


WOMEN *of* DISTINCTION

2012 EDITION



*Honoring
women
who have
shaped the
borough*

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A message from the editors

Welcome back to our annual tribute to the women of Brooklyn who truly make a difference.

The Community Newspaper Group and Courier Life Publications are proud to salute 25 of the borough's most pre-eminent women, who were nominated by their peers and selected by an elite panel for distinguishing themselves in their chosen fields.

Their attention to work, duty, and community has transcended their abilities to inspire, educate, and uplift untold numbers of people.

We feel their contributions have helped to raise our borough's stature as a unique place, where female workers prove every day that selfless acts and talent go hand-in-hand with success and accomplishment.

Gratitude also goes to our keynote speaker Dr. Una S. T. Clarke, who will help to officiate the June ceremony at the New York Aquarium. Dr. Clarke has distinguished herself as an exceptional Brooklynite by being the first Caribbean-born woman elected to the City Council in the 1990s, sponsoring more than 300 pieces of legislation in the 10 years she held office.

We hope that you enjoy reading this publication as much as we did compiling it — and come away with the distinct knowledge that Brooklyn would be a lot less distinctive without these Women of Distinction!

Vince DiMiceli, Shavana Abruzzo, and Courtney Donahue

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BROOKLYN'S WOMEN *of* DISTINCTION

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the power of giving

We salute **Courier Life's Brooklyn Women of Distinction** and congratulate its 2012 honorees.



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THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

June 20, 2012

Dear Friends:

It is a great pleasure to welcome everyone to Courier Life's Brooklyn Women of Distinction Gala.

New York is proud to be known as a City of opportunity, and we are committed to empowering women and helping them achieve the success they deserve. All of tonight's honorees are recognized leaders in their fields and in their communities. These women are dedicated to improving the lives of others, and through their many contributions and accomplishments, they have shaped the borough of Brooklyn, building a brighter future for all our residents.

I commend those being honored tonight for their spirit of service and community, which is an inspiration to us all. On behalf of our great City, best wishes for an enjoyable gala and a terrific evening.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael R. Bloomberg".

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OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

June 20, 2012

Les Goodstein
Courier Life Publications
CNG Community Newspaper Group
1 Metro Tech North
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Dear Friends,

Brooklyn has a long and illustrious tradition in journalism and the arts and offers a rich array of exhibitions, musical venues, museums, restaurants and galleries for the enjoyment of its visitors and residents. I extend my greetings and congratulations to CEO Les Goodstein, Publisher Cliff Luster, Courier Life Publications and the CNG team as you are joined by staff, supporters and special guests as you host the Second Annual Brooklyn's Women of Distinction.

Brooklyn is a borough of minorities. The only real majority is the women of Brooklyn. It is not a stretch to say that all of Brooklyn benefits from those special women who have given us life, or who inspire us to great heights by their extraordinary example. Courier Life Publications pays tribute to twenty-five amazing women whose commitment, dedication and excellence in their fields has earned them our respect and gratitude. It is with great pleasure that I join with those who honor these twenty-five dynamic, compassionate and selfless women who epitomize what Brooklyn is all about.

On behalf of all 2.6 million Brooklynites, I salute and commend Courier Life Publications and the CNG team for working so hard to make this extraordinary evening possible. I congratulate all of the honorees and wish them continued success in all of their endeavors. And I thank them for all that they do to make Brooklyn a better place to live, work and raise a family.

Sincerely,

Marty Markowitz

MM/gdmw

We are delighted that
Courier Life has chosen to honor

Matti Berkowitz

among its **Brooklyn Women of Distinction** this year. We can think of no one more deserving. Matti's tireless devotion and abounding energy in the service of others is a shining example of how the voluntary contributions of one person can positively affect the lives of so many.

Matti, we are so proud of your many accomplishments at Maimonides and with N'Shei C.A.R.E.S. We speak not only for ourselves, but on behalf of the countless number of patients and families who have been helped by you, when we extend our very warmest congratulations and best wishes for every future success.



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MATTI BERKOWITZ

Raising consciousness through education and service

BY ALEX RUSH

Matti Berkowitz's groundbreaking childbirth program at Maimonides Medical Center started with an off-the-cuff suggestion.

She was already a community leader for the Jewish organization, Agudah Women of America, when an acquaintance informed her that women giving birth at the Borough Park hospital would benefit from doulas, or female labor coaches, a profession dating back to ancient Greece. Before long, Berkowitz and a group of members were in the office of Dr. Howard Minkoff, chairman of Obstetrics and Gynecology, telling him that they knew a whole cadre of women who would love to volunteer as doulas.

"He thought it was a great idea!" Berkowitz says. "And somehow, we pulled it off."

Berkowitz helped to set up the Maimonides Doula Program, a network of Orthodox, hospital-certified doulas who lend their time to the secular Maimonides Birthing Center, helping women of all ethnicities relax during labor. The doulas suggest special breathing techniques, give massages, play music, and utilize other forms of pain management. This year, about 100 women are volunteering as doulas at Maimonides, whose obstetrics unit is the busiest in the state, delivering about 7,000 babies each year.

The doula service is a labor of love for Berkowitz, who works as a real estate broker and has seven children of her own. She became passionate about community service as a member of an Agudah-sponsored youth group, for which she organized dances, field trips, and holiday parties, eventually becoming the organization's vice president. One of her most significant moments as an Agudah leader took place in early 2000 when she helped to successfully lobby for a state law mandating that insurance companies pay for infertility pills. With that act, she solidified her commitment to advocating for women's issues.

Berkowitz also volunteers hands-on, though a foot injury forced her to put her doula work on hold for a while — but that's of no consequence to her fans.



Photo by Steve Solomonson

"I still get a call almost every week from a pregnant woman asking for advice," she states. "And I try to help all of them."

The Doula Program at Maimonides is an offshoot of Agudah Women of America's N'shei C.A.R.E.S., where Berkowitz is also co-chairwoman. The group stands for community, awareness, responsibility, education, and support. It's best known for hosting educational seminars on diseases, such as arthritis, diabetes, and breast cancer.

"We've had phenomenal doctors speak at these events, which have saved lives," Berkowitz says.

Many of the seminars encourage early detection. Berkowitz loves to tell one story about a mother and daughter of Ashkenazi descent — a group genetically predisposed to breast cancer — who were inspired to get mammograms after attending a lecture. Turns out they both had tumors, but caught the cancer early enough to recover.

As if saving lives wasn't enough for

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Midwood.

OCCUPATION: Real estate broker; co-chairwoman of N'shei C.A.R.E.S.; vice president of Agudah Women of America; co-director of Maimonides Doula Program; founder of Mothers of Multiples; volunteer doula.

COMPANY: Friendly Realty.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Volunteering as a doula and founding Mothers of Multiples."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Maimonides Birthing Center.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Pamela Brier, president of Maimonides Medical Center, she's a role model in that she doesn't just sit on the sidelines when a community is in need, she gets up and does something about it."

MOTTO: "Whatever G-d does is good. He's leading us in the right way and there's no reason for me to worry."

Berkowitz, she also founded and runs Mothers of Multiples, a support group for parents of twins, triplets, and other multiple children. She has twin boys, so she knows firsthand how stressful raising multiples can be. That's why the group holds regular meetings for its 700 members, dispensing tips, such as encouraging independence and individuality in the kids, creating personal downtime, and establishing routine. It also loans out baby equipment and recommends caregivers.

When Berkowitz was growing up, she merely wanted to belong to a community service organization. Now she's in charge of two, and doing admirably, according to Agudah Co-Vice President Leah Gerlenter, who has worked with her for 20 years.

"When Matti had twins, she realized how difficult it could be for mothers raising multiples to cope, so she wanted to reach out and help others," Gerlenter says. "She's a very community-minded person with a huge heart."

**The YMCA of Greater New York
wishes to congratulate
Eileen O'Connor**

AND

**The Dodge YMCA
wishes to congratulate
Doris Palazzo**

for being individually acknowledged as two of
2012's Brooklyn Women of Distinction

The Brooklyn community continues to be enriched by the
contributions and tireless efforts of these exceptional women.



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SANDRA CHERYL CHAPMAN

Ensuring Brooklynites get the services they deserve

BY JON REISS

Sandra Chapman is Brooklyn's deputy borough president — the “Joe Biden” to Borough President Markowitz. The two of them have come to represent for Brooklyn a kind of change similar to that which the Obama presidency has meant for Washington.

Chapman's loyalty and dedication as Markowitz's right hand is undeniable. She sees it as her mission to make sure his vision for Brooklyn is carried out into the next administration. Prior to her appointment as deputy borough president, Chapman served as director of the borough president's Community Service Center, helping residents throughout Brooklyn access city services. She shares instances — such as helping residents get streetlights put in at intersections or getting pot holes filled — as common and easy examples of the kind of help she has offered to boroughites. On the more difficult end of the spectrum, Chapman describes the struggle to help residents with such necessities as benefits and housing. The need for more available low-income housing is one of the biggest issues currently facing the borough, according to her.

Her office under the administration of then-Borough President Howard Golden was referred to as the Action Services Office, and she served there under both Golden and then Markowitz before being appointed to her current position last year. Married with two children and a home in Canarsie, Chapman originally hails from Guyana, and came to the United States with her family, following her high school graduation. As the second top official in a borough where nearly half a million Brooklynites are of Caribbean descent — Guyana being one of the countries leading the group — she has the chance to be an inspiration, the official states.

“I am a portrait of what all immigrants, old or young, come to this country seeking — a better opportunity,” says Chapman.

She proceeded to attend college in the U.S. and receive her master's degree in public administration from Long Island University — much to the pleasure of



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

her father, who was big on education.

“I think that's a major part of what pushed me to get to this point,” she says.

Reading, Chapman reveals, was of the utmost importance in her house growing up, and it quickly became one of her passions. She recalls her father making sure she always had something to read. Literacy, subsequently, is an issue she considers critical, and one that she will try to push in the coming months. She mentions the Brooklyn Book Festival — a magnet for international scribes — as a sign of our vibrant literary climate.

“To have such good writers and people from around the world come to this festival is a testament of something we're doing right,” she says. “I'm hoping the younger kids will take this event as something they can look to and learn from.”

