

# Murky Waters: Coney Council candidate plans Coney Island Creek dive

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City Council candidate Steven Patzer plans to hold a scuba dive clean up in the Coney Island Creek.

Courtesy of Steven Patzer

Talk about diving into local politics!

A 22-year-old politico running for Coney Island's Council seat has vowed to strap on scuba gear and plunge into the fetid Coney Island Creek, where he plans to make good on his promise to clean up the community.

"There a lot of rumors that the creek is very dirty and I believe them," said Steven Patzer, a candidate for Council in the 47th District, which also includes Bensonhurst, Gravesend, and Seagate.

Patzer is working to put together a dive team including himself, and other licensed frog men from across the borough willing to brave the notoriously contaminated waterway, which one local green thumb compared unflatteringly to the Gowanus Canal.

"Most of the creek bottom is what we call black mayonnaise — very fine, easily dispersed toxic material," said environmentalist Ida Sanoff, adding that a combined stormwater and sewer outfall empties into the canal. "The Interstate Environmental Commission came down a few years ago, and basically found pure sewage coming out of that outfall."

The Council candidate said his team won't mess with the toxic goop lining the creek's bed, but plans to collect the more commonplace junk you'd expect to find littering a municipal waterway, some of which Patzer became familiar with when he participated in a dive off of Rockaway Beach with scuba diving do-gooder org, the Superdive Foundation.

"We took any floating debris, we pulled old fishing nets that could be harmful to marine life, glass...a lot of plastics... those are some of the things we're looking for," he said.

The cleanup won't be Patzer's first volunteer mission in the community— since announcing his candidacy in June, the former president of the Thomas Jefferson Young Democrats has participated in a variety of beach clean ups, job fairs, and giveaways.

But the Coney Island Creek event will be Patzer's largest undertaking yet, since the cleanup requires the completion of waivers, certifications, and even \$1 million or more worth of insurance in order to get the permits for the event, Patzer said.

The dive will also be a historic one — according to locals, there haven't been any diving expeditions in Coney Island Creek since before Superstorm Sandy, more than seven years ago, when the late diving expert Gene Ritter made the plunge. But even Ritter, an experienced, hard-hat diver, found the creek challenging, and not many other divers have tried it, according to a local maven.

"I would say it's kind of unusual," said Charles Denson, an expert on Coney Island Creek and the founder of the Coney Island History Project. "It's dangerous; there are cables and sharp things."

Denson also worried that the 2012 superstorm may have mixed up sediment and waste at the bottom of the creek, making conditions worse.

"After Sandy, I don't know what they're going to stir up," he said, adding that he hoped Patzer was HAZMAT certified, which would allow him to handle hazardous materials.

Patzer didn't say if he's seeking HAZMAT certification, but claimed that he's already secured permission for the Department of Environmental Protection for the dive, and that he hopes to hold the cleanup within the next couple of months.

"Planning a dive requires a lot of research and safety planning. When everything is acquired and I am positive all our divers will be safe, we'll schedule a date," Patzer said.

Patzer's run for Council was greeted with skepticism after locals learned that he moved to the district from Georgetown, Brooklyn for the explicit purpose of running for Councilman Mark Treyger's seat in 2021. The young man's political aspirations are bolstered by his serving as president of the Thomas Jefferson Young Democrats club in Canarsie, and the self-help book, entitled "Six Figure Secrets," which he authored at 19 years old.