

**WIRE Interview**

## **RIOC Board Member David Kraut**

June 9, 2008

**Dick Lutz** (Managing Editor, *The Main Street WIRE*): Tell me what happened.

**David Kraut:** I don't know what happened. People have been ascribing deep knowledge and communication to me for years that I never had. They called me and said, "We're going to name three people, and you." I said, "Why? I told you I don't want the job." They said – I can't remember exactly who said – I was talking to the Deputy Counsel to the Undersecretary for Appointments, David Szuchman, and I said, "Why?" And he said, "It was thought..." – I don't know specifically by whom – "...that there was a need for some carryover experience." And I said, "Well, I don't want to do it." They said, "We want you to do it," and I said, "OK, I'll do it."

I've been clear from the go. I gave an interview to Kim Lengle that if I was off the Board tomorrow, it still wouldn't bother me a bit. If the people who are so angry about this manage to make themselves heard, and the Governor relents and picks one more from the list, it wouldn't bother me a bit. It wouldn't. I've got nothing vested in this job.

So, here I am, taking the expectable amount of... Well, people are angry and they should be. About the fact that the Governor did not make a bunch of appointments of everybody on the list. People thought they had a promise. They didn't have a promise, unfortunately. Steve Shane made it clear over and over again that we're rolling the dice here. He may even have used the phrase, "crap shoot," but [added], "We're trying to influence the Governor; they might not go for it. The appointments office may not accept it. It's a governmental prerogative they may not want to give up." He said this repeatedly. I don't think he was heard. And so people think that this was a bona fide election process, and it wasn't, from the go. It was a very iffy proposition from the go, and all the iffy's were spelled out, but people didn't register that, I think. But that's not their fault. When people go to the polls to vote on election day, believing there's a point to what they're doing there, and then find out that the will of the people has not been totally accepted, they become irate, and I would expect nothing else.

And I think the Governor's office would expect nothing else, but I don't know if the Governor has totally read on how high feelings might get about this. They have no experience here. The Spitzer administration had no experience here, and now, this new outfit, with a month or two or three or whenever it was, trying to make judgments about what people will put up with, and people may absolutely refuse to put up with it at all. And who could blame them?

That's one issue, and the other is the personal attacks on me, which are just absurd, and if I hadn't been hearing them for 10 or 12 years by now, I might be bothered by them.

**WIRE:** Let's talk about that. What kind of attacks are you hearing?

**Kraut:** There's a website, nyc10044, there's a blog site there, and David Bauer, who is the – whatever word they use, some kind of magic word having to do with the Maple Tree Group leadership when you don't want to be in charge?

**WIRE:** Convener.

**Kraut:** Convener. ... has encouraged people to post there. Well, people are not turning out in droves to post, simply because like everything else the Maple Tree Group does, they're talking to themselves. His mailing list consists of the Maple Tree Group, so the Maple Tree Group is complaining. To date, 23 names. I just checked. If he got to 500 names, or even 100 names, he might get somewhere, but not 100. One hundred voted anti in the Southpoint Kahn Memorial election, and 100 voted for, so 100 ain't enough. If he gets 500 names out there, maybe he'll get listened to. Maybe you can help him on that.

**WIRE:** It seems unlikely there would be 500, given the number of people who typically turn out for an election.

**Kraut:** Oh, but how many people voted in this election, for the candidates? Over a thousand.

**WIRE:** Fourteen hundred something, but that's a matter of going to the polls on an appointed election day and simply pulling levers. It's not a matter of composing something, getting on line, doing something people are typically unfamiliar with. 500 would seem like an impossible goal.

**Kraut:** OK, I just made that number up. But it can't be the same 23 people whose names appear everywhere. Why would anybody listen to them again if they didn't listen to them before? Most of the complaints are about the election process per se. They feel betrayed. They participated in an election that wasn't a real election. I'm trying to think – it's an Internet term – *Godwin's Law*. It's the one about how long an Internet discussion goes on before the Nazis are invoked. Believe it or not, there's a name for it – in this case, the "law" got invoked by post #6. "Sounds like fascism to me." That would invoke the law.