She adds that she can't fix the economy, but she can get students to understand that if they come out of school with a 12th-grade education they can go on to college, or at least get a job.

Chapman says she wasn't looking for the job of deputy borough president, and when Markowitz appointed her, it

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Canarsie.

OCCUPATION: Deputy borough president.

COMPANY: Office of the Brooklyn Borough President.

CLAIM TO FAME: “I discovered the pending sale of 112 community gardens, and led a successful effort to save them from being auctioned off and destroyed.”

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Coney Island.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: “My mother Ivonne Waldron for unselfishly putting everything aside upon moving to this country to give my brother and I a better life.”

MOTTO: “We shall never know all the good that a simple smile can do.” — Mother Teresa.

was a surprise and an honor. Her experience in helping New Yorkers get the resources they need runs deep. She has served in the borough president's office since 1996, and before that at the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. Yet Chapman still considers dealing with people, one-on-one with a focus on preservation, the best part of her gig. She recently mounted a successful campaign to save more than 100 community gardens from being auctioned off and destroyed.

“My job gives me the opportunity to go out and talk to Brooklyn residents,” she says. “That's something I love, it's my favorite part of the job.”

Mary Anne Cino, Markowitz's former deputy chief of staff, feels Chapman is well up to the task.

“Sandra brings the best of herself to all that she does,” she states. “If she doesn't have the answers, she searches for them.”

Sandra Chapman may be new to the job, but she's already proved that she's no rookie when it comes to enhancing Brooklyn's international reputation as a proud home to everyone from everywhere.



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Singer*

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CECILIA CLARKE

Empowering young women to be critical leaders

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Cecilia Clarke comes from hard-boiled stock.

Her great-grandmother Virginia "Sadie" Nash Cartan was a society doyenne from Nebraska who made national headlines in Dec. 1902 when she spied a baby shivering on a crowded trolley car, stood up, lifted up her skirt, removed her silk slip, and wrapped it around the restless infant.

People were shocked by the gratuitous act of kindness, and the *New York Times*, in a report headlined "Wrapped Child in Petticoat," heralded Sadie as "the talk of the city."

Generations of kin have been inspired by the altruistic aristocrat.

"She did the right thing in the moment," states Clarke, a Fort Greene resident who herself rose to action a century later to diffuse the social pressures facing her 16-year-old daughter.

"I didn't like the messages she was getting from the culture," she says. "I didn't feel she was being empowered."

Clarke utilized her background in non-profits, the visual arts, and social work to form a leadership program in 2001 for young women ages 14–22, focusing on creating change where it mattered most — at home, in schools, and in communities. She named it the Sadie Nash Leadership Project, solicited private funds, and fortified it with free programs, stipends, and a trailblazing gender recruitment policy.

First, however, Clarke, the product of an upper-middle-class family from New York, had some obstacles to overcome: "I had to reconsider what privilege is," she says. "The anachronistic, charity model, 'I'm here to help you,' was instantly abandoned for, 'We are going to work together towards a vision we agree on.'"

Her bold initiatives took shape in thought-provoking workshops, exercises, and seminars that offered her young "Nashers" a lens into social injustices, women's rights, and theories of power and leadership. Clarke regaled her young charges with compelling guest speakers, including Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-Williamsburg), 2011 Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee, and late Cherokee chief Wilma Mankill-



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Fort Greene.

OCCUPATION: Founder and executive director.

COMPANY: Sadie Nash Leadership Project.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Founded an award-winning non-profit while raising three children."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Sadie Nash, for doing the right thing in the moment."

MOTTO: "Sharks die when they stop swimming."

er. Later, she instituted a community action placement program offering students internships at local organizations, plus a leadership action project to train them on community organizing and activism. Her core leadership institute prepared the girls for college, and fostered self-awareness and self-assurance, drawing the attention of social service giants such as C.A.S.E.S. and

F.E.G.S., who were interested in forming partnerships.

"They approached us and said they needed leadership programming for young women," says Clarke.

Today, her organization serves hundreds of students in New York and New Jersey, but its tentacles have gone far beyond: It won the *New York Times* Management Excellence Award, Bank of America hailed Clarke as a "Local Hero," Nashers were invited to be guests on the "Tyra Banks Show," and international clothing designer Eileen Fisher — among its big-hearted benefactors — raised \$32,000 for the group through a blockbuster shopping event.

The achievements are documented proudly in a collective of short films for the group's 10th anniversary this year, profiling Sadie Nash alumnae from 2002 to 2011 — among them, Shanai Watson. The legal fellow recalls Clarke's enthusiasm during that first summer institute in 2002, held in a donated, bright purple Manhattan office space where her first assignment was making a full-sized tracing of herself.

"Cecilia was very concerned with making sure we knew that the program was ours, and was meant to be what-

ever would be most helpful to us," says the Stanford Law School graduate. "She made sure we felt empowered to speak, to question, and to be critical."

The vote of confidence, adds Watson, helped her to revive her school's fading Black Students' League, and become its president.

"I realized that I didn't have to change to become a leader, that being dedicated to a cause while being myself was enough," she says.

Clarke's successes have even inspired distant bureaucracies to review themselves. North Carolina Project Manager Anton Shaw was so impressed with the Sadie model that he worked to have it adopted by the Charlotte Housing Authority.

"It holds the girls accountable for their own development, and it exposes them to social responsibility," he says. "This dynamic was missing in other programs in Charlotte."

Clarke's vision to promote a better world for young women continues to work its magic on grateful beneficiaries such as Watson.

"I took all the lessons of Sadie Nash to heart and keep them with me to this day," she says.



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to congratulate

Christine Coley

a leader in her field
and a true

Woman of Distinction

CHRISTINE M. COLEY

An award-winning realtor who shelters us by keeping it real

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Rapid Realty trainee David Adams was observing a workday at the firm's Flatbush franchise when he noticed a new realtor having teething troubles with a jittery client.

The flustered rookie, recalls Adams, sought help from co-owner Christine Coley, who rushed to the rescue.

"I don't know what Christine said, but within five minutes everything seemed to work out," he says.

Coley's managerial moxie didn't surprise Adams, a landlord from Bedford-Stuyvesant who met the senior broker last fall after listing an apartment with her office. He remembers being impressed when she called almost immediately to inform him that a professional couple was interested in the dwelling.

"She closed the deal in one day!" states Adams, who credits Coley with helping to raise his neighborhood's star as a desirable place to live and work for all people — plus introducing him to the real estate business after he lost his job.

The double-duty was all in a day's work for the Woman of Distinction, a multiple award-winning broker and member of Rapid Realty's Advisory Council who has fanned her entrepreneurial skills into a parallel career as an international event planner.

"I've always felt like there's nothing I can't do," says Coley, who has organized rockfests in Europe and Jamaica, party promotions in Washington, and national conferences for the Department of Defense, and NASA, in addition to participating in more than 1,200 successful real estate deals.

That adventure began on a whim in 2005 when the single parent from Jamaica interviewed with Rapid after encountering difficulties while apartment hunting, herself.

"The bad experiences I had made me want to help people, instead of just focusing on what my commission would be," says Coley, who gained her license and immersed herself in the industry with an intensity that earned her rookie of the year honors, ranked her in the top one percent of the firm's most active agents, and enabled her to establish her own franchise with a partner — an en-



Photo by Steve Solomonson

terprise that Rapid heralded as a top-10 producing franchise in its first year of business.

Coley's agile ascension in a shrinking, competitive market has been due to a simple strategy she now employs to train new realtors.

"I take clients to exactly where they want to go," she states, adding that she became a fly on the office wall in those early days, memorizing Rapid's inventory, listening intently to agents conducting phone transactions, and asking to tag along when they left for appointments.

At her own showings, Coley exercised patience over presumption and wielded

her instincts like a surgeon's scalpel, allowing clients to survey the space while she retreated into a corner and discreetly observed their body language to gauge their interest level.

"If they were just standing there, they wanted to be led around, but if they started opening the cabinets and envisioning their stuff there, then they were seriously interested," she says.

One of her first clients — a "Top Chef" contestant — was immediately sold on the duplex with two kitchens and a spiral staircase in Park Slope that she showed him.

"He was like a kid in a candy store," states Coley, whose talent for her job

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Flatbush.

OCCUPATION: Broker, franchisee, advisory council member, and columnist.

COMPANY: Rapid Realty, NYC, and Caribbean Life.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Invigorating Bedford-Stuyvesant through commercial and residential enterprise."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Heights Promenade.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother Iris S. Coley for being my strongest example of what being a strong woman of distinction is about through her actions — she set the bar very high."

MOTTO: "You can if you think you can. As you think, so shall it be. Then think you can and you can, indeed." — Norman Vincent Peale.

didn't go unnoticed by the firm's founder, Anthony Lolli.

The broker says Coley has contributed to his company's boom as one of the nation's largest and fastest-growing real estate conglomerates, with more than 52 franchises throughout the tri-state and New England area, by introducing cutting-edge measures such as a separate closing division for which she recruited, trained, and mentored fresh talent — typically on her own time and dime.

"I've seen Christine come in at 9 in the morning and leave at 2 in the morning," says Lolli, adding that her leadership has increased the overall closing percentage, crowned her a top Rapid closer, and created career positions for people within the organization.

Christine Coley's achievements are amplified by her people-friendly approach in an industry known more for cutthroat deals than compassionate negotiations.

"I put myself in the consumer's shoes," she says. "Because everyone needs a place to live."



WELL DONE.

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SUSAN DOBAN

She makes Brooklyn a beautiful place to live and work

BY CAMILLE SPERRAZZA

Trees grow in Brooklyn, and so do businesses. Just ask Susan Doban, an architect with a green thumb.

The Massachusetts native came to New York City to attend Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture. But when she had to decide where to plant her business and where her children would be raised, she chose Park Slope.

"I wanted a backyard," she says. "I love gardening, and I wanted my kids to have a yard to play in."

Her budding business venture — Doban Architecture — blossomed, so she started a second one, Think Fabricate, with partner Jason Gorsline. Both Brooklyn-based companies design solutions for better living, and as a result, make the borough a better place to live. It was Doban who helped design Red Hook's Fairway supermarket, contributing to the economical development of the area.

