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## Naming Rights for the Rest of Us

Billionaires, step aside; New Yorkers with more modest means can name a fossil exhibit, a school stairwell or even a zoo cockroach

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For a mere \$100 million, producer David Geffen got Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall renamed in his honor. For an identical sum, financier Stephen Schwarzman put his name on the New York Public Library's main building.

And now, for Valentine's Day, the Bronx Zoo has a special naming opportunity for the rest of us: \$10 lets you name a captive cockroach in honor of a loved one—or yourself!

When I heard of this fantastic opportunity, I immediately went online and named a roach in honor of my sister's dog, Charlie, who recently, as family lore now has it, defended her from a ferocious bobcat attack in the wilds of Oswego, N.Y.

Sis soon received a certificate from the zoo in her email inbox: "Your hissing cockroach lives in a hollowed out tree-trunk inside the Madagascar! exhibit at the Bronx Zoo."

We are all feeling quite posh.

And that's hardly the only naming opportunity available to New Yorkers on a budget. Let the billionaires name their hospital wings. For a more modest sum, you can name a [fossil exhibit](#) at the American Museum of Natural History, a foghorn display at the National Lighthouse Museum or a "bouquet of books" on your topic of choice at the Queens College library.

For \$2,500, anyone can get their name on a student study desk at the Ackerman Institute for the Family, a postgraduate training school for family therapists in the Flatiron District. Other naming opportunities include Therapy Room 205 (\$20,000) or the third-floor stairwell (\$15,000).

In most cases, the naming rights are good for 10 years. “Not for eternity, that would be silly,” says Adriana Londono, the institute’s director of development. “Unless you want to give me another \$15,000.”

Park benches are a popular option. While Central Park Conservancy benches run a steep \$10,000, the Parks Department runs a more affordable adopt-a-bench program. For \$1,500, for example, you can get your name on a bench plaque in a “Level D” greenspace like Sara D. Roosevelt Park on the Lower East Side.

The donation guarantees your plaque for the life of the bench, says marketing director Christine Dabrow—about 10 years.

Perhaps the city’s best seat deal is at Bryant Park, where \$150 lets you name one of the green lawn chairs—a legacy that lasts as long as the chair, typically two to three years.

About 15% of the park’s 4,000 chairs carry plaques, typically from a donor honoring a loved one, says Bryant Park Corp. President Dan Biederman. Donors get a digital photo of their chair and the option to place the chair near a park monument they find especially meaningful—like the coffee kiosk!

While some institutions are selective about their naming opportunities, others put just about everything up for grabs. The historic fireboat John J. Harvey, for example, has offered dozens of naming opportunities on everything from the ship’s engine room to firepump four, the aft flag pole and the whistle. Naming rights on the ship’s two toilets sold for \$2,500.

Folks wanting their name on some New York real estate need look no further than the Queens Museum, where donations starting at \$50 buy a title deed on your location of choice in its 3-D Panorama of the City of New York.

Most donors adopt their current or childhood home, says Deputy Director David Strauss. But others have sponsored locations ranging from a stadium dugout to a tiny stretch of the Brooklyn Bridge pedestrian walkway.

The perplexing question, of course, is how to value these naming opportunities. Fundraisers say it’s more art than science.

“It goes on instinct,” says David Garza, executive director of Henry Street Settlement, a social-services agency offering naming opportunities on the historic firehouse it plans to renovate on the Lower East Side.

Henry Street considers factors such as an item’s historical significance, visibility and emotional resonance. The fire pole, for example, went for \$125,000. The reception area is available for \$250,000.

It also tried to create opportunities for varied budgets. Hence the option to name a brick in the firehouse wall starting at \$1,000, or the entire firehouse—which a donor recently did for \$4.5 million.

The reason nonprofits offer these opportunities?

“It works!” says professor Rebecca Tekula, executive director at the Wilson Center for Social Entrepreneurship at Pace University. Naming opportunities capitalize on our competitive nature, not to mention peer pressure. No one wants to be the sole devil who hasn’t named a paver in the new church walkway.

And then there’s the subconscious appeal to the deepest drive of all: fear of death.

“It’s a way to live forever, it’s like immortality,” says Ms. Tekula. “Although with your cockroach, that will be hard. I guess you could freeze it.”

Nonsense. Charlie the cockroach may die, but his progeny will hiss forever, long after David Geffen Hall crumbles to dust.