There was a long diatribe ending with, "The soldiers in Iraq are dying for our freedoms and, here, we don't have any." That seems a bit extreme. There was a post about "the do-nothing rubber-stamp Board," which was nonsense... and "David Kraut's reign." David Kraut neither reigns nor rules. David Kraut serves and he sits – on a Board.

**WIRE:** Talk about the "rubber-stamp Board" for me. One of the complaints I have heard goes along the lines of "the Board always goes along with whatever the [RIO] administration proposes," and, apart from Mark Ponton, who often votes no, it seems to me most of the Board typically ends up going with what the administration wants. Now, you can make a case that the administration wouldn't bring things to the Board if they thought they were going to get shot down, but things like, for example, Eastwood slipping out of affordable housing... How did that happen?

**Kraut:** Eastwood slipped out of affordable housing because the owners of the building wanted to take it out of the program, and they had every right to do so under the law. Had the Board voted no, they would have taken us to court and, I guarantee you, they would've won. The Board decided, we can't win the lawsuit to stop them, so what choice do we have?

**WIRE:** One choice would have been maybe not to extend the lease. The lease was extended.

**Kraut:** And so, to vote not to extend the lease is to manifest yourself as being opposed to them leaving the Mitchell-Lama program.

**WIRE:** Well, there were two separate votes, right? There was a vote to leave Mitchell-Lama, and there was a vote...

**Kraut:** I can't have this argument with you again. We've had it before. I'm saying that...

**WIRE:** I don't remember our having it before.

**Kraut:** Well, perhaps it was in my own mind as I fumed over what you wrote in the paper...

**WIRE:** I didn't write about it.

**Kraut:** Well, maybe I'm rehashing an old internal argument. But what was clear is that they had every right to leave. Counsel advised us that if we do anything to impede, we're going to lose. So...

**WIRE:** Then a separate vote was taken in which there were no conditions set for their lease extension, and right now, what DHCR is talking about is setting conditions for Island House and Westview to leave Mitchell-Lama, those conditions being, "You've got to stay affordable." That didn't happen in the case of Eastwood.

**Kraut:** That didn't happen in the case of Eastwood because it wasn't the program we were presented, and I have to remind you that a Republican administration will do everything it can to give people the ability to leave the program, and a Democratic administration will do everything they can to support the concept of affordable housing, whatever that means – it hasn't been defined to me properly yet.

**WIRE:** Could the Board have voted no extension of the lease?

**Kraut:** Sure, of course we could have. Then we get sued, and they get their lease extension.

**WIRE:** Really?

**Kraut:** Yes, I believe so. Dick, what people don't understand is that the RIOC Board doesn't exist in some sort of a vacuum. We make our decisions every day based on our best knowledge of the conditions we have at the time. And that time, in my case, extends over a mighty long number of years. The reasons for whatever we do are grounded in the time and the conditions we are facing at that time. Hindsight is easy. Our judgment is based on what's best for the corporation, moment by moment or decision by decision, and we have no choice in that because we are forced by reality to be the ultimate ones to make the decisions. And sometimes the conditions are such that you may have to make an ultimate decision that may go against what you feel should be the world as you wish it to be, and confront the world as it is. If it's a dead-solid certainty that you're going to lose a lawsuit if you go a certain way, why put the corporation and the people who live in the building at risk? You saw what happened recently when false hopes were raised. We would have lost. And the people who made a decision to take it private were well aware of all this. They knew they were going to take it private and they knew they could. Their lawyers told them that if we tried to stop them they could sue us and win. I'm sure that was in the considerations, too. This is not stuff based on wishes or want-to-be's. They are choices based on your best estimate of what things actually are and what will really happen.

**WIRE:** In that particular case, aren't conditions often set for the extension of leases? I mean, I

could see you saying no to a lease extension and maybe getting sued but, often, when a lease is extended, there is often a condition set upon it. You may not put a gin mill in this building, you may not do this, you may not do that, and that was not even considered in this case. I realize that the administration of RIOC brings certain choices to you and asks you to vote a certain way. I think the problem I hear people talking about is that there is never or rarely a push-back, and that makes them unhappy with the Board.

