



## Friends of Historic New Utrecht

1831 84<sup>th</sup> Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11214 • Tel: (718) 256-7173 • Fax: (718) 256-7162



**Photo by Ginny Stomberg**

Friends of Historic New Utrecht

New Utrecht Reformed Church - Since 1677

### **Bethlehem Back to Bensonhurst - Live Animals in Stable Setting**

Brooklyn - Bethlehem comes to Bensonhurst Saturday, Dec. 17, with a "Living Nativity" on the large front lawn of the New Utrecht Reformed Church along 18th Ave. near 84th St.

The manger scene dates back 53 years as the church, the Friends of Historic New Utrecht and Boy Scout Troop 20 offer what Friends president Robert Buonvino calls their "annual Christmas gift to the communities of Bensonhurst, Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights."

The nativity picture "comes alive" with a donkey, sheep and llama along with congregation members and others in costume at 3 p.m. Doors to the stable setting with its Christmas lights and carols are closed at 6 p.m. But at 7:30 p.m. the Fort Hamilton Jazz Band, conducted by Paul Korn, gives a concert in the Parish House of the historic church. All events are free.

The sanctuary of the church, founded in 1677, had been open for tours during the "Living Nativity" until two years ago when the building was closed for repairs. A fund-raising campaign continues in the hope of reaching the goal of close to \$2 million to restore the Brooklyn landmark. Bidding for contracts may begin early in the new year, Mr. Buonvino says.

When the "Living Nativity" tradition began in the early '50s, the historian says, some of the animals were donated by local farmers. "That's all changed now," he adds, "the church, with its limited financial resources with a much smaller congregation, must rent the animals from a petting farm on Staten Island."

"Still," he continued, "the congregation wants the tradition of offering this gift to the communities to continue."

The New Utrecht Reformed Church is within the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Its minister is the Rev. Terry Troia of Staten Island.

Every year, hundreds of Brooklyn residents, many with children, visit the manger. The costumes, including those of shepherds and wise men, were restored two years ago in an Eagle Scout project directed by Kenneth Shields. He brought together designers, tailors and other experts who "made new" the costumes the church had used when it began presenting the "Living Nativity" decades ago.

Visitors to the Parish House will see a decorated 18-foot Christmas tree.

The nearby D train stop is at New Utrecht and 18th Aves., with a bus stop at the entrance to the church complex on 18th Ave. between 83rd and 84th Streets. Parking is available in the church lot.

Persons interested in learning more about Brooklyn history or the church's many community activities are invited to call (718) 256-7173 or (718) 234-9268. They also may log onto the Friends of Historic New Utrecht's Web site at [www.historicnewutrecht.org](http://www.historicnewutrecht.org). Contributions for repair and restoration of the landmark are welcome at Friends of Historic New Utrecht, 1831 84th St., Brooklyn, NY 11214. Checks, tax deductible, may be made out to the Friends of Historic New Utrecht Restoration Fund.

###

pr services donated by bhprEspeciallyForChurches December 2005