

THE ISLAND

For openers, it's see and be seen

■ Celebrities of all (pin)stripes fill the seats and suites

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Rudy sat with Judi, with Guy in between.

Last night's home opener for the Staten Island Yankees at the Richmond County Bank Ballpark at St. George was a Who's Who of political and public figures.

In one luxury suite, you had the mayor, his "good friend," the borough president and his daughter. In the stands, you were liable to run into any of three men running for borough president, a mayoral hopeful, any of another dozen or so elected officials — or even a Cy Young Award winner.

Former New York Yankees and Mets pitching star Dwight Gooden raised the 2000 New York-Penn League championship banner, and stuck around to sign a few autographs before the game began.

Meanwhile, suite 13, just to the left of home plate, was the stomping grounds for the Republican Party. As the innings wore on, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Borough President Guy V. Molinari and the mayor's close friend, Judi Nathan, sat sipping Diet Pepsi and bottled water. They stood for the seventh-inning stretch and sang along to "Take Me Out To The Ballgame."

"This is an exciting day for us," Molinari said moments before the first pitch. "To see the evolution of what at one time was in our wildest dreams is now a fabulous reality."

Molinari's daughter, former Rep. Susan Molinari, sat next to the mayor, taking in the view of the Manhattan skyline.

"Next to closing the garbage dump, this is the second greatest achievement on Staten Island," Ms. Molinari said.

The borough president's right-hand man and a candidate to fill his office this fall, Deputy Borough President James Molinaro called last night a boon for Staten Island.

"We've been discovered," said Molinaro, noting that hundreds of people got off the nearby Staten Island Ferry to attend the game. "And once you've been discovered, you can't put the genie back in the bottle."

Maybe it was the heat of the moment, but during the game, which the Staten Island Yankees won, 3-1, over the Hudson Valley Renegades, the Borough Hall team was challenged to a baseball contest by the crew from City Hall. On July 3, they'll face off at the St.



Judi Nathan and Mayor Giuliani walk along the St. George Staten Island Transit platform on the way to the game.



Hank Steinbrenner, son of the Yankees Boss, was on hand.



Sen. Charles Schumer comes to the game with his daughter.

George stadium.

Two men hoping next year they'll be managing the Borough Hall team mingled in the crowd. Councilman Jerome X. O'Donovan (D-North Shore) and Assemblyman Robert Stranieri (R-South Shore) weren't going to miss out on the night when, as O'Donovan put it, the park "was off and running."

"Play Ball!" he said. "It cost an awful lot of money, but I think Staten Island realizes what it has here," O'Donovan added.

Stranieri, basking in the shade of the third-base line, said the park and its views are enough to coax anyone from other boroughs to take the ferry across the pond.

"I'm looking forward to next season, when I'm borough president, to work out with the team," Stranieri said.

Stranieri wasn't the only one who wants to turn in his pinstriped suits for pinstripes of a different kind.

"I'd trade jobs with them anytime," said Councilman James Oddo (R-Mid-Island), who walked around carrying a bat in preparation for Thursday, when he will introduce a bill to eliminate aluminum bats from youth and high school baseball and softball games. "My career ended when I discovered the curve ball. I couldn't hit them."

Noticeably distant from the GOP parade was Rep. Vito Fossella, who taught his sons, Dylan and Griffin, the rules of the game with wife Mary Pat as they all sat in the stands.

"I wish I was on that cruise ship," said the congressman as a luxury liner sailed by the ballpark. "Really, I think this is great the way families are getting together and with a little luck and good pitching, the Yankees will win."

Also spending the night with the

family was Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), there with his daughter, Jessica, who landed a summer job with the New York Yankees.

"There's not a better view in any ballpark to look up at," Schumer said. "Maybe some night, if the wind is right, someone will hit a home run that lands in Manhattan." Yankees first baseman Aaron Rifkin's fourth inning home run didn't quite make it.

Not on a ballot this year, but greeting people as if he were still a candidate, former Councilman Fred Cerullo was overwhelmed by the numbers who turned out last night to cheer on the home team.

"It's hard not to bump into 10,000 of your closest friends," said the president and CEO of the Grand Central Partnership and a part-time actor who had a minor role a few weeks ago on the ABC soap opera "One Life to Live." "People think I am still running for something and I am not."

Mayoral hopeful Michael Bloomberg is running this year, and he was sitting right behind home plate for most of the game. State Sen. Vincent Gentile (D-East Shore/Brooklyn) was also around, hanging out in the Democratic luxury suite.

It wasn't only politicians and former politicians who were out last night. Taking in the game drinking beer and eating hot dogs were countless public figures, including judges, lawyers, doctors, business owners and civic leaders. Assistant Chief Anthony J. Marra, the borough's police commander, took in the game with his family from the first-base line. Henry Stern, the city Parks commissioner, was walking around the upper level.

"This is gorgeous," said Curtis Sliwa, founder and president of the Guardian Angels and a radio talk-show personality. "For years, all Staten Island was known for was the dump and this gives peo-



Guy Molinari, left, laughs as Mayor Rudy Giuliani gives him a kiss during a press conference at the Richmond County Bank Ball Park.

ple a reason to come to Staten Island. It's about time this first-class borough gets something first class from the city."

Waiting on line at one of the concession stands was Staten Island's representative to the city Board of Education, Jerry Cammarata.

"This is an absolutely incredible experience," he said. "It really demonstrates all the enthusiasm that Staten Island has. This breathtaking view of the stadium really lifts the soul. They should just let people come here and meditate because it is a great place to lift the soul."

Also spotted rubbing shoulders were Judges Louis Sangiorgio, Thomas Aliotta, Michael Brennan, and Philip Stranieri. Also from the courts was Supreme Court Deputy Chief Clerk Bob Olivari and Ron Cerrachio, chief clerk of Surrogate Court. Businessmen Dave Villamarin and Gary Angiuli were there — Gary with wife Annette, who happens to be Judge Sangiorgio's daughter. Also entrepreneurs Richard and Lois Nicotra. Richard, who admits he prefers cabaret and the theater over

hot dogs and baseball, spent the evening telling wife Lois the game was only seven innings. "That's when you were playing Little League," a nearby baseball fan told him.

Community board leaders like Lou Caravone, Joe Carroll and George Caputo were on hand, as was Advance General Manager Caroline Diamond Harrison took in the game with husband Tim and children Alice and Timmy. Staten Island Hospital's associate chief of medicine, Dr. Ted Strange was there, as was Public Administrator Gary Gollin. They sat near West Brighton attorney John D'Amato and wife Theresa.

Consolidated Edison VP Marilyn Caselli was on hand, as was Gladys Schweiger, director of the Island's Alzheimer's Association.

One of the men responsible for lifting the souls of the 6,854 fans in the stands was Michael F. Manzulli, who runs the bank for which the ballpark is named.

"It brings the whole community together, people from all walks of life," said Manzulli, chief executive officer of Richmond County Financial Corp.

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