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IMMEDIATE

MTA Crowns Second Avenue Idols

Public Ballot Tabs Narrators of Upcoming Interactive Exhibit

MTA Capital Construction's *Second Avenue Idol* contest came to a thrilling conclusion over the Presidents Day weekend as online voters chose a male and female voice to be the featured narrators for the first exhibit at the Second Avenue Subway Community Information Center.

Bill Bunting and Joanna Bonaro were crowned Second Avenue Idols after a five-month process. Dozens of applicants responded to a casting call by emailing recordings or calling into a dedicated phone line. A panel of judges narrowed them down to six finalists, who recorded audio samples in a professional studio that were put to an online poll. When the ballots of more than 1,900 voters were tallied, Bunting and Bonaro were selected to be the voice of the subway information center.

Bunting, a financial worker, had been commuting to New York for over a decade before he moved to Manhattan in 2010. His wife encouraged him to apply for the contest after reading a newspaper article about it, but the article sat on his desk for a week before he decided to audition.

"Initially I was surprised when I was contacted," Bunting said, "since I am not an actor and I don't have any formal voice training. However, I was excited about the prospect of working with the MTA in connection with the Second Avenue Subway. Mass transit is a vital asset of New York and the Second Avenue Subway will soon become a critical link in the City's transportation network."

Bonaro, an actress and resident of the Upper East Side for over 20 years, launched her own YouTube campaign to bolster support. "I try to look at everything in a creative way," she said. "What is this project about? It is about people understanding that I live here, I work here and I play here, and now you get to know me."

The contest was open to people who live or work in the Second Avenue Subway area from First to Third Avenues and 63rd to 105th Streets, and attracted amateur as well as professional voiceover talent. Voting for the *Second Avenue Idol* opened January 30 and closed at midnight on February 17.

"Congratulations to our *Second Avenue Idols* and to all of the contestants. They truly represented the melting pot that is New York City," said MTA Capital Construction President Michael Horodniceanu. "It just makes sense that the soon-to-open Community Information Center, which will serve as an important tool in engaging the public on the colossal Second Avenue Subway project, will have two distinct and local voices."

Bunting and Bonaro will be featured in an interactive video for exhibit in the newly created Community Information Center to explain the history of the Second Avenue Subway, first proposed in 1929. The SAS Community Information Center aims to foster and encourage a continued exchange among neighbors and the SAS team regarding the construction of the Second Avenue Subway. It will be located at 1628 Second Avenue and will serve as space for the public to meet with community liaisons and discuss construction-related matters. The facility also will serve as an educational center where programs will be offered to schools, community groups and other organizations about public transportation in New York.

Phase 1 of the Second Avenue Subway will extend from an expanded station at Lexington Avenue and 63rd Street east to Second Avenue, then north to 96th Street. Three entirely new stations at 72nd, 86th and 96th Streets are under construction. Phase 1 is scheduled for completion in December 2016.

The Second Avenue Subway will reduce overcrowding and delays on the Lexington Avenue line, improving travel for both city and suburban commuters, and provide better access to mass transit for residents of the East Side of Manhattan.