

# No alcohol, but more fun, for New Year's

NEW YEAR'S, from 1A

after having abused drugs and alcohol for nearly 30 years.

"It's really important for me to stay clean," Ortiz said. "The holidays are really hard, especially this night. That's why I surround myself with people I know are not using."

The White Plains party wasn't the only way residents could enjoy the last hours of 2006 and the first few of 2007 without booze.

In New Rochelle, families and friends celebrated New Year's Eve with an array of creative and cultural events as part of the First Night movement.

First Night is an alcohol-free community celebration of the new year through the arts. Celebrations are held in 131 cities throughout the world. This year, leaders at the New Rochelle YMCA decided to host a First Night event there for the first time in celebration of growth and artistic talent in the city.

"New Rochelle is revitalizing itself and it's growing," said Bennie Giles, president of the YMCA board of directors. "There's all kinds of positive development going on. First Night is the kind of celebration that is consistent with that positive direction."

The festivities began at noon with a children's mask-making workshop at the Huguenot Children's Library. Later, city residents visited The Poet's Corner, a community arts presentation space on Main Street, for storytelling, dance and theater.

At other venues throughout the city, there were art workshops, magic shows, photo exhibits, and dance and music performances.

At the YMCA, Debra Whitman watched a magic show with her 3-year-old daughter, Tess, as they waited for Jeffrey Freidberg and the Bossy Frog Band to take the stage.

Whitman, a piano teacher, saw a flier for the event at the local library and decided to participate.

"We try to do as many cultural things with her as we can," said Whitman, a Larchmont resident.

Friends Ruth King, Clara Grant and Ethel Levitz hurried around from place to place yesterday trying to take it all in. They hit a mariachi performance at the YMCA, and afterward went to a modern



Frank Becerra Jr./The Journal News

The Lynn Academy of Irish Dance performs at the New Rochelle Public Library during First Night festivities.

dance performance at The Poet's Corner.

They later stopped in at the Hugh Doyle Senior Center to listen and dance to live music and enjoy cake and coffee. The women, all retired teachers, say they generally like to keep busy as much as possible. First Night, they said, helped them do exactly that.

"There's such a variety of activities," said King, a New Rochelle resident. "The ones we went to were very good. It was very peace-

ful and enjoyable."

King said she hoped to continue going to First Nights in the future in her hometown.

"I'm very proud that New Rochelle did this. It brings people together," she said.

Next, the three were headed to Trinity-St. Paul's Episcopal Church to hear live jazz.

The entire day's activities were capped with a noise-filled procession along Main Street ending at the Library Green, where participants did a New Year's Eve count-

down to the family-friendly hour of 8 p.m.

Jeffrey Krause, executive director of the YMCA, said he hoped to see First Night continue and grow over the years.

"We think there's such a talent of artists and creative people in New Rochelle, it really was a good thing to do," he said.

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