[Lengthy pause]

**Kraut:** I think that people will always be unhappy with what the Board does, in hindsight. I can't see them as not being. I don't really recall what all of the particulars were at the time of the Eastwood decision, but I didn't have a sense that we had a lot of choice in the matter. That's the first thing. Second, I've seen some push-backs on the Board in minor areas. But you were right when you pointed out that the administration, wanting to accomplish certain things, brings us motions and asks our approval for those things. And I'm never totally certain why we wouldn't do those things. There were some complaints – someone on the blog said we're "paving the whole Island." What was that person talking about? Well, we're building Southtown, but Southtown was in the cards for this Island even before the WIRE buildings. It was always supposed to happen. The Octagon was a bit of a surprise to some people, but Octagon is a brilliant project and if you had the vision to see it, you knew how it was going to come out. You were at the recent dedication. I told Bruce Becker I think he's going to win every award there is, not only for environmental reasons, but for historical preservation and for adaptive reuses. And 500 households. 500 new families have a place to live. All these people who go around fuming about how that building got built are going to have to look those people in the eye and say, "I didn't want you to live here. I don't want your building to be here. It offends me. It continues to offend me even though you're now living in it." So let them go to those people and say that. I don't really care to hear it. It's nonsense.

**WIRE:** Let's go back to Southtown and the issue currently before the community, in a sense, and before the authorities out there, of overburdened transit. We know that, in the morning, people have trouble boarding the subway. Three or four trains can go by before they can get on. I've heard this many times. Tomorrow morning is going to be interesting, with the Tram down, to see how many people are left on the platform...

**Kraut:** And the trains are running slower because of the temperature.

**WIRE:** So, you have a situation where two new buildings in Southtown are in the process of going up – let's say 500 apartments, which will presumably add 500 new commuters to the rush-hour, and then three more buildings to be built on the other side of the street, none of which anticipates an increase in transit capacity. Holy smokes. I mean, that having been agreed to – and I realize that goes way back – we now have a situation where, meanwhile, Queens is growing like crazy and trains are coming in full. Is Roosevelt Island going to be livable if you can't commute during rush-hour?

**Kraut:** I don't know the answer to that.

**WIRE:** Would it make sense to refuse to have a development agreement for the remaining three buildings until there's some addressing of the transit problem?

**Kraut:** Yes.

**WIRE:** You want to expand on that?

**Kraut:** You've aired the issue.

**WIRE:** How do you see dealing with that? Or can't we? Can the RIOC Board?

**Kraut:** I don't know what the Board can do about that. We can slow down development but, remember, there are competing interests here, and RIOC has an interest in finishing out its developments. That's based on nothing more than the income from the ground rents for those developments. And that's based on nothing more than this entire Island is operated on the ground rents from development. And there's a historical context for that which must not be forgotten. And there's a consistent trend toward overlooking it in public comment nowadays. It must not be forgotten that, when the Pataki administration came in, they took away all our subsidies. This was 13 or 14 years ago, and we had been living on an operational subsidy of a million-plus every year, and a capital subsidy that ranged from four to six million dollars – so a minimum of \$5 million was taken away from us. And the Board at the time had very little choice but to embark on a serious development program that the administration had not been really serious about theretofore.

When Rosina Abramson was president of the corporation, she got Northtown built. And then everything stopped and at a time of a generally good business climate – it wasn't a boom – the administration of the Island couldn't get new buildings built. They almost made it at one point when Steve Shane was on the staff of DHCR, he put together an entire deal – and it never happened. It was stuck. I don't know why. When Pataki came in, he took so much away from us that, even when Pete Grannis wanted to provide us limited funding as a member item, the president of RIOC was not allowed to take that money, by the powers that be in Albany.

So we made the decision that we had to develop. And in the haste to develop, deals were made that in their early years provided too much profit to the developer of the site, and that provided too lengthy a period of site control to developers. That was what developers ask for. You don't always give it to them. In this case it was given to them. People have said buildings 1 and 2 were giveaways. They weren't. Buildings 3 and 4 were giveaways. Buildings 1 and 2 were what you call "loss leaders." Give them a deal to develop 1 and 2 and, if they prove viable, give them 3 and 4. The way RIOC staff in those days set the terms, 3 and 4 were offered similar terms [to 1 and 2] or not much higher. So not enough income is derived from those properties. So be it. Again, that's past. And we get confronted with what to do next. Well, we need to derive income from 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, that's what we need to do.