She is involved in restoring facades, and preserving historical buildings, all over Brooklyn. But most of all, Doban believes in the spirit of collaboration, an ebb and flow that works together to create something unique and special, she says.

It's about being open to ideas, sharing viewpoints, and learning from each other, according to her. It's something she discovered about 17 years ago, when she joined the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, shortly after starting Doban Architecture. It was there that Doban heard the views of people from other small businesses.

"I learned to see things from different perspectives," she says, adding that she found it beneficial to hear from business owners who were not architects. "I was able to step back and look at things in a broader context."

She's also coined a word for it: "We believe openness to ideas, viewpoints, and background defines 'Brooklynness,' and is at the heart of our collaborative zeal," she states.

Gorsline is amazed by Doban's ability to draw on the historical references of a project in order to develop contemporary designs that are both fresh yet respectful to their surroundings.



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

"Susan's desire for exploration and openness to new ideas is what has made Doban Architecture an award-winning architectural firm," he says.

Doban's innovative hands are involved with the public schools, too, where she has designed classrooms and made improvements to structure. When she was recently called upon to renovate the library at PS 32 in Carroll Gardens, she spoke at length with the librarian about the type of decor that would work in the community. Now, there's a huge ceiling mural of a train station, a theme that appeals to children and adults.

"Our designs evolve from a thorough understanding of the function, user, and constraints of the project, rather than from any preconceived notions," says Doban.

It is this attention to detail that is so important to her.

"We tailor the project, including the process of developing and delivering the project, to fit the specific situation," she adds.

Think Fabricate expands on the concepts she believes, taking design to another level. It is involved in sustainable home furnishings, made from natural

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Park Slope.

OCCUPATION: Architect.

COMPANY: Doban Architecture; Think Fabricate.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Making Brooklyn a beautiful place to live."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN

PLACE: "My house — a place of experimentation, where I am always testing out new ideas and new products."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Gae Aulenti, an European architect who created the Musee D'Orsay in Paris. She created it in a new way — a blend of new and old things."

MOTTO: "Collaboration is key to success."

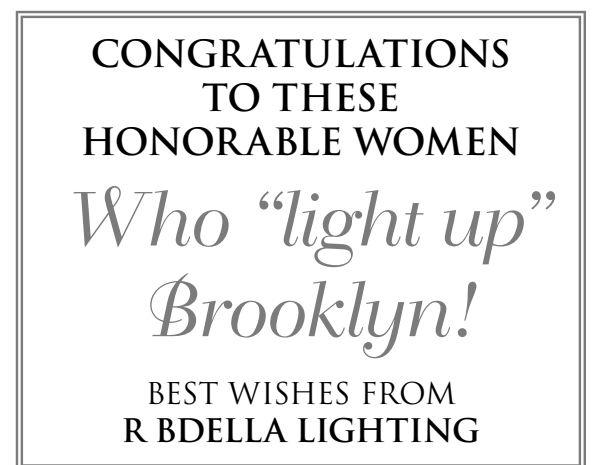
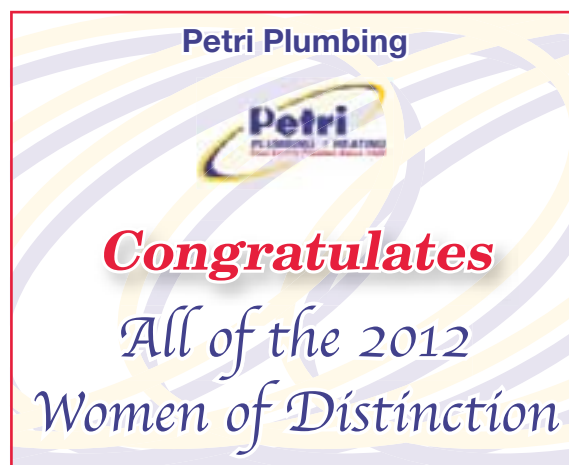
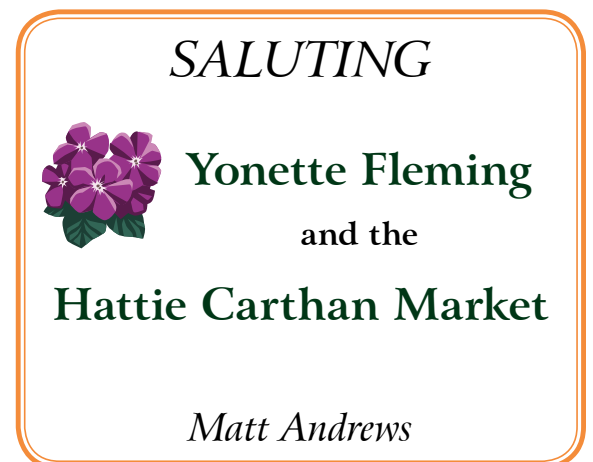
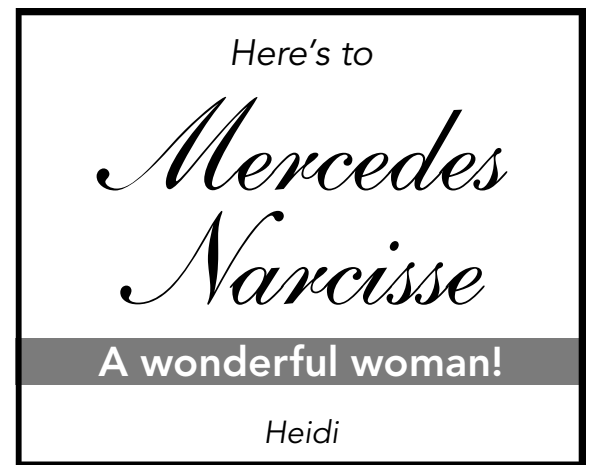
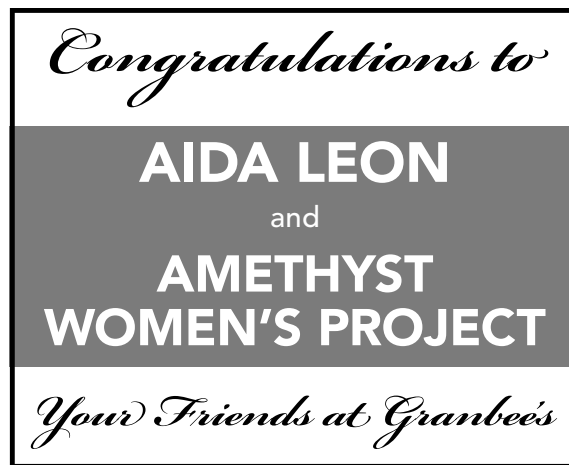
bamboo, plywood, and Richlite, a composite of paper and stone. These products are more environmentally friendly, she says. She often tests these ideas in her own home, experimenting with radiator covers and furnishings to see how they hold up in her household that includes her husband, also an architect, and their two children, ages 12 and 18.

It can all be quite challenging at times, she admits, but it helps when you are passionate about what you do.

"Vision and spirit help you get over these challenges," she says.

There have been many good things, too, including awards such as the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce Building Brooklyn Award in 2007, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency Energy Efficiency Award for Red Hook Green Power in 2008. Think Fabricate was also recently recognized for creating a unique line of china plates that feature a map of 19th-century Brooklyn, including designs of the Brooklyn Bridge, the Navy Yard, and the waterfront. It is now a permanent part of the Brooklyn Museum.

When Doban started her architecture company, it was a one-person business. There are now 10 employees. Green thumbs don't only apply to gardens.



GENEVA FARROW

She's a young mother's D.R.E.A.M.

BY ALEX RUSH

Geneva Farrow was a 19-year-old sophomore at Temple University when her life changed forever: she became pregnant with her son. “This is not a part of my plan!” Farrow thought, an honor student who was earning her bachelor’s degree in marketing and administration.

Farrow wasn’t prepared to raise a child, but she also wasn’t prepared to abandon one. Her teenage mother left Farrow and her sister to live with their grandparents; she didn’t want to repeat the cycle.

“My grandmother offered to take the baby so I could finish college without worrying about raising a child,” says Farrow, who was born in Crown Heights. “But I didn’t want my child to feel like I left him, calling me by my first name when I saw him on the weekends.”

Farrow’s son Deion Anthony was born in July 2000, six weeks early, right when her fall semester was starting. She barely took any time off, bringing Deion to the lecture halls with her as she attended class. She graduated two years later — the date she had originally planned on — and scored a job in pharmaceutical sales. Now, Farrow is using her experiences as a teenage, single mom to empower young women facing similar predicaments.

In 2007 she founded the non-profit organization A Young Mother’s D.R.E.A.M., which pairs young mothers with mentors, and distributes scholarship money to help with the costs of school and daycare. A Young Mother’s D.R.E.A.M., an acronym for determination, resilience, excellence, achievement, and motivation, currently works with more than 50 mothers, ages 16 to 23, from around the city, says Farrow.

Most teen mothers don’t graduate from high school, states the advocacy organization, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, but Farrow and her group are working to buck the statistics: they host regular workshops in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan on how to balance family life with educational pursuits, and also take the mentees on tours of colleges with



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

dorms reserved for students with children. The trips are meant to encourage the young mothers to pursue higher education, despite the odds against them, Farrow adds.

“Geneva inspires me to not take no for an answer,” says Oneka Bady, a group member. “She taught me to do one hard thing a day, and that’ll get me

closer to achieving my dream.”

A Young Mother’s D.R.E.A.M. also makes sure that young mothers have a little fun, taking them to a salon for a glamorous makeover each year. It’s during extracurricular activities that mentors and mentees often forge the strongest bonds, Farrow comments.

“I remember one young lady had her

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Crown Heights

OCCUPATION: Executive director.

COMPANY: A Young Mother’s D.R.E.A.M.

CLAIM TO FAME: “Founder of A Young Mother’s D.R.E.A.M. and creator of the mantra, ‘I defy the odds!’”

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Prospect Park.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: “First Lady Michelle Obama for the work she has done with her Get Fit initiatives, and because she remains extremely poised in very difficult situations.”

