What better way to reintroduce northern Manhattan parks to residents and friends than through a neighborhood celebration that takes you hiking through our secret and not-so-secret parks and finishes up with a big outdoor party?

Hike the Heights, an annual community-wide hike-and-party, is now in its eighth year. It will take place this Saturday, June 2nd.

With the exception of the first, I have volunteered at every one, and I learned at the planning meetings that this year promises to be more fun than ever.

Molaundo Jones, Program Director for Creative Arts Workshops for Kids Inc., one of the Hike's partners, agrees. Last year's Hike the Heights was one of my most fun and memorable experiences," he said recently. "It was amazing to see so hundreds of kids and families in the park enjoying themselves and making new friends. I know that this year's Hike the Heights is going to be even bigger and better and I can't wait to be there.

You may arrive directly at the Sunken Playground in Highbridge Park, at Edgecombe Avenue and 167th Street. Or, you may join in on a delightful walk along the Giraffe Path that takes you through several neighborhood parks and leads to the party. The route is called the Giraffe Path because it is made up of dozens of giraffe sculptures, created by neighborhood youth. They will greet hikers at entrances to parks along the Hike the Heights route and also will be exhibited at the Community Party in Highbridge Park.

Why giraffes? Everyone loves them, and if you squint real hard at a map of northern Manhattan, the shape resembles that of a giraffe.

Here's the scoop on the walk/hikes:

There will be groups of hikers meeting at the following locations, and all will converge at the Sunken Playground:

At 10:00 am:
- RING Garden (Dyckman & Broadway)
- Central Park (110th St & Central Park West)

At 10:30 am:
- Jackie Robinson Park (148th St & Bradhurst)
- Swindler Cove (Dyckman & 10th Ave)
- St. Nicholas Park (135th St & St. Nicholas Av)
Morningside Park (118th St & Morningside Avenue)
At 11:00 am

Fort Tryon Park (190th ST A station & Fort Washington Ave)
Here's the line-up for the party

Participants can join the fun and food at the main party location (167th Street at Edgecombe Ave) from 11:00 to 3:00 pm. This year, the schedule includes:

- Roller blading by NYC parks play mobile
- Adult arts and craft by VNS' Time Bank
- Kids arts 'n crafts by Scribbles
- On-stage 'Open Mic' with at least one 12-year-old stand up comedienne
- Belly dancing demo by pregnant ladies
- Yoga by Bread 'n Yoga
- Kid fitness by CHALK
- Capoeira demo by Coco
- Parkour demonstration and lesson by New York Parkour and Nancercize
- Rock climbing by REI

A hearty lunch and beverages
Games
Dance/music
Book Wagon from WordUp

And surprises!

This is a "potluck" event, with food, labor, skills, and other materials being donated and funding from a host of sponsors and partners.

It is truly a community event.

On June 1st, over 200 kids from Inwood Academy for Leadership are cleaning trails, for example.

Community partners include Alianza Dominicana, Asthma Basics for Children, Boy Scout Troop STN, CHALK, CLIMB (City Life is Moving Bodies), Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health, Concrete Safaris, the Friends Committee of the Fort Tryon Park Trust, Group for Community, Partnerships for Parks, Yes We Can Inwood, and many more.

Be sure to wear comfortable walking shoes, a hat and sunscreen. If you participate in the hiking, bring water with you in a re-usable...
Nancy Bruning has a master's degree in public health, is a certified personal trainer, and is the author or co-author of over 25 books on health and fitness, including the forthcoming "Nancercize: 101 Things to Do on a Park Bench." She also is the Chair of the Friends Committee of the Fort Tryon Park Trust and leads outdoor fitness experiences and weight loss workshops. Visit Nancy's website at www.Nancercize.net.

For more information, please call Lourdes J. Hernández-Cordero 212.305.1077 or email crg.climb@gmail.com.

You can also visit http://sites.google.com/site/hiketheheights

You can learn more about the event on YouTube (keywords: Hike the Heights, CLIMB)

To donate: www.ioby.org/project/hikeheights2012