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## Can't See the Tower for the Trees

Fighting between Catholics and Protestants may be ending in Northern Ireland, but it's getting worse in the Bronx, where the waspy New York Botanical Garden is waging war against the Jesuits at Fordham University who must build a new radio tower to meet the requirements of the Federal Communications Commission. Fordham's radio station, WFUV-FM, serves 150,000 listeners each week, and is a vital source of information and entertainment for ethnic communities in the Bronx and nearby suburbs.

WFUV has been broadcasting since 1947 with a signal power of 50,000 watts from a tower above Keating Hall on Fordham's Rose Hill Campus in the Bronx. In response to new FCC rules regarding transmission of radio frequencies, the university considered more than two-dozen sites and ultimately chose a location far from student dorms and the surrounding neighborhood, but just across the street from the 230-acre New York Botanical Garden.

Fordham's choice was constrained by tight boundaries, since its radio tower could not be in a dense residential area or interfere with other broadcast signals or LaGuardia Airport's flight paths. Earlier this year, the city approved Fordham's request to build a one-story transmitter building and a 480-foot radio antenna, but in June, after construction began, the botanical garden launched a legal and public-relations campaign opposing the tower.

Although the city has rejected the botanical garden's request to revoke Fordham's building permit, work has stopped on the tower pending redesign of the structure. If the new tower isn't completed by the end of this year, Fordham may lose its FCC license for the station.

The botanical garden, one of the world's leading herbariums with the largest botanical library under one roof in the Western Hemisphere, is a well-preserved treasure, a tribute to its insulation from the turbulent borough in which it is located. Fordham's radio tower, garden leaders claim, will intrude on the aesthetic experience of visitors to the magnificent Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, a favorite stop for suburban garden clubs. Further, garden executives, about to launch an \$80-million capital plan to attract more visitors with a new main entrance and children's adventure garden, believe that the tower will cause "permanent damage to one of the New York City's most important cultural, educational and historic institutions."

In the words of the garden's leaders, the Haupt Conservatory dome is the "primary symbol" of the garden and of "the Bronx itself." It's no wonder that the garden's leaders, protected as they are by acres of forests and flowers, can so easily overlook such plebeian Bronx landmarks as Orchard Beach, Yankee Stadium, the Bronx Zoo, and even the Bronx County Courthouse.

While the botanical garden generates a sense of peace and quiet, Fordham's WFUV generates a sense of community with programs such as "Echoes of Ukraine," "Polka Party," "Bharat Vani," "Club de Sol" and "Coel nGael," one of several programs that serve the growing Irish population of the Bronx. New York is known for its national radio icons like Don Imus, Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern, but radio is also a community medium, and WFUV is the only public radio station specifically serving the residents of what is decidedly an electronically deprived borough. And, of course, the radio station helps attract students to Fordham; it has even been the incubator for professionals such as Alan Alda, Charles Osgood and Sal Marchiano.

Fordham's radio station is not just another spot on the FM dial; its programs help foster ethnic identity and cultural pride in a remarkable mix of communities. While WFUV's new tower is hardly an aesthetic delight, its radio signal is a source of life to its listeners. In this era of electronic communication, radio signals are as important as trees.

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