That's one interest. That pays for cutting the grass and taking out trash and operating the AVAC and removing snow and sweeping the streets and everything that RIOC does, so that's why it's hard for RIOC to say you've got to slow down development now.

That's working hardships on the morning commute – there's no two ways about it – we'll see how bad it gets during the next two weeks as the Tram is out of operation, and we're going to see where that leaves us as we completely shut down the Tram a year or two from now to rebuild it. And it could be pretty bad. And it may be that what RIOC should do is put on more buses – take up the slack. Five hundred new commuters – ten bus trips.

**WIRE:** Or two-and-a-half subway cars.

**Kraut:** I don't know how to get those subway cars. They're running ten-car trains now and that's about the max that their system allows.

Dick, here's what I don't want to do for the rest of this interview, however long it lasts. We can be criticized – the RIO Board can be criticized a lot of different ways – and I didn't come here in order to postmortem or review past decisions. There'll be time for that after someone has the kindness to get me the hell off this Board.

**WIRE:** Fair point. Where do we go from here?

**Kraut:** I think... a couple of things. You know, it's funny. In the last couple of months, Steve Shane has put some things in motion that actually empower this community to a degree never before, including going back to the prior Democratic administrations: The idea of giving the Residents Association a say-so and power over Public Purpose Funds is one. The attempt to provide some level of community input into the decision on who goes onto the Board. That's another. I don't know how the RIRA Public Purpose Fund vetting is going to go. That remains to be seen. I hope my fellow Board members don't get too critical of RIRA's decisions, because that would be a bad thing. We've seen how our direct election process – it wasn't a real process – I gave an interview to Kim Lingle and I said, "We have a promise from somebody, but it doesn't go high enough." We knew going in we were running the risk of the Governor's appointments office turning their back on the whole thing – just turn it down across the board – that they would continue to maintain their right to vet candidates for the Board, despite what the people of the Island wished, and we could end up with no candidates, and we would probably end up without a full across-the-board authority to elect our candidates. We got to three. From one point of view, that's half a loaf. From another point of view, it's a betrayal.

**WIRE:** There are two more appointments to be considered – the Mayor could choose two of those people; it could end up being five out of six. But, the Mayor could also follow the Governor's lead and say, "No thanks. Never mind."

**Kraut:** I understand the Mayor's appointments people went through the same vetting process as the State people, or they had some input, or did some research, or something. I'm not aware of what the actual facts are...

**WIRE:** The three people who were not selected by the Governor were never vetted. They never filled out the papers. They were invited *not* to fill out the papers. The Governor's selected three were asked to fill out the papers – in a couple of cases, within 24 hours.

**Kraut:** Me, too. It was exactly the same process. When I say "vetted" I meant after the fact, I meant before those selections were made. Before the appointments people...

**WIRE:** The interviews.

**Kraut:** Yes, the interviews.

**WIRE:** In some cases, the Mayor's people interviewed concurrently.

**Kraut:** So that's what I mean. That's the context for what we're talking about now.

**WIRE:** Right. You didn't have a mayoral interview?

**Kraut:** No.

**WIRE:** Only the ones who were nominated by the community did – only the ones that were available for mayoral appointment.

**Kraut:** I don't know if existing mayoral appointees were interviewed or not. I was interviewed as an existing gubernatorial appointee. Nor do I know if my fellow gubernatorial appointees were also interviewed.

**WIRE:** A couple of them were. So, in terms of where we go, looking at the problems the Island faces – probably transportation is going to end up being number one, then there's the whole subject of the infrastructure – which redounds to development. Presuming you're going to be on the Board for the next four years, what would you like to see the Board and RIOC accomplish in that period of time?

**Kraut:** I only know what I want to accomplish. I want to finish out Southtown; I want to get Southpoint Park built. I want to make sure the seawall is secure in all the places where I don't think it's secure. That's it.

