfazed. “It’s Halloween!” the woman told the group. (There is apparently a Halloween-themed meeting of a senior group going on today in Breezy.)

Your pooler was kept back during most of the walk and did not catch the conversation between Mr. de Blasio and Mr. Castro.

They eventually arrived at Kennedy’s restaurant, which re-opened one year after the storm. It offers lovely views of the beach—including some temporary dunes for coastal protection—and Jamaica Bay. Beyond that you can see Brooklyn and in the far distance Manhattan. Sail boats bobbed outside. Three ladies who lunch enjoyed lunch and cocktails, relatively unfazed by the mayor.

Mr. de Blasio and Mr. Castro pretty quickly took off for a corner table and a private chat with a few other officials, at around 11:20 a.m. Your pooler was kept out of earshot. Others joined them at the table, including Melissa Mark-Viverito, who sat down with them around 11:35. The pow-wow finished up around 11:56 a.m.

Then the entire group moved to a long table near the window where a waitress poured coffee and there were several platters of doughnuts and bagels. Also there was Jimmy Buckley, the owner of the restaurant, and Assemblyman Phil Goldfeder.

Mr. Buckley told the mayor he was “very grateful.” The restaurant was rebuilt with help from the Small Business Services, including a \$126,000 grant.

After the storm, all the walls were destroyed, Mr. Buckley said. Now the restaurant is slightly elevated, and is built with better materials like steel.

“It’s beautiful,” the mayor said of the restaurant. “It’s really beautiful.”

The mayor, in discussing how important it was that the restaurant re-opened quickly, showed off his business acumen: “Time is money, so being open earlier means more money.”

Secretary Castro was curious about the food. “The menu,” he asked, “did it stay the same?” Just some minor changes, Mr. Buckley said.

The mayor asked what the city was doing to keep the entire area safer, and Office of Recovery and Resiliency Director Daniel Zarrilli pointed out temporary dunes outside and mentioned several other resiliency projects underway.

And with that, Mr. de Blasio was told it was time to go outside for the press conference.

(In case you are wondering, the mayor did not partake in any of the bagels or doughnuts. Mr. Zarrilli and Ms. Peterson each nibbled on a bagel. HPD Commissioner Vicki Been had what appeared to be a blueberry doughnut. I mean, I didn’t taste it, but I think I know my doughnuts pretty well.)

If you have any questions or need more info about the tour/the homeowners/the doughnuts, please feel free to contact me at [917-974-6634](tel:917-974-6634), or [jjorgensen@observer.com](mailto:jjorgensen@observer.com). Apologies for any typos!

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