MOTTO: “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” — Albert Einstein.

guard up at first and kept complaining about the dress we had given her to wear,” Farrow says. “But when we asked her what she learned at the end of the day, she said that she learned to believe in herself and that she’s beautiful on the outside and inside — it was so touching.”

You don’t have to be a member of the organization to be inspired by Farrow. She hosts a weekly radio show on WHCR 90.3 FM called “No Girl Left Behind,” which features teenage girls talking about preventing teen pregnancy and other pressing issues. The show may be co-hosted by teenagers, but adults tune in, too.

“It opens their eyes about teens’ opinions on various topics,” Farrow says.

She also wrote a book entitled “A Young Mother’s D.R.E.A.M. ... I am NOT a Statistic,” a collaborative effort with five other mothers from around the country. Farrow and her co-authors detail the struggles and the triumphs they experienced finishing their education while raising their unplanned babies. Their project took about a year, though Farrow says they have even more stories to tell.

“Look out for a volume two,” she says.

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YONNETTE FLEMING

Green-thumbed foodie makes the human garden grow

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Good food sparkplug Yonnette Fleming made the unthinkable happen when she turned a deadly dumping ground in Bedford-Stuyvesant into a flourishing farmer's market, complete with educational, recreational, and spiritual programs for neighbors who once feared to walk by the disaster site.

The community organizer wanted to cultivate healthy and sustainable food choices in her neighborhood, having been raised in a farm-friendly Guyanese family that grew its own food.

But she faced an uphill battle after gaining permission from the city in 2009 to begin work on the eyesore at Clifton Place and Marcy Avenue, next to the Hattie Carthan Community Garden where the foodie was a member and vice president.

Drug paraphernalia, mattresses, old boilers, stray bullets — even dead dogs — littered the abandoned lot, out of which Fleming and garden volunteers lugged out seven containers of trash with a force which remains a mystery to her.

"I don't know what was driving me to do it, all I know was that it needed to be done," she says.

They called the plot the Hattie Carthan Community Farmer's Market after the late environmentalist who planted more than 1,500 trees in the area. Then, Fleming began to sow the seeds of her vision to unite residents on their common need for sustenance.

"We wanted a food market that told the legitimate story of food, not lily-white food in fancy packages," she says. "But food recently harvested, possibly with some dirt."

The back-breaking work has reaped sweet rewards: kids, who once spent their food stamps on junk food at the local bodega now buy fresh produce at the market, and even help out — though sometimes with mixed feelings!

"One boy helper hid whenever his school friends walked by because he thought it wasn't cool to be gardening," remembers Fleming. The child, she says, ended up being an outreach liaison for the market, a vital resource that has distributed more than 40,000 pounds of produce to a community dubbed a fresh



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

food desert by the government — much of it grown in the adjacent garden.

That delightful sanctuary of fig, sour cherry, and other fruit trees, is splashed with dozens of verdant plots blooming with eggplants, melons, Egyptian onions, turnips, and amaranth grain, all of them lovingly nurtured by green-thumbed members, such as Leon Simmons.

The retired forklift operator donates his surplus beans, corn, tomatoes, potatoes, and peanuts to local senior centers, and credits Fleming with uplifting the green spaces with rainwater harvesting capabilities, a children's learning garden,

greenhouses, an elaborate composting system, and chicken coops — in addition to creating an urban farm and a second farmer's market! Another popular Fleming project, he adds, is the new herb garden where Russian sage, lavender and rosemary rise lushly alongside organic elephant garlic, rue, and 70 other flavorful varieties.

"Yonnette is helping out the neighborhood a lot," says Simmons. "She's an asset because she takes care of everything."

Folks are also harvesting benefits through Fleming's gardening and nutrition workshops, cooking demonstra-

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Bedford-Stuyvesant.

OCCUPATION: Urban farmer and agro-ecology educator.

COMPANY: Hattie Carthan Community Garden-Farm School New York City.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Cultivating community from the ground up."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Hattie Carthan Community Garden.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My grandmother Geraldine King, an eternal ally whose active, lively hands brought beauty to all things she touched."

MOTTO: "Who can afford to live without beauty? It graces us with joy and lights the path to a meaningful existence."

tions, and international food festivals, in addition to such welcome initiatives as fresh food delivery to home-bound seniors, fitness classes, a woman's conferences, and a youth corps. The bustling green spaces provide area children with a healthy outlet, according to Boys and Girls High School student Deanna King, 16, who has grown pumpkins and radishes there, become a fan of sorrel juice, and tuned her mom on to sage potatoes.

"Ms. Fleming has shown kids that there's a way out of the violence happening around them, and that this is the place to relax, have fun, and know that somebody will always be there for them," says the budding gastronome.

Word of blossoming Bedford-Stuyvesant has even reached the United Nations. Delegates from 20 countries once stopped by the garden to learn about urban agriculture, prompting Rokhaya Deba Fall of Senegal to marvel, "New York has a different face than the tall buildings — it's the face of many engaged people."

Gratitude for that bill of health goes in large part to good-food gladiators such as Yonnette Fleming, who accepts the honor with a pinch of salt: "I am a small speck in this whole chain," she says. "It's not about me, it's about all of us."

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DOREEN GARSON

Volunteer Bravest to the rescue!

BY ANDREW LINDERMAN

Doreen Garson was at her home in Gerritsen Beach one Sunday in the mid-1980s when her young daughter accidentally hit her head. Garson needed to take her daughter to the hospital, but got a rude surprise when she picked up the phone.

"I called the volunteer fire department and there was no response," she explains. "I had to get my neighbor to drive us to the hospital — I was furious."

The next day, Garson stopped by the Gerritsen Beach Fire Department to speak with the staff about the incident. Before long, someone at the volunteer firehouse approached Garson and told her the department was understaffed, and handed her an application. She took it and within a year, Garson was running dispatch for the single-engine firehouse. Twenty-six years later, she's the assistant fire chief there.

Garson is used to taking charge in difficult situations. As a paramedic, a business owner, and a mother of five, she has plenty of practice as a leader. Just don't expect her to talk much about her accomplishments. Her low-key attitude comes from her modest, middle-class upbringing. When she was a girl, her family lived in one of the bungalows in the older section of town.

"The streets weren't even paved because there were no sewers at the time," Garson recalls.

But as Gerritsen Beach grew from a collection of small bungalows to a community of around 5,000 people, she became the face of change in the neighborhood. Since 1982, Garson has owned her own real estate business, and has single-handedly helped to preserve the family-oriented nature of the area.

"When I'm showing houses, I tell people that they have to like kids and dogs," she states. This family-friendly approach has helped her get to know the concerns of the local community.

Her passion for effecting change also led her to politics. Garson ran for the City Council in 2001 and lost. It was a tough race, she says, but her



Photo by Steve Solomonson

work caught the eye of state Sen. Martin Golden (R-Bay Ridge). Golden was looking for someone who knew Gerritsen Beach, and Garson fit the bill.

"Doreen has a civic mindedness," says John Quaglione, Golden's deputy chief of staff. "If you call and you get her, she's going to help you."

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Gerritsen Beach.

OCCUPATION: Real estate broker, and assistant fire chief.

COMPANY: Doreen Greenwood Realty, Gerritsen Beach Fire Department.

CLAIM TO FAME: "I'm happy with what I have. I have everything that I need. I have everything that I want."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN

PLACE: "White Island near the environmental center."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother Winifred McCann, she was the best mom, she had 35 foster children in our home over the years, she loved children and always had a good attitude, she was my best friend."

MOTTO: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

When the economy crashed in 2008, for example, a number of Garson's clients were facing foreclosure. But in her typical life-saving fashion, she stepped up to help her clients and neighbors. Through her efforts, she estimates that at least 10 or 15 people were able to save themselves from foreclosure.

Then there were other kinds of disasters. During Hurricane Irene last summer, Garson rescued a woman as her house was flooding. The previous winter, in the midst of one of the city's worst snowstorms in history, Garson was out running a volunteer ambulance when the city was considering suspending emergency services.

"When everyone wants to go inside, Doreen's the person who doesn't," Quaglioni adds. "She has no fear."

So where does Garson, an anchor for the Gerritsen Beach community, get all of her strength?

"I have a wonderful family," she says. "Every Sunday, everyone meets at my house, I cook spaghetti and meatballs, and everyone runs around — who's got it better than that?"



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Two months after Brooke Hester began having unexplained fevers, a strange limp and difficulty walking, her parents learned that they needed to come to New York City for treatment of a tumor.

Brooke was ultimately diagnosed with stage four neuroblastoma. The Hesters came a long way to find treatment for their little girl, and what they found was new strength, support, and encouragement. They found it in the heart of New York City at Ronald McDonald House New York.

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CATHIE GEARITY

A Florence Nightingale for the terminally ill

BY CAMILLE SPERRAZZA

Cathie Gearity, a nurse for 33 years, spent most of her career helping the sick get better. But for the last year and a half, she has helped the terminally ill prepare to die.

As a Calvary Hospice nurse, it's Gearity's job to make the inevitable less traumatic.

"We need to say our good-byes and get our plans in order," she says.

Gearity performs many of the tasks that all nurses do: she administers medication, helps manage pain, treats wounds, and makes patients comfortable. But she also provides comfort to families of the sick, who are often devastated by the reality they face.

Emotionally, it's very demanding work, she admits.

She stepped up to this huge challenge because she saw there was a need for it. Over the years, as she performed her duties at Sloan-Kettering and at Catholic Home Care, she witnessed far too many people become traumatized by the death of loved ones. Eventually, she came to realize that a good part of the stress was because they were so unprepared for what they faced, and, as a result, they were afraid.

"Death and dying are things we don't talk about," she says.

But this is starting to change.

"The medical system is moving towards teaching end-of-life care," says Gearity. The reason for this change is tough to accept.

"Younger people are becoming afflicted with disease, such as cancer and Alzheimer's," she says. "These challenging events mean we need to be prepared emotionally, physically, and financially."

Dealing with these emotions is something Gearity does on a regular basis. Recently, she took care of a woman who was at the end stage of pancreatic cancer. The patient's daughter wanted medical treatment to continue, but the patient had had enough. It is Gearity's job to be an advocate for the patient, and she takes this responsibility very seriously. So it was left up to her to help the daughter come to terms with her mother's wishes. She did, and as a re-



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

sult, the patient was able to pass away peacefully, says Gearity.

