

NYers

NOT LEAVING HOME

without it

The ID NYC card has become a staple for locals

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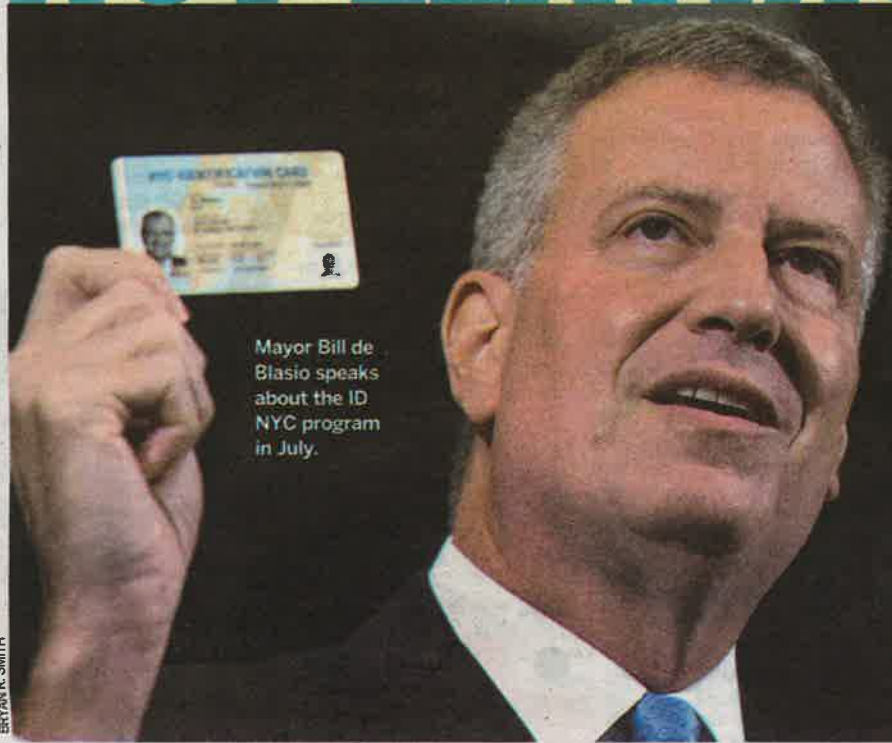
What's in your wallet? It might be the ID NYC card — the ultimate “rewards” card for a surging number of locals.

The ID NYC program was designed to provide government-issued photo IDs to people who desperately need government identification but have had difficulty getting it — undocumented immigrants, primarily, but also homeless folks, formerly incarcerated people, teenagers and older adults.

But as a result of the sweeteners offered with the card — free membership to museums, zoos and botanical gardens, and discounted memberships to city recreation centers and YMCAs — it has also emerged as a hipster cultural credential.

It's proven to be a popular insider's passport for locals who are more than adequately credentialed, but appreciate the perks, swag, freebies and discounts the card confers.

Obtaining the card “is a no-brainer . . . it's so cool!” said Tiffany Sun, 32, a tech startup editor from Brooklyn Heights, who has already activated a free mem-



Mayor Bill de Blasio speaks about the ID NYC program in July.

BRYAN R. SMITH

bership to the New York Botanic Garden and BAM.

The card's benefits (multi-borough library privileges, dance rehearsal admissions to the New York City Ballet and other perks) have inspired her to explore the “full breadth of cultural offerings in NYC,” and visit boroughs other than her own, she said.

“It's the I am a New Yorker. Hear me roar!” statement card,” joked Ryan Max, external affairs director for the city's Department of

Cultural Affairs.

More than 30,000 free memberships at 33 cultural institutions have been activated to date.

Membership lasts for one year after activation of an initial visit, which must be made by Dec. 31; it is unclear yet as to what benefits will be activated by those joining after that point.

More than 400,000 ID NYCs (representing 5.5% of NYC's population) have been issued to New Yorkers 14 and older since registrations began in January, with another 54,885 registrations in the pipeline, making NYC's municipal card program the largest in the nation.

Although the application rollout was rocky, applying now is a fairly seamless experience, cardholders said.

While 37% of the city's population is foreign born, according to City Hall, the city has no idea how many of those who have obtained the cards have done so primarily to obtain identification, and how many just wanted to see the Basquiat exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum for free.

“We do not ask appli-

cants for their immigration status,” a spokeswoman explained in a statement.

Yet, it's clear that many longtime residents — grateful to finally have a break in an increasingly costly city that is often rife with frustrations — have signed up, too.

“I hadn't budgeted,” for an annual membership to the New York Botanic Gardens, explained Kaela Gallo, 25, a user and visual experience designer from Bushwick, so discovering she could get one for free by obtaining an ID NYC card was a blessing.

Leah Schmerl, 43, said that using her card “gave me a positive impression of the de Blasio administration.”

Schmerl, a public relations consultant from Brooklyn Heights, loves the card she received in March — even though it mistakenly lists her as “male” and has her street name misspelled. The city, she said, is “basically giving you money. It's weird to me that everyone hasn't got one.”

Schmerl has activated memberships at the Brooklyn Museum, the BAM Cinema Club and Brooklyn Bo-

Participating Institutions

The 33 cultural spots that offer free one-year memberships to ID NYC holders include the following:

- American Museum of Natural History
- Bronx County Historical Society and the Bronx Museum of the Arts
- El Museo del Barrio
- Metropolitan Museum of Art
- Staten Island Museum, Staten Island Children's Museum and Staten Island Historical Society
- Queens Museum, Queens Botanical Garden, Flushing Town



- Wildlife Conservation Society (which includes Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium)
- Public Theater
- Carnegie Hall
- City Center
- Ryan Max, director of external affairs for the Department of Cultural Affairs, said that participating institutions are located on “city-owned property.”

- Hall and Queens Theatre in the Park
- Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning
- Museum of Jewish Heritage
- Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Brooklyn Children's Museum, and Brooklyn Academy of Music
- Wave Hill
- New York Botanical Garden

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