**WIRE:** Retail?

**Kraut:** Hm? I've said a thousand times that I want a proper saloon or bar or tavern on this Island. And people think it's because I want a drink. Actually, I can drink at home. Actually, it's an amenity of a village life that we just don't have here. We didn't have a pizza parlor; there's now a new pizza parlor taking up the slack. We lost a bakery, and empty storefronts generally are a bad thing. We're *stuck*, and I'll reiterate this because people don't always understand. We're *stuck* under a law passed during the Pataki administration – one of those laws that's designed to keep the Republicans from stealing things directly, called the Public Authorities Accountability Act. Unfortunately, we're stuck as a byproduct of that, in that, if a guy comes to us and wants to open a pizza parlor, we have to tell him, "No, under the act we will bid it out. So therefore, we will use your offer to open a joint as the basis for a Request for Proposal and then will turn it over to the public." No small businessman is going to get into that, ever. So we're stuck. I've told Steve Shane that no matter what else he accomplishes in his tenure here, he's going to be judged on the retail. That's my view, whether he can find a way to get these businesses open, whether he can make these storefronts available for small-business people to establish the kind of services you need for a viable community. And we know all this stuff about people can shop in Manhattan on their way home from work and all that kind of stuff. I don't care. If we can't afford to run a full-service hardware store, charging full-service rent for a full-service hardware store, let's run a lesser hardware store. Let's run less of a bakery to get a bakery in there. Let's run a smaller pizza operation to get a pizza operation in there. Let's get a tavern so that we get the drinkers out of the window at Trellis and let it be a family restaurant as it should be. And all the other things that people have a right to expect in terms of local services. I don't know what his answer is going to be. He's bound by the law, same as I am. There are people on the Board who say, "Well, let's rent it out anyway and take a chance." Well, sure, they ain't gonna get arrested, going to jail for violation of a law if that's done. But staff is just not about to go and rent those places directly. Now if Shane comes up with a solution or direction for a solution that seems sensible and viable, and we get some kind of indication from the State that they'll let us do it, we'll find a way to rent those spaces. He's busy with it, but until then, we're a street of empty storefronts. And everywhere in the world that you go, a street of empty storefronts indicates a declining neighborhood, and we're not in decline at all. But it's not just

the economics of the empty storefronts; it's the feeling that you get walking down a street of empty storefronts. So I've told him that's his biggest issue, whether he's aware of it or not, and you heard me reiterate it during the last Board meeting during the President's comments, and I'll keep on it even though I know he's going to have to come up with some kind of a – someone's going to have to come up with some kind of a brilliant solution. I don't know what it is. If he can present me with one, I'll vote for it yesterday.

**WIRE:** What other points, in a freelance way, do you want to make?

**Kraut:** Let me just think for a minute. As I told you earlier, there'll be plenty of time to postmortem my time on the Board after I'm off it, which can happen four years from now or three years from now or next week if the public can get the Governor to change his mind, and I consider that very possible. I'm not going to sign a petition to get me off the Board; I just agreed to be on it.

**Kraut:** You just had to fill out 25 pages of paper.

**WIRE:** You know, the last time I did that... Oh! They were going to think about reappointing me when Herb Berman was President. They wanted to reappoint me permanently then, and there was no question of an election then. The process didn't go through. I started filling them out then and they said, "Well, never mind." So all this could have been moot, because I could have had a long appointment. By the way, someone was wrong in an article in the paper. Not only did I not have a four-year appointment originally, I didn't even have a two-year appointment. I had an appointment that was going to last... Because I ran for the presidency of the Residents Association based on the fact that the President should be on the Board, they gave me an appointment contiguous with me being President. Well, that was from the Lerman administration here on RIRA, and I accepted it. It made sense to me. And, in fact, as I told Kim Lingle in an interview, in fact, when Governor Pataki's first DHCR Commissioner, Joe Holland, had a meet-and-greet with the Board members and staff, I told him privately at that point that Nneka Pope had succeeded me as President of RIRA, and she should logically succeed me as an appointee to the Board. That went nowhere.

So I feel very strongly that people should have the right to vote who's on the Board.

