



Forum to examine future of Staten Island after Hurricane Sandy

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Dr. Alan Benimoff, a geologist and professor at the College of Staten Island, will be among several experts speaking at the Hurricane Sandy Forum.

Staten Island Advance/Mark Stein

WILLOWBROOK -- Hurricane Sandy impacted Staten Islanders in a variety of ways: Emotionally, financially and physically.

Next Friday, experts will participate at the College of Staten Island's (CSI) "Superstorm Sandy Forum: Serious Conversation about the Future of Staten Island" to explain how residents have been affected, and what steps can be taken going forward.

The Advance chatted with some of the panelists participating in the day-long forum set for Friday, March 8, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., in anticipation of what attendees can expect to learn. The discussion will take place at the Center of the Arts Building (1P).

The event was coordinated by CSI Interim President Dr. William J. Fritz, who has penned a Five-Point Plan that will drive the discussions during the forum.

Dr. Alan Benimoff, a geologist with more than 40 years experience and a professor at CSI, will be a panelist on "Geology and History of Storm Surges on Staten Island." Dr. Benimoff has studied hurricanes for about 10 years.

"My job on this will be to give the background," said Dr. Benimoff, referring to how hurricanes form and act, and how Staten Island is situated in a "right angle" location that leads to increased amounts of damage caused by the storm.

HUGE GROWTH

After the storm, the professor studied maps labeling structures in Zone A areas that date back to 1902. In the start of the 20th century, a person could count the number of homes on two hands in the region. Fast-forward

100 years and the area has been completely filled with structures.

Dr. Benimoff said it was somewhat surprising, especially since a major storm smacked that section of the Island in 1938.

With the increased number of homes came a decrease in wetlands. Those wetlands could have acted as sponges when storm surges occurred. By the time Sandy arrived last October, the wetlands were "wiped out," he said.

Another panelist, Dr. John (Jay) Arena, will be part of "The Human Impact of Natural Disasters: A Social Science View." Dr. Arena, formerly of New Orleans, was present when Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005.

"I have the dubious distinction of surviving Katrina and Sandy," said Dr. Arena, an assistant professor of sociology at CSI.

Dr. Arena will draw on experiences that occurred in New Orleans and speak about how to avoid injustices carried out post-Katrina.

One of those focuses will be on how powerful interest groups helped privatize public services, resulting in poorer people leaving the city.

Dr. Arena said the storm exposed the inequality and a need for reinvestment in the public sector. He said folks in Zone A areas who previously clamored for more flood protection will finally have an audience, unfortunately due to the storm.

"Sandy sent us the message that we need to invest in the public sector. A new green Works Progress Administration of the 21st century is the message we can take from Katrina and from Sandy to prevent future disasters," said Dr. Arena, an active member of the American Sociological Association who's previously served as an invited speaker at schools, political conferences, and community organizations regarding New Orleans' public housing, movement, and right of return.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Professor of finance Dr. Jonathan R. Peters will be part of a discussion on the "Financial Impact and the Role of Government in Sandy Recovery on Staten Island."

Dr. Peters will be joined by CSI professor Richard Flanagan. The panel's focus will involve public policy aspects about the post-Sandy situation, as well as what Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Monday regarding buyouts in Oakwood Beach.

"We're trying to get to what are the public policy issues and who will take responsibility, and what the next steps are," said Dr. Peters, referring to financial steps and actions taken by the government. "There's not a right and wrong as for the solution. There are different goals and objectives people have for this."

He explained the situation has been difficult for Sandy victims. He also said the average person has heard conflicting information, and this panel should help paint a clearer picture.

Dr. Peters has a background in regional demographics, geo-spatial data and local communities, as well Staten Island's history, urban planning, and the regional economy.

"We're trying to give people guidance," said Dr. Peters. "A lot of questions need to be answered. Many things need to be funded. We're looking forward to it, and we're interested in the range of comments."

For more information on the upcoming event, visit www.csitoday.com. It is open to the public.

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