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A happy return



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AT A GLANCE

Make that vote count

Did long lines, overtime — whatever — keep you from voting last time around? A Cobble Hill English professor may have a fix. He's invented a system to let voters cast ballots anywhere in the state.

Brooklyn Diary, Page 3

Spin City

After surveying 25,000 city residents, the Bloomberg administration concluded that 85% of respondents think city services rate high marks, which immediately made all New Yorkers suspicious.

Editorial, Page 6

Holiday train show

The Polar Express, the Brooklyn Bridge, Metro-North commuter trains and city subways. They're all part of the New York Transit Museum's Grand Central Terminal Holiday Train show. Check 'em out.

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Asylum application real?

Immigration expert Allan Wernick tells a permanent resident who entered as an asylee and then visited his home country several times that a naturalization examiner may ask if his original asylum application was genuine.

Immigration, Page 12

Hair ... today!

Looking for a new holiday 'do, but want to have some dough left to buy gifts? Visit one of these great salons and get your hair done without busting your budget.

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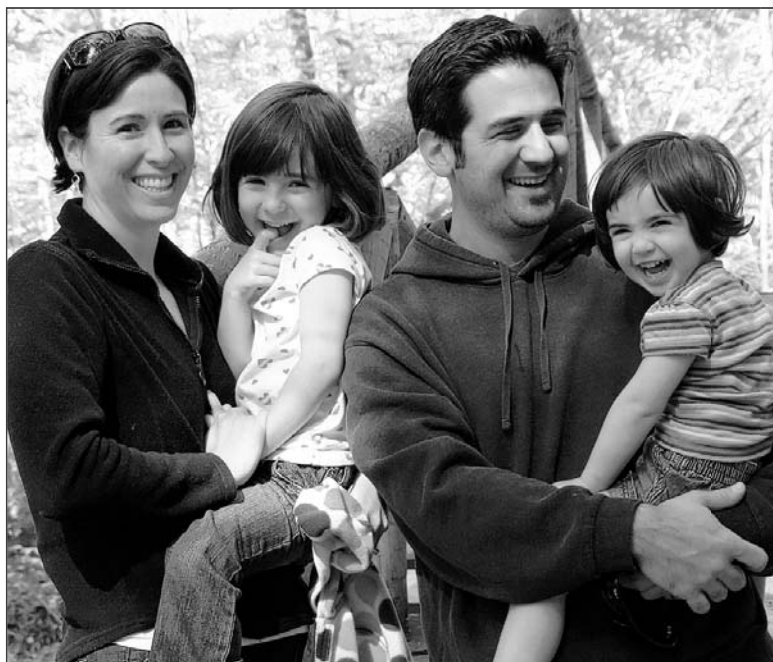
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Families 'adopting' families

Aid program creates personal links



JEFF BACHNER

Hastings-on-Hudson residents Stephanie and Chris Hinkaty, with kids Sabine, 4, and Mira, 2 (l.), have "adopted" Sharon Cooper and her kids, daughter Kiyana and son Kijah, of Bed-Stuy through the Family-to-Family project. The Hinkatys donate \$25 a month so Cooper can shop at the BedStuy Campaign Against Hunger pantry.

BY RACHEL MONAHAN

WANT TO help a poor Brooklyn family without leaving your desk?

Instead of "adopting" a child orphaned by AIDS in South Africa or a Honduran boy whose parents live on \$3.50 a day, you can now "adopt" a family in need — on a Web site.

A Bedford-Stuyvesant food pantry has teamed with the Web charity Family-to-Family to ensure local families have enough to eat.

"I was excited to know that someone really cared about me and my family," said Sharon Cooper, 44, of Bedford-Stuyvesant, who works two jobs, but

still relies on the BedStuy Campaign Against Hunger food pantry on Fulton St.

Through Family-to-Family, Stephanie Hinkaty of Hastings-on-Hudson has been sending \$25 a month to the pantry to make sure Cooper's family can pick up groceries there.

"This was a real personal connection, instead of sending \$25 to some organization to do whatever with it," said Hinkaty, 36, who moved from Cobble Hill with her husband and two young children last year.

The 10-year-old pantry faces a growing demand for help. Last month, it pro-

vided food for a record 9,531 families — which was 60% above average.

To make sure it doesn't have to turn away people, as it did early last summer, the pantry's director, the Rev. Melony Samuels, has turned to Family-to-Family.

Launched by Westchester mom Pam Koner in 2003, Family-to-Family began operating as do many international-aid nonprofits, asking families who could afford it to commit to a small monthly donation to sponsor American families in need.

It focused exclusively on the poor in rural U.S. areas — until Samuels

convinced Koner there was real need much closer to home.

"She called me and said, 'We have families who don't have food.' I kept thinking about her," Koner said. "Even in New York, where there's vast amounts of resources . . . she was turning people away. I wanted to do something."

Since the summer, Family-to-Family has matched 10 donor families in its network to 10 families in Brooklyn.

The sponsors contribute \$25 a month so recipients can shop at the pantry.

Continued on Page 4

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