The next thing is that people say I should just step down because then the Governor will appoint the next winner. I don't know where they got that notion. I didn't ask for this current appointment. The Governor said, "I'm appointing these three people and Kraut." And if I had turned down the nomination, what would he have done? You know what I told the counsel for the Governor's appointments secretary? I said at the time, "I don't want an appointment. If you need me around, just don't appoint my successor," because the law is very clear. I'm on the Board until my appointment expires, which it did around 1994, *and* my successor's appointed. And he can appoint my successor at any time. If he wants me not around for any reason, all he needs to do is appoint my successor. He doesn't have to put me on the Board with a four-year appointment. I think that just came out of their sense of what is fitting and proper. They don't want to leave... what's the word when the next guy's in office until inauguration – what's that called?

**WIRE:** Lame duck?

**Kraut:** Lame duck. They don't want lame ducks.

**WIRE:** Well, there's a case to made, it seems to me, that you're more free to vote the way you want to vote when you don't suffer the possibility that they can simply say "we didn't like that vote" so now you're going to be replaced since your term has expired. If you're on a four-year appointment, it should be easier for you to vote as you wish.

**Kraut:** I look forward to perhaps seeing an occasion when that comes into play. It hasn't yet.

**WIRE:** That's a good ending.

**Kraut:** I have lots more to say.

**WIRE:** Talk.

**Kraut:** There were a couple of things I was chewing over on my way here. If I were going to chart a course for the Maple Tree Group to have my appointment overturned and see to it that the next electee gets appointed, I would say that they've got a much bigger turnout – they've got to make their rage felt much more broadly. It can't just be letters to the editor. The last RIRA President that did anything meaningful in a political activist sense was Pat Stewart, that good grey Republican fellow who actually led the people on a march down Second Avenue to the Governor's office and insisted that the Blue administration was screwing things up around here. And he took people to the streets. They can go to the streets again if this matters to enough people, if it's a huge injustice. Why wouldn't they go to the streets? Why wouldn't the people take anything to the streets?

I also would add, but you probably won't print, that I consider it possible, and part of the Governor's office reason why they decided not to pay total attention to the election, was the fact that nobody in the Maple Tree Group ran. People have commented on the fact that I didn't stand for election? I've explained why: If you want to boot me out, fine; if you want to keep me, fine. I don't care. But nobody in the Maple Tree Group ran. They all had excuses as to why they wouldn't run. And I think perhaps if some of them had run, as members of the Residents Association Common Council, and as known community spokespersons, then perhaps the Governor would have tended to listen to them a little more.

But you weaken your case when you say, "We insist the job ought to be done this way, but we want no part of it."

**WIRE:** I have no problem printing that, or using it in the transcript.

**Kraut:** There are some other things. Give me a second to think.

I guess I do get a little bothered by the kind of criticism that forgets that I've been a volunteer in public service in this community for nearly 30 years, going back to... My son was born in '73 so his first Little League year was around 1980. It's 28 years now. I put in the first of six years on the Little League Board and other things. That's old news. That's history. I don't blame people for... You know, if I was running for an office, that's the kind of thing I'd list. But it doesn't mean a thing.

I resent the notion that because I haven't agreed with people on some issues in the past, and because I tend to see things my own way and go my own way, that I am therefore not a dedicated volunteer in this community. As I mentioned, someone said something about "David Kraut's

reign.” I don’t reign, and I don’t rule. I volunteer, and I serve, and I sit. And when the decisions come to me to make, I make them to the best of my ability. And I have for nearly 30 years. I wasn’t just sitting. There was a time when the Nurses’ Residence needed a proper baseball field and I figured out a way to tuck it in there, went out there and did it.

There was a time when my wife was president of the Garden Club – this was before Manhattan Park was built, and people were coming to her and saying, “we need space for gardens,” and we were chopping the gardens out of pavement in those days – carting the asphalt away and making soil. On a day in March, I remember, Martha and I went out with a tape measure and a bunch of stakes and took the next 12 to 24 feet coming toward that old baseball field where the school is now, and staked it out and said, “OK, here’s the next 40 gardens,” and added 40 gardeners to the club... As a result the club was 40 members bigger when we moved down behind the Nurse’s Residence in that temporary place, and then came the night that it turned out the club’s administration was sloppy – it had been totally ad hoc – we were all hippies out there digging in the dirt kind of thing – and something had to be done to get the running of the club back on an even keel, so Martha and I went in there to their annual meeting and staged a palace revolution, and I used my knowledge of Robert’s Rules of Order, which was considerable, to force, in one night, a proper administration on the Garden Club. Martha was the past president. I was “First Gentleman” of the Garden Club. I was Bill Clinton to Martha’s Hillary, except she was a real president. But feeding her the next point to make, point by point, she stood up there and *wrenched* them into some semblance of organization. And by the time the meeting was over, not only had Judith Richards been elected the new president with a mandate to write a new constitution and by-laws, but her first act was telling me to “Shut up,” and I thought, “That’s great.”