Making peace, accepting reality, and dying with dignity, are what we all want at the end of our lives, she says. Helping patients achieve these goals is part of the job of a hospice nurse.

To help relieve her own stress, Gearity, a Bay Ridge native, likes to ride her

bike along Shore Road. This path, too, served as an inspiration to help others.

Last May, Gearity organized the first annual Bay Ridge race for Semper Fi 5K, an organization that raises funds for injured Marines. The Bay Ridge run, held along the Shore Road Bike Path, raised \$6,000 for the group. It was Gearity's brother, a major general in the Marine

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Bay Ridge.

OCCUPATION: Hospice nurse.

COMPANY: Calvary Hospital Hospice.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Helping the sick and dying."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: The Shore Road Bike Path.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother, who did everything she could to make the world a better place for her family — and everyone else's families."

MOTTO: "Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." — Mother Theresa.

Corps, who brought the institute to her attention. He described the horror of seeing soldiers with arms and legs torn off of their bodies. The emotions they endure are something Gearity can identify with, so she was motivated to help.

The Bay Ridge event was so successful that she planned another one. Money raised provides medical care, housing, and support to the Marines and their families.

Gearity credits her mother, Jeanne Toolan, for her roots in activism.

"She was a woman of faith, and lived her life by doing many acts of kindness for anyone who needed help," she says.

Her mom, too, was active in the Brooklyn community. She ran for district Leader of the Democratic Party, and once ran for the City Council. Although her mom lost both elections, she remained involved in numerous organizations, including the Bay Ridge Community Council. Gearity eventually became a caregiver to her mom, assisting her when she fell ill to heart disease.

Like her mom, Gearity has deep faith in religion, and this helps her cope with the many deaths she sees on a regular basis.

"Faith brings illumination to the darkness of fear, doubt, and uncertainties," she says. "It makes us strong."

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- Gale Stevens Haynes '72, '76
Provost, LIU Brooklyn

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GALE STEVENS HAYNES

A scholar with a heart who makes it happen

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Four years ago, Alexandra Grateaux was a journalism student at Long Island University's Brooklyn Campus, juggling several jobs to put herself through college and burning the midnight oil to maintain a near-perfect 3.8 grade point average. One day, consumed by mounting financial troubles, she broke down by the elevator in despair.

"I didn't have any money for anything, and I was literally ready to transfer out," says Grateaux, who tried to hide her tears from Provost Gale Stevens Haynes, who was walking by.

She knew the senior academic administrator was a canny, no-nonsense official with a maternal touch, but she says nothing prepared her for the forthcoming flood of kindness: the executive led her into her office, stuffed a box of tissues into her hand, listened to her story, and within days emerged with a financial plan that allowed the aspiring journalist to breeze through her studies.

"Provost Haynes made it happen for me!" says Grateaux, today an entertainment editor at Fox News Latino.

Grateaux's uplifting academic experience has been matched by the hundreds of thousands of scholars — most of them financially-strapped, first-generation collegians with high needs — whose destinies have been shaped by Haynes on one of the most diverse college campuses in the world, with a student body hailing from 75 nations and fluent in 35 languages.

The provost embraces her tall task.

"I'm the only person I know with 11,000 adopted children!" says Haynes, who has attended their weddings, celebrated the births of their offspring, and rooted for them at sporting events.

When the men's team headed to the Midwest this spring for the college basketball championship tournament, you can be sure the self-professed hoop "nut" was in the bleachers exercising her vocal chords.

"I was in Ohio making a lot of noise!" says Haynes.

Jason Aubin, a graduate who attended the game, remembers her vim and vigor.

"Every time our team made a bas-



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

ket, Provost Haynes would cheer — she wasn't a provost then, but a passionate, New York sports fan!" says the teacher who was raised by a single parent and completed his post-graduate studies with Haynes's support.

Students who work hard — running from class to work, and working week-ends to make ends meet — are always on the provost's radar.

"They don't necessarily have someone home, so we provide the substitute parental support for them," she says.

Haynes's roots run deep at the campus: she's an alumna, its former legal counsel and ex-director of the Higher Education Opportunity Program, and two of her

three daughters — an attorney, a cardiologist and a social worker — studied there. She began its revival in 1989 when she was appointed provost, quickly forging alliances with schools, hospitals, arts groups, and other local agencies and organizations. She implemented innovative initiatives that prepped budding Einsteins for prestigious Westinghouse competitions, offered wannabe accountants residential internships, and instituted ground-breaking curricula, such as the first state-approved Physician Assistant program.

The accomplishments are a far cry from her early days as a top college official.

"I came back at one of its darkest

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Downtown.

OCCUPATION: Provost.

COMPANY: Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus.

CLAIM TO FAME: "I'm a lifetime learner, and continue to be a student of new works."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE:

The New York Aquarium in Coney Island.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My grandmother Annie Luiz Stevens because she introduced me to books, new adventures, discipline, music, and so much more."

MOTTO: "We all have to be willing to roll up our sleeves and tidy the house."

moments," says Haynes, a trustee of the Brooklyn Hospital Center, and ex-chairwoman of the Board of Education for the Roosevelt Union Free School District. "We had a campus that can best be described as cracked cement, it was not a pretty place."

She took charge by instituting a new financial policy.

"We decided that for every dollar received, 50 cents would be reinvested into the campus," states this Woman of Distinction.

The returns have been remarkable. Today, the college's green space has tripled, student enrollment has doubled, there's a \$45 million Wellness, Recreation, and Athletic Center supporting 18 Division I athletic teams, in addition to a Cyber Cafe and a community performing arts center.

Haynes has returned glory days to her learning institute, which admitted students based on merit and promise when it was established in 1929 as the original arm of LIU. The policy, progressive in an age defined by quotas and discrimination, continues to place the campus in a class by itself — thanks to the simple philosophy of its provost.

"We don't deal with privileged students," she says. "We are privileged to deal with them."



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'QUEEN' MARLENE HOCHMAN

Sweet memories of childhood preserved by a real doll

BY CAMILLE SPERRAZZA

"Toyland! Toyland! Little girl and boy land."

Oh, how we sang the lyrics to this song each Thanksgiving when the movie, "March of the Wooden Soldiers" would air. We'd dream, wonderful Brooklyn dreams, of apartments filled with toys — dancing, singing, and keeping us company. It was a world filled with imagination.

It's these magical feelings that "Queen" Marlene Hochman had in mind when she founded the Toy Museum. Of course, only a queen would be able to recreate the magic of dreams, so the title is fitting. She also happens to be the star of "Queen Marlene's Toy Theatre," and seeing shows at this theater is the only way Brooklynites can experience the enchantment of the Toy Museum. That's because the collection serves as the background to the performances.

So far, more than 7,000 school children from all five boroughs have been to the Toy Museum, located inside St. Ann's Church in Brooklyn Heights. These are kids who grew up with video games and the Internet. They now get to learn about the toys of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents — some dating back to the 1880s — including Shirley Temple dolls, Howdy Doody dolls, and Cabbage Patch Kids.

"The purpose of the museum is so children can learn history, language arts, and social studies, using toys to teach these subjects," says Hochman. "I love to look at very old toys, and try to imagine what it was like for the child who played with them back in the day."

Creating the museum was a labor of love, and Hochman had to overcome a number of obstacles, including funding.

"Just because we are a museum, does not mean our space is free," she says. "Can you imagine Mayor Bloomberg calling Arnold Lehman, director at the Brooklyn Museum, to say you have to move the museum next year because the city needs the space for something else?"

The Toy Museum has no such security, and has had to move several times.

"We are just like other businesses in



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

Brooklyn," says Hochman. "We move because the landlord needs the space for other purposes."

It's not easy packing each special piece, she adds, and it's expensive, too, especially as the museum anticipates moving again in September.

Generating revenue has been another challenge. A few years ago, when the

economy tanked and grants were no longer available, Hochman, who has always loved the theater, came up with the idea to create the "Queen Marlene's Toy Theatre." Charging patrons for tickets to see the show is what funds the museum, in addition to support by, among others, Independence Community Foundation and Con Edison.

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Carroll Gardens.

OCCUPATION: Founder of the Toy Museum.

COMPANY: Queen Marlene's Toy Theatre.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Bringing the magical world of toys back into our hearts."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: The Toy Museum.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Margaret Mead [1901-1978] because she was a pioneer in the field of anthropology."

MOTTO: "Never give up."

"All our revenues are generated the old-fashioned way — one happy customer at a time," says Hochman. "Necessity is the mother of invention."

In the midst of this undertaking, she received horrifying personal news — she had been diagnosed with colon cancer.

"Luckily, I am still here working, and I have fully recovered," she says.

Hochman brings "The Queen" to life on the stage about eight times a week, and is having a blast. Her three grown children and her husband were very supportive throughout these difficult times. They like to call her, "The Q."

Catherine Gasta, one of the first professional actors to join the theater shows, credits Hochman with instilling creativity in youngsters and adults.

"Marlene is wonderfully inventive, a great collaborator, and strives to offer something truly special to children and families," says Gasta.

Hochman, for her part, is grateful to her toy donors.

"I have been working on the collection for 13 years, and we are really chock full," she says. "Really, we are bursting at the seams."

But the toy collector would like one more item to complete the collection: a Pensy Pinky ball.

"If anyone has a Pensy Pinky in good condition, let us know, and we will add it to our collection," she promises.

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Dr. Millie Fell, founding ophthalmologist at Brighton Eye, personifies the type of doctor you want caring for your eyes.

Dr. Fell has been a fixture in Brooklyn since 1987, and a presence in Brighton Beach for more than 20 years. She is now fulfilling a lifetime dream with the opening of her new eye facility. The new eye center, on the corner of Kings Highway and 21st Street, is equipped with the latest advanced diagnostic equipment. It has been a "project of love" for the doctor who was involved in every aspect of the facility's design.

