

MAYOR MARVIN'S COLUMN

We at Village Hall have been working with Con Edison executives since the July power outages to improve service and communication to better serve Bronxville customers. As you may recall, we were very unhappy with both the response time and the communication of accurate information during the summer storms.

Just this past week, we had the last in a series of meetings with Con Edison officials to devise the most efficient methods to react to potential problems. The Village now has a team of Con Edison employees consisting of one Municipal Representative and four assistants who will be assigned specifically to our Village in case of power emergencies. They will work directly with the Bronxville Department of Public Works and the Police Department to organize and prioritize repair needs in our Village.

In the course of our discussions we learned of some innovations in information technology that will improve customer service. For example, Con Edison's website, www.Conedison.com now has a section called Storm Central. This site allows customers to report outages by inputting their address and Con Edison account number as well as view the number of outages in every community serviced by the utility. Knowing the scope of the outage based on its severity and breadth will allow individuals to better gauge the projected response time. Their technology does not yet extend to transmitting this information via a Blackberry device.

The automated phone system dispensing information on the projected time of a repair or resumption of power has been updated to give more precise estimates.

It is important to note that the phone information logs data by approximately 20 minute intervals. Also the recorded estimate is the time Con Edison projects that the last person on a particular power line will have service restored. Con Edison's rationale is that the "worst case scenario" projection allows homeowners greater latitude to make their own choices whether to empty a freezer, go to a hotel, or take other actions.

Con Edison does not yet have the financing for so-called "Smart Meters" in their system. They applied for Federal stimulus money but, unlike the State of Maine, did not receive funding to install the updated meters. Bottom line, this means if you lose power, you must call in your individual address to Con Edison directly. You cannot assume that because all of your neighbors' homes are dark that Con Edison is aware of your outage. Calling the Bronxville Police just adds a layer of calls. Direct contact with Con Edison helps to pinpoint the problem and improve response time.

By way of information, when you see a Con Edison car parked in your neighborhood during an outage, this is usually just a "site safety" individual who monitors downed wires to prevent injury or accidents. This individual will most likely not have the latest information about power restoration. Equally frustrating sometimes is the sight of a Con Edison crew that leaves without repairing an outage. Quite often they are a "damage assessment" team responsible to determine the amount and severity of damage and the kind of supplies needed to make repairs. They do not have repair service capabilities.

We conveyed to Con Edison that the lack of communication and reliable information as well as an understanding of their procedures leads to frustration and justifiable anger by their customers and our residents. We believe we now have in place far better procedures for future power disruptions.

This coming Thursday, December 10th from 3PM to 7PM is the “Village Shopping Night” where a percentage of sales will go to benefit our own public library. Our merchants will have special offers and additional merchandise to serve your needs. One of the merchants participating is Jacqueline Bed and Bath, a mainstay of taste and quality in our Village. Owner/proprietor Jacqueline Lucchese will be offering special sales and promotions on all items every day leading up to the holidays. In addition to her selection of bedding, which rivals New York’s Switzers in price and selection, new items are arriving daily including many gift items for all ages.

The tree lighting, Santa visit and caroling is scheduled for this Saturday, December 12th. Following an afternoon of festivities an additional tree at the intersection of Park Place and Kraft Avenue will be illuminated at 4:45PM.

The Village continues to work closely with the Bronxville Chamber of Commerce and our more enlightened landlords. We work together so our existing shopkeepers can ride out the current economic downturn and the empty stores can be rented at realistic rental numbers. The vast majority of our landlords are extremely cooperative and value their long time tenants. We do have a few glaring exceptions which seem oblivious to current conditions. We will continue to work with all of them to ensure that our merchants are treated fairly. As the holidays draw very near, please remember to stay close to home for your holiday shopping needs. Support those who support us.