**WIRE:** Who did?

**Kraut:** Judith Richards. You don’t even remember.

**WIRE:** I don’t.

**Kraut:** Of course you don’t. Nobody remembers everything. But I remember everything, because I was on *Jeopardy*. I’m the institutional memory of the Operating Corporation. They keep turning to me and saying, “What was it like in the old days?” Judith Richards split from John Richards, who succeeded her as president, but her last thing was, she said, “You’re out of order,” and that was it. We had a real president, who could tell people they were out of order. And I never said another word. Didn’t have to. And then Judith and John took over the thing and so, when the Garden Club moved down to behind the Nurse’s Residence, there was a good administration in place and it was a good, viable concern, and then we had a strong negotiating position based on large numbers, 501(c)(3) and all the rest, to get the Octagon Park – the current Garden Club place.

Stuff like that is the stuff you remember. When I do my biography of all the stuff David Kraut did on Roosevelt Island, that’s what’s going to be in there. That and, when I saw the first plans for Southtown, we had lost the traffic circle between here and Southtown. I said “no.” It goes no further until you... That’s why we have that odd little triangle, because it needed to be fitted in with laws about stuff like that, because the old circle disappeared. I said, “You have to have a turnaround there.” That and the fact that when the Nurses’ Residence was going to be taken away, I said, “Before you start with your first building, you have to replace that soccer field.”

Stuff like that is what you really do – finding some money for people, that’s what you really do. And in all these years of volunteerism in this community, I’ve done certain things. And, to me, serving on the RIOC Board is just a thing like that. It’s really of a piece, except that it requires the ability to take real responsibility for the shape of this community and real responsibility for the decisions you make, which are always criticizable, in hindsight, or after they point out your mistakes and the stuff you weren’t smart enough to see.

One letter [to the blog] quoted me as saying half a comment... I think Lengle may have dropped the second part of the comment when she edited her film. I said, “These damn people don’t know a damn thing about how this place is run,” and someone said, “Well, neither did you when you first sat [on the RIOC Board],” and that was wrong. Before I ever thought to – first of all, I may not have said that. I may have said exactly what the critics said. Maybe I went on to say, “I didn’t know that much about it,” and if I had said that, it would have sounded better in the quote, but if I didn’t say it, there was a good reason for it, because it would have been a lie. In those days, old-timer Dave remembers, RIRA Presidents sat in on everything – sat in on Board meetings, non-voting, sat in Executive Committee meetings, non-voting, sat on committees... I attended every Board meeting and every Operations Committee meeting for the two years or 18 months that I was RIRA President. I attended every Board meeting, every Executive Committee meeting, every Operations Committee meeting, except for the ones that happened in the month after my wife died.

**WIRE:** All pre-Pataki.

**Kraut:** All pre-Pataki. And that was when Jerry Blue first showed up. What happened was that Pataki – not Pataki but Blue’s Chief Counsel, Frank *Something* – found a way to make it go away. So, as a result, any RIRA President back in those days was well prepared to move onto the RIOC Board. The situation was such that we didn’t need to see ourselves as an opposition on all things. We saw ourselves as... we’re going to sit with you as we work through them. And the current RIRA President never had that chance, nor his interim placeholder.