Dr. Fell is a highly-trained cataract surgeon with expertise in the field of medical retina. This compassionate doctor also shares her expertise globally. Just recently, Dr. Fell again volunteered her time and skills at an eye mission in the Dominican Republic. There she examined and treated patients who had no other access to healthcare. Her group of 50 volunteers consisted of physicians, nurses, and other para-professionals and lay people. "We treated 1300 patients during the week." Dr. Fell's passion is cataract surgery. "There is nothing more thrilling than giving someone back their sight." She says.

Dr. Fell and her associate, Andrew Brookner, MD who has also treated Brooklyn patients for many years and who recently joined the Practice, also treat patients with wet macular degeneration with intravitreal injections. Years ago, people who suffered with this condition became blind and unable to read. Now, we're keeping these patients functioning normally. Patients are living longer and these treatments are providing them with better quality of life.

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CATHERINE HODES

Helping survivors of violence soar to success

BY JON REISS

A young woman looks astonished and very pleased after breaking a board at the conclusion of her self-defense course. The class, taught part-time by Catherine Hodes, dovetails perfectly into Hodes's full-time job as a social worker, and her unyielding passion for helping empower survivors of violence.

For the past 17 years, Hodes has been director of the Safe Homes Project of Good Shepherd Services, working to create and hone advocacy for a broad range of survivors, including those who are undocumented, young, lacking resources, and part of marginalized societies, such as the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender community.

Hodes and the Safe Homes Project work to provide counseling, support, safety planning, and resources for survivors of domestic and intimate partner abuse. The Safe Homes Project also organizes peer support groups, helping survivors connect with one another and develop support networks while maneuvering the legal system.

"The past few years has seen the expansion of the definition of family in New York's Family Courts," she says.

Non-married partners, elders, young people, and same-sex partners, she adds, now have the ability to get orders of protection in family court. Yet, they often don't come forward.

"We must continue to do vigorous outreach and education so that people can create greater safety using all the tools available to them," Hodes states.

Meanwhile, there's been an increase in the number of available shelter beds for victims of violence and their children over the years, but a concurrent decrease in safe, affordable, permanent housing options. Hodes cites advocacy for a realistic housing subsidy, a top priority for herself and fellow advocates for survivors in the coming years.

"There has been a drop in crime rates and homicides across the board in our city, but domestic and partner abuse has not decreased," she says.

Hodes explains that many incidents of abuse do not rise to the level of a crime, but occur over long periods, becoming chronic.



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

"We must consider interventions that help victims of lower-level abuse, as well as those who might be reluctant or afraid to use the criminal justice system, such as undocumented or trafficked victims," she comments.

Hodes is a warrior who empowers women, according to her supporters.

"Catherine has dedicated her life to ending relationship violence and helping women find their own strength," says Tracy Hobson, director of the Center for Anti-Violence Education.

Hodes also works with younger individuals in underserved communities to halt problems early on.

"By talking with young people about healthy relationships, and involving them as active participants in creating

safe communities, we will begin to see more meaningful change," she says.

Social change, Hodes says, is a necessary aspect of dealing with this problem: "Centralizing the voices of survivors, involving communities, raising awareness, and promoting prevention activities are important aspects of the work," she adds.

The staff at Safe Homes works in conjunction with the Coalition of Residential Domestic Violence Service Providers, the Committee on Domestic Violence and Economic Justice, the New York State L.G.B.T.Q. Domestic Violence Network, and the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, all of whom advocate for survivors at the local and state levels.

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Park Slope
"and beyond."

OCCUPATION: Social worker and program director.

COMPANY: Good Shepherd Services, Safe Homes Project.

CLAIM TO FAME: "I listen, then I listen some more."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE:
"A Brooklyn garden."

WOMEN I ADMIRE: "2011 Nobel Peace Prize winners Leymah Gwobee, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Tawakkol Karman."

MOTTO: "You cannot change society unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it." — Grace Lee Boggs.

The tough work has met its match in Hodes, states Good Shepherd Executive Director Sr. Paulette LoMonaco.

"Catherine continues to bring an amazing level of energy, conviction, and commitment to very challenging work," she says.

The group's community outreach and education include the annual Domestic Violence Remembrance Vigil during Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October. It also provides a series of workshops every year about healthy relationships and abuse prevention to Higher Education Opportunity Program students at Long Island University, as well as other abuse prevention activities in high schools and colleges across Brooklyn. It also strives to educate survivors on how they can impact policy and social change because unity is strength, notes Hodes.

We are all part of families, neighborhoods, communities, and nations, Hodes states, working to improve the options and lives of survivors of violence includes working against systemic oppressions, such as racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.

"The goal is not only to help one victim, or a thousand, but to build a more peaceful and just world for all of us," she says.

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AIDA LEON

A trailblazer who promotes a better life for others

BY CAMILLE SPERRAZZA

Aida Leon grew up in Coney Island, where, she says, “I saw the socio-economic deterioration and rampant poverty of the community.”

She left Coney Island in the early 1980s, and returned in 1987 to find the area blighted.

“I was astounded with how, in a very short time, the area had become plagued by drug use, and was horrified by how the community was devastated by the AIDS epidemic,” she says.

It would become a growing concern, one she was committed to doing something about. In 1999, she established the Amethyst Women's Project to combat these issues. Among the challenges the organization hoped to address were the lack of services available for those afflicted with AIDS. Substance abuse treatment for women was another priority.

“Many of them were sex workers, addicts, and victims of domestic violence,” says Leon. “When a woman is impacted by addiction, her whole family suffers, often resulting in fragmentation and family dysfunction.”

Those troubles increase the risk of HIV infection due to misinformation and lack of services, she adds, and are complicated by alcohol and drug abuse, contributing to child abuse and loss of productivity.

“In the early '80s, it became clear to me that the devastating impact of addiction, crime, and sex work activity was not limited to these women, but passed on to their children,” Leon says, adding that many of them ended up in foster care, victims of violence, abuse, and neglect, predisposing them to drug and alcohol abuse, and perpetuating the vicious cycle of addiction.

The Amethyst Women's Project provides outreach and educational services so that these issues can be addressed. Literature is distributed, assessment is provided, and HIV testing is facilitated. It makes referrals, and offers educational presentations on topics such as safer sex practices and teen violence.

The community's response to the program has been overwhelming, Leon says: “It was obvious that this support



Photo by Steve Solomonson

was very much needed.”

By helping others, her life has been altered in profound ways as well, she claims: she is more passionate, committed, driven, and generous.

“I now realize that one committed person can change the trajectory of history,” she says.

She also understands that there is hope for everyone.

“Every life is worth saving,” she comments. “But I cannot do it alone.”

Incredibly, when the Amethyst Women's Project first began, Leon paid for everything out of her own pocket.

“Of course, this was unsustainable, and a need to reach out for help was

apparent,” she says.

Early support came from organizations such as the New York Foundation, the New York Community Trust, and the Daphne Foundation. The latter was one of the first supporters, and remains so today. Other supporters included the Sister Fund, the New York Women's Foundation, and the United Way. Funding shifts, she says, often due to political changes. But through it all, “we continue to provide comprehensive services and care,” she assures.

Manuel Dominguez, a management consultant with SeaTree Associates who has worked closely with Leon, marvels at her work ethic.

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Coney Island.

OCCUPATION: Founder and Executive Director of Amethyst Women's Project.

COMPANY: Amethyst Women's Project.

CLAIM TO FAME: “Improving the quality of life for the residents of Coney Island.”

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: The Coney Island Boardwalk.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: “My mother Virginia Sanchez because, despite poverty and hardship, she persevered and was the glue that kept our family of 14 children together.”

MOTTO: “If you stumble, make it part of the dance.”

“What impresses me most about Aida is her spirit of generosity and her concern for the well-being of others,” he says. “Where others shy away from difficult challenges, Aida embraces them.”

Leon is also committed to improving the quality of life for women, children, and families in Coney Island, and has been recognized for her work by various organizations and individuals, including Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-Coney Island) and state Sen. Diane Savino (D-S.I.). In 2007, she was awarded the “Spirit of Woman” Award from SUNY Downstate Medical Center University Hospital. In 2005, the New York City Department of Health Bureau of Sexually Transmitted Disease Control presented her with a “Making the World Safe for Sex” Award for HIV and sexually transmitted disease prevention. Her education includes certifications as an alcoholic and substance abuse counselor, an acupuncture detoxification specialist, and an HIV counselor.

Aida Leon has made helping others her life's work.

“We all have something to contribute, the opportunities to help others abound,” she says. “Volunteer to help, and you will receive much more than you ever imagined.”

SHARON MYRIE

City exec turns challenges into thriving community partnerships

BY ALEX RUSH

Sharon Myrie can navigate through the bureaucracies like a G.P.S. — a government positioning system — when it comes to city agencies.

Throughout her nearly 30 years working in city government and the non-profit sector, Myrie has sped through what can be a daunting system to achieve tangible results, such as creating a public high school that specializes in environmental studies and strengthening community outreach programs at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Currently in charge of the city Housing Authority's community centers in all five boroughs, the British-born, Brooklyn-raised Myrie enjoys the opportunities to get out of the office and visit the housing developments. She visits with resident leaders to find out what kinds of programming residents need most, whether it's new computers at a senior center or S.A.T. prep classes at an after-school program.

Myrie taps the large and challenging New York City Housing Authority to help build greater community partnerships.

"I try to create the right mix of programs primarily focused on education, health and economic opportunities for the residents," she says.

Myrie relocated at 9 years old with her family from the outskirts of London, England, to Brooklyn, and coming of age here was made easier by her mother, who inspired her, she says, to try to make things better for others by encouraging them to pursue new opportunities.

Myrie earned her psychology degree at Ithaca College, but soon realized that she wanted to work in the public sector. After a stint at Sponsors for Educational Opportunity, which works to prepare underserved high school students for college, she went on to law school in Washington, immersing herself in educational policy issues by working for the Children's Defense Fund and the United States Department of Education. But Myrie couldn't stay away from New York for too long. She was soon back in her adopted home town, first as a civil litigator for the city, then as an advisor to mayors Ed Koch and David Dinkins. She served as the Deputy General Counsel of Homelessness



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

under Dinkins from 1990 to 1992, during which she often faced challenges when trying to address the increasing number of families coming through the shelter system.

"It was so troubling to see the lack of affordable housing options for low-income New Yorkers," Myrie said. "The issues weren't easy, there were a lot of competing policy issues."