**WIRE:** He ran, saying he wouldn’t take it.

**Kraut:** Right. I’m just lurching from subject...

**WIRE:** Well, lurch some more...

**Kraut:** I have a concern about the Residents Association. I back them in all things. I really do back them in all things, regardless of whether I oppose them on issues or not, I believe that the Residents Association *is* the people of the Island, and the Common Council is the voice of the people. And so, when I see a shrinkage in that over the years – fewer and fewer members, whole buildings under-represented, the larger scope of the community not well-balanced in terms of the Council’s make-up, that’s a huge concern to me. I will tell you that *The WIRE* is perceived by some in the community as being part and parcel of that kind of thing.

**WIRE:** Insular and focused on...

**Kraut:** Sure. You can’t tell me how many kids from this Island just graduated from college and which schools. People would like to read that in the paper. You can’t tell me whose children are getting married this month. You can’t tell me how many people died here in the last six months and where the funerals were held. See? A community paper... I think you earn your viability,

you earn your right to be heard on the larger political issues by serving the more quotidian needs of your readers.

**WIRE:** You and I communicated about this some eight years ago. What you should know is that – and I don't need to get defensive – I print every obituary, and I solicit some when I hear about somebody dying, and I print every birth notice, and I print every graduation notice that I get. The problem is that if you undertake to root those out, you run into a really severe time problem.

**Kraut:** Sure you do. Space, too.

**WIRE:** Well, space is not a problem anymore. The paper has gone from typically eight pages to typically 16 now. So space is not the problem.

**Kraut:** Well, you've got some run-on columnists... filling up the space.

**WIRE:** I give them their head. I let them take the space they want, because they have important stuff to communicate. What you end up with is a very large commitment of volunteer time running down things like births. Because you only know what people tell you – “I just had somebody die, or I just had somebody graduate.” What you end up doing is you have to call every mortician in the City of New York...

**Kraut:** Let me ask you a question.

**WIRE:** OK.

**Kraut:** If the environment of the paper is known to be a place where these things reside, don't you think that people would come to you to place them? Do you think that in *The Times*, *The Times* went out looking for all those weddings? Or do you think that people didn't fight to get their weddings into *The Times*.

**WIRE:** Well, *The Times* charges for those.

**Kraut:** The articles?

**WIRE:** Yes. That's a profit center for *The Times*.

**Kraut:** You mean, when they show pictures of nuptials out in...

**WIRE:** Yes. The *Vows* column is an expansion, a special thing. They take one and they make a big deal about it. But all the others – those standard announcements. I'm not talking about the small-type obituaries, but those are all paid for, as well. *The WIRE* doesn't charge, but I print every one I get. So, to the extent possible, I've created the climate. But also, when I hear that somebody has died, I do my damndest to get in touch with somebody to get the information and a photo, and you'd be surprised the number of times the only available relative of the person who has died has no interest in or concern about Roosevelt Island, and the number of times you can't get in touch with anybody is amazing. Anyway, it's something I'd love to do, and I have had birth announcements and obituaries whenever I can get them, and I have had wedding announcements, but it hasn't brought a flood. But I would like very much to have more of that.

**Kraut:** Your proofreading isn't bad, by the way. [Brief discussion of proofreading in *The New York Times* vs. *The WIRE* follows.]

Before I was elected to the presidency of RIRA, their most assiduous critic and their most irate complainer, and Rosina doesn't know this, was me, so I hold no particular brief for the corporation. Until I moved, I still had a cartoon on my wall, on a placemat from Trellis, signed by you, of your sketch, your caricature of Jerry Blue. But I just moved down the hall to a smaller apartment and I haven't gotten to hanging my stuff yet. So I have no particular brief for the corporation. I still don't know if they're the best way to run this Island. We finally got to the point where there is very little patronage going on in the organization; all the deadwood was weeded out over the years. And the professional operations vice president, the legal department came in, kind of under a patronage thing, but they proved they can do the job, as well as perhaps some other people could, accounting, public process...

**WIRE:** Engineering...

**Kraut:** Engineering... And that's as far as I'm going to discuss that right now because I'm not happy with some possibilities that I see developing. If we hire people out of a political environment, or out of an environment that was previously related to the corporation, it always looks like patronage. That's a weakness that has to be addressed.

**WIRE:** Well, there is the problem that the Governor appoints the President of RIOC, even though, on paper, the Board is supposed to do the hiring.

**Kraut:** Yeah, I don't know how to fix that one. They kinda lay this person on us.