Myrie recognized the importance of protecting the safety net before families entered shelters, and decided to move into the not-for-profit sector, serving as associate executive director of programs for Lenox Hill Neighbor-

hood House, a settlement home providing an array of social service programs for all ages, from youths to seniors.

Marjorie Cadogan, who met Myrie when they were both first-year litigators for the city's law department, is in awe of the legal eagle.

"Sharon's had an amazing career and really had an impact on the city," says Cadogan.

In addition to her work within city government, Myrie counts her 11-year tenure as the vice president of education for Brooklyn Botanic Garden as her most rewarding experience. Her time there inspired her to help open

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Flatbush.

OCCUPATION: Executive vice president for community programs and development.

COMPANY: New York City Housing Authority.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Being able to think outside the box, and being able to push the envelope."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother, Deloris Gabbidon, because of the sacrifices she made for our family and the educational values she instilled in us."

MOTTO: "The things you learn in life that you don't like help you to understand better who you really are."

a public high school — the Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment — in 2003. For nine months Myrie worked almost every weekend with a team of more than 20 people, including staff from Prospect Park Alliance, to plan the school, based in Prospect Heights directly across the street from the Garden, making it easier to host classes at both Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

"We wanted to reach young people who have an interest in science and the environment, but wouldn't normally have access to those specialized programs," Myrie claims.

She hopes to continue to expose youth to many different activities, including environmental studies, through her work with the Housing Authority, which for 50 years has run the Garden and Greening Program, working with residents to plant flowers, trees, and vegetables in their developments.

"The work I do now feels like a culmination of everything I've done over the years — education, youth development, urban gardening, and community organizing," Myrie said. "It has been wonderful."

MERCEDES NARCISSE

Turning Canarsie into a multicultural family of neighbors

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Mercedes Narcisse was fast asleep when she was roused by a phone call from Karen Cherry, an aide to Rep. Ed Towns, alerting her to an emergency: a stroke patient needed a walker, a cane, and some adult diapers — ASAP.

Narcisse's swift response impressed the director of community relations.

"Mercedes didn't huff, she didn't puff, she just said, 'Let me know what I can do for you,'" recalls Cherry, adding that Narcisse — a registered nurse from Canarsie, the president of the Avenue L Merchants Association, and the owner of a medical supply shop — rushed to open her store, locate the items, and deliver them personally to her with a request not to charge the man.

The call was business as usual for Narcisse.

"A lot of people think about dollars first, I think of people first," says the Haitian immigrant and mother of five who has worked for more than 20 years to help transform once-depressed Canarsie into a multicultural community of civic-minded neighbors eager to rebuild the neighborhood after demographics changed there in the 1990s — when years of vandalism and comatose commercial corridors became the norm as immigrant homeowners struggled to fill a void created when longtime residents moved out.

"Avenue L was like a ghost town, most of the stores closed, and graffiti became the vogue," says Narcisse, who began a brisk campaign to jump-start new growth and diffuse racial tensions sparked by the firebombing of a local realty office for selling homes to immigrants. Nefarious realtors triggering the turnover of white-owned properties to African Americans — a policy known as blockbusting — also found their match in Narcisse, who supplied homeowners with "This home is not for sale" signs to post in their yards.

Glimmers of hope sparked when 150 marchers showed up for a harmony rally led by two 10-year-old girls — one white, one black — holding hands.

The renaissance had begun, and Narcisse steered its course by opening



Photo by Steve Solomonson

Statewide Medical and Surgical Supplies on E. 96th Street, the first medical supply store in the area. She soon became a regular face at community events, forming close ties with her local precinct, community board, firehouse, and other local authorities.

"I attended every single meeting in the area, and advocated for Canarsie everywhere I went," says Narcisse, who cleaned up the avenue with teens from the precinct Explorers Club, funding some of the beautification efforts herself and rewarding her helpers with pizza parties. Her popular Christmas revels

— complete with toys for the kids and a visit from Santa — earned her a reputation as a devoted civic activist, and when she formed Canarsie By Choice in 1994, nearly 500 people attended its first meeting. Narcisse met their anxieties and bigotries, head-on.

"I told them, you stay here by choice, so just understand your neighbor, say hi and be friendly," she recalls. "I wanted to show that people can live together without fighting."

Today, Avenue L bustles with 80 new businesses — from beauty salons and restaurants to mini-marts and 99-cent

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Canarsie.

OCCUPATION: CEO and entrepreneur.

COMPANY: Statewide Medical and Surgical Supplies.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Contributing in a positive way to my community."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Avenue L.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My grandmother Elizabeth Theodule, who went above and beyond for everybody, and would give you the clothes off her back — people say that, but she would do it."

MOTTO: "To whom much is given much is expected."

stores. The area's quality of life has also improved, thanks to the honoree who has worked to have potholes paved, garbage pickups accelerated, and traffic lights installed at dangerous intersections. In between, she's honed enough political chops as past president of the 41st Assembly District Democratic Club to run for City Council.

Winifred Bartholomew, who has known Narcisse since 1998, is astounded by her gumption. When PS 272 needed a new air conditioner, Narcisse rushed to the rescue, she says, securing funds from local politicians, with enough left over for an after-school program.

"If there's a need, Mercedes is willing to help," says Bartholomew.

Disaster victims, too, can look to this Woman of Distinction to ease their ordeals.

As a medical missionary with the National Organization for the Advancement of Haitians, Narcisse has provided emergency care in earthquake zones, where the horrors endured by amputees and children dying of dehydration still haunt her.

"Seeing that brought me home to who we really are as human beings," says this community leader whose work has been so far reaching that it has helped to rescue an entire community from the brink of destruction.

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P U B L I C A T I O N S



IJANA NATHANIEL

She dares to make young dreams a reality

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

When Ijana Nathaniel assigned after-school students at Andries Hudde Junior High School a creative writing project to promote her new youth organization, she was astonished to discover that one girl — a youngster so shy that she seemed to fade into the wall — handed in a poignant play she had written in a matter of hours about a bully who was actually the tragic victim of homelessness.

"It was a deep plot," says Nathaniel, who knew then that her vision for empowering youngsters in East Flatbush could become a reality.

The presentation was so successful that Hudde offered her a regular gig for Dare 2 Dream Leaders, a group she created in 2010 to provide inner-city youngsters, ages 11 to 18, with skills to conquer the challenges they faced daily on the tough streets they called home.

Nathaniel was all too familiar with their gloomy lot — her brother died in a shooting, and some of her friends were killed by random gunfire. She sought a new path by volunteering at her local Y, and then working there while she studied for a degree in human services at the New York City College of Technology. After graduating, the vivacious mother of one pounded the pavement, networked, and accessed a small city grant while establishing her mostly volunteer-led organization with creative programming that informed youngsters how to graduate from school, prepare for college, become financially independent, and comport themselves in all situations.

She flung open the floodgates with a simple question.

"I asked my students, 'What would you do if you knew you could not fail?'" says Nathaniel, who held special events to engage them.

Her first entrepreneurship seminar sparked instant results: one girl formed a dog-walking business, another student began selling her home-baked cupcakes, and yet another young entrepreneur invented an electrical device that rivaled an iPhone. Then, a youth empowerment summit she held in March contrasted the perils of social media



Photo by Steve Solomonson

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: East Flatbush.

COMPANY: Dare 2 Dream Leaders.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Starting Dare 2 Dream."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Heights Promenade.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother Charlene Renee Nathaniel was a woman of strength and determination, and she instilled that in me."

MOTTO: "What would you do if you knew you could not fail?"

with the joys of community-building through spoken word, music, and interactive workshops, with seven-time Grammy Award-winning producer and engineer Gordon Williams as a guest speaker.

The kickin' symposium dared 11-year-

old Jasmine Hoff to dream bigger and better.

"I didn't want to win a Grammy before, now I want to become someone famous!" says the starry-eyed tween.

Fellow Hudde student Xalika Crawford, 11, has made super strides, too, since enrolling in Nathaniel's group.

"I was afraid to talk to people, but now I have no problem getting up on stage and acting in a play," says the sixth grader, who put her newly acquired people skills to good use recently by participating in a clean-up project at Prospect Park with the Parks Department.

"We swept up, picked up trash, and looked at bugs and plants," Xalika says. "It was an opportunity to meet new friends and have new experiences."

Key to those new interactions, states Nathaniel, is making a good first impression.

"This is your one big shot and you need to get it right," she says.

Tips for that and other correct codes of conduct are included in her cool decorum classes, meant to inspire big

dreams in her enrollees.

"Etiquette is everything because you might get invited to the White House one day!" claims this "Miss Manners," whose presentations are thumbnails on human behavior, from how to sail through a job interview to dressing appropriately for all occasions — no saggy pants, please! The boys were in for a rude awakening from the girls during a recent dialogue about the floppy fashion fad, she says: "The girls told the boys they didn't like boys who sag!"

Students are also eager to practice for future "etiquette teas" she plans to hold for Black History and Women's History months, she shares, learning how to fete guests like ambassadors of hospitality by escorting them to their seats, chatting politely with them, and serving them dinner at a formally set table.

"It's good to see because it's a test of their value system," says Nathaniel, whose young charges are passing all of her tests with flying colors — because she dares to make their dreams a reality.

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EILEEN O'CONNOR

Creating community through shared opportunities

BY JON REISS

The beginning of Eileen O'Connor's 30-year career at the YMCA of Greater New York sounds like a reality show.

When the Brooklyn Central Y closed its doors, passenger vans dubbed "youth mobiles" were used for street outreach. They would drive around Brooklyn, closing down streets and turning them into "play streets," engaging kids, families and neighbors in fun outdoor activities. This being back in the 1970s — when roller-skates and rainbows were all the rage — differs from what she does now as vice president of Operations of New York's YMCA, but according to O'Connor, the mission is still the same.

O'Connor started at the Y when she was still in college and had an interest in social work. She began with a part-time job for a Y office in upper Manhattan, doing outreach with kids — mostly teen girls who were new Americans. She focused on teen pregnancy and child sexual abuse, until she realized that those things were very crisis-oriented. Her focus shifted when she realized the need for families, schools, and social agencies to make an impact in a child's life. She decided to shift the focus of her work toward intervention to help young people avoid crisis situations.

"I wanted to provide education and support for better decision making, a feeling of belonging and options early on," says O'Connor. "The Y was a safe place that people came to naturally, where I could really work with people early on and make an impact, before kids made choices they were going to regret."

O'Connor wants people to know that the Y is more than just a place to go to gym or swim. The Y is a place where kids and adults can come to feel safe, and also a place where they can learn, grow, and feel included, she says.

It provides a safe haven for teens, such as 13-year-old Kennedy, who was taken in by her aunt when her mother died. The girl was introduced to the Y and the numerous programs that could help her to fulfill her mother's wishes for her — good health and a good education. Kennedy was able to build new relationships, which allowed her to become



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

healthier and more self-confident. After several months, Kennedy was able to lose 43 pounds through diet and exercise all because of the support that she received at the Y. Kennedy, O'Connor says, also participates in other Y programs, such as Leader's Club and Teen Tech Crew, and feels like she is on top of the world. She says that the Y is like a second home to her and that she knows that her mother is very proud of her.

These are the types of stories that have kept O'Connor inspired.

In addition to heading up the Strong Kids Card program, one now adopted by every YMCA in New York giving free membership to all kids who want to join, O'Connor identifies the opening of the Dodge YMCA in Boerum Hill as a highlight in her career. At the time, in 2005, it had been more than 30 years since a new Y had been built in Brook-

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Downtown Brooklyn.

OCCUPATION: Vice president of operations.

COMPANY: YMCA of Greater New York

CLAIM TO FAME: "Building and opening the Dodge YMCA."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: The Brooklyn Bridge.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "First Lady Michelle Obama for undertaking major issues, such as youth obesity prevention, and the sacrifices and hardships of military families, and helping us realize that working together we can — and must — make a difference."

MOTTO: "Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you plant."

lyn, until O'Connor undertook the project — from brick and mortar to membership — coordinating it into a facility that today serves more than 27,000 clients, according to Y Chairwoman Melissa Glass.

"Eileen built the Y into a place where young and old can come to better themselves in so many ways regardless of financial ability," says Glass. "Under Eileen's direction, it grew from a dream to a reality."

There are three areas of focus that make up the Y's mission, says O'Connor: youth development to help young people learn values and positive behaviors, while exploring their talents and interests so they can realize their potential; healthy living to create balance in one's life through learning how to stay active and have fun, while eating right and connecting to others; and social responsibility to give back to the neighborhood by working with others.

The result is shared experiences and opportunities that create a sense of community — a work in progress that inspires O'Connor today, she says, as much as it did 30 years ago.

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Recipient of the
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DORIS LOPEZ-PALAZZO

A compassionate crusader for the ailing

BY ANDREW LINDERMAN

Several years ago, Doris Lopez-Palazzo was at a Ronald McDonald House charity softball game in Central Park when she spotted a 4-year-old British boy named Jack Brown.

"Jack hit the ball and started running with the bat, when he got to first base, he slid into the bag," Lopez-Palazzo remembers. "He came back to the dugout later, looked at me and said 'I'm a natural at this.'"

It was then, Lopez-Palazzo contends, that she fell in love with Jack. After the game, Lopez-Palazzo chatted with Jack's parents, who informed her that Jack was suffering from a terminal form of cancer called neuroblastoma. Lopez-Palazzo, who was a junior volunteer, wanted to do everything in her power to help Jack. Over the next few years, she assisted Jack and his family in every way she could. When Jack returned to New York for treatment at Sloan Kettering Memorial Hospital, Lopez-Palazzo visited him. Then, when the family sought experimental treatments at the University of Vermont, she flew up to Burlington.

After a painful five-year struggle with cancer, Jack unfortunately passed away in 2009, leaving Lopez-Palazzo wanting to honor his memory. With the help of a few friends, she organized a memorial at Jack's favorite baseball diamond in Central Park — the very place where she'd met him years before.

For people who know Lopez-Palazzo, an executive hospital administrator at Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn Heights, her work with Jack Brown is just one case study in her decades-long goal of bringing compassion back into the healthcare field.

She is an asset to the healthcare industry, according to her mentor, Robert Schiller, a senior vice president of the Institute for Family Health.

"Doris will do everything she can to make a difference with her personal touch," he says. "She's an extraordinary leader, she has this infectious smile and energy."

Even though Lopez-Palazzo spends much of her time managing the hospital's \$5-million budget and operat-



ing the Emergency Department Business Center, she makes sure to visit the emergency room each day to chat with patients and their families.

"People come in feeling sick, they need a friendly face," she explains. "I tell my staff: 'Think of the patients as your brother or your mother.'"

Her warmth and intelligence extends far beyond the emergency room. She is an adjunct lecturer at Lehmann College in the Bronx, and in the Milano School of Health Care and Policy at the New School. During the last 10 years, she's helped hundreds of students ad-

vance their careers and have an impact in the world of healthcare.

Lopez-Palazzo loves teaching because it gives her the chance to show her students that making a difference is all about the small things, she says.

Latasha Avery, a healthcare marketing professional, met Lopez-Palazzo in graduate school and immediately knew she was a special lady.

"Doris is someone who cares, she takes an interest in her students," Avery says.

Lopez-Palazzo introduced Avery to recruiters and helped place her in a position as a marketing consultant when

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Carroll Gardens.

OCCUPATION: Administrator of emergency medicine, and adjunct professor of healthcare management.

COMPANY: Long Island College Hospital; and the Milano School of International Affairs, Management, and Urban Policy.

CLAIM TO FAME: "I am a teacher and a mentor, and through my actions I have helped those in need, regardless of their ability to pay in our healthcare system."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Heights Promenade.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother Ana Maria Lopez — we didn't have a lot growing up, but we never knew we didn't have a lot."

MOTTO: "Be true to yourself — above all, love yourself."

Avery was between jobs. These efforts helped the woman on a path that ultimately led her to high-level positions with several distinguished healthcare centers all over New York City.

Still, Avery is quick to dispel any hints of favoritism.

"Doris would do this for anyone," she says. "It's not just for select people."

All of her work in the community would be too much for someone with less stamina or focus, but Lopez-Palazzo credits her boundless energy to her family. She remains close with her daughters, now 25 and 29, and with her mother, an immigrant from Mexico who spent her life helping people.

"My mom is 88 and is still active and bringing people meals, she's like 4-foot-11 and she runs around the subways," Lopez-Palazzo chuckles. "I finally convinced her to get a cellphone."

Through it all, she remains committed to giving the people around her — both students and patients — the best care possible.

"If you help one person today," Lopez-Palazzo adds, "you make a difference."

Photo by Stefano Giovannini

SUSAN J. PULASKI

Bottling Bay Ridge's past for future generations

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Visitation Academy was an inebriates' home where General Ulysses S. Grant — overly fond of the bottle — came to dry out after the Civil War. A yacht club and polo grounds stood on the site now occupied by Fort Hamilton High School. And Fontbonne Hall Academy, according to local legend, is the former home of American actress and singer Lillian Russell, bought for her by her companion, Diamond Jim Brady.

Bay Ridge, first developed as a summer resort in the late 1800s, was once the playground of the privileged who reveled in its pavilions and rode a two-mile electric trolley that wound along the river and lake shores. But its picturesque legacy may have ground to a halt if not for guardians such as Susan Pulaski, president emeritus of the Bay Ridge Historical Society, who has worked to preserve its lore.

"Bay Ridge is absolutely beautiful!" says Pulaski. "It's right on the water, it's still like a small town with beautiful flowering trees and a small community feel."

Her early memories of the area once called "Yellow Hook" for its lemony hued soil are snuggled in the delightful strolls she took as a child with her mother, who would point out the stately homes.

In 1977, Pulaski attended a slideshow by the newly formed society to celebrate the nation's bicentennial. At the next meeting, she joined its landmarking committee, and faced a daunting agenda of convincing the New York Landmarks Conservancy to declare the Bennett-Farrell-Feldmann House at 119 95th St. between Shore Road and Marine Avenue a historical site.

The home's owner had other ideas.

"He threw us off the steps," recalls Pulaski, who helped to persuade the Conservancy to put a demolition halt on the 19th century Greek Revival-style villa, a rare survivor of the fashionable summer chateaux that once lined Shore Road, until the new owner agreed to having it landmarked.

Later, as group president, Pulaski held show-and-tells and organized bus tours to historic sites while restoring Ridge remnants of bygone eras, including the



Photo by Steve Solomonson

18th century Barkaloo Cemetery on Mackay Place and Narrows Avenue — the final resting place of Revolutionary War soldiers.

"I played there as a child," says Pulaski, who helped to landscape the graveyard, festoon it with the Stars and Stripes, add a headstone, and institute a Memorial Day parade.

Word also spread about her roundtable lectures and absorbing presentations, including her popular annual Santa Lucia shows at the Shore Hill Community Room. She documented oral histories of Ridge residents, and compiled then-and-now photographic exhibits of the

stretch bound by 50th to 101st streets, and Shore Road to Fourth Avenue, once known as "New York's Newport" whose dirt roads, horse and buggies, and trees had been replaced by concrete jungles.

"You would look at the photographs and think, 'Omgod! It used to be beautiful, and now look at how ugly it is!'" she says.

The urban warrior looked at the bigger picture, too. As chair of Community Board 10's Police and Public Safety Committee, Pulaski helped to introduce new stipulations in State Liquor Authority applications to streamline noise and other local quality of life issues. In 2003,

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Bay Ridge.

OCCUPATION: Court assistant, and real estate salesperson.

COMPANY: Kings County Family Court, and Re-Max Metro.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Duty, loyalty, doing everything with grace and charm, and living in joy, peace, beauty, love, and inspiration."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: "Sailing in New York Harbor and looking back at the Brooklyn skyline."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother Dorothy Salzmann Pulaski, who was passionate about the land, beauty, nature and family."

MOTTO: "To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield." — Lord Tennyson.

she worked with Councilman Vincent Gentile (D-Bay Ridge) to help reclassify 369 Bay Ridge blocks in Brooklyn's largest rezoning project at the time.

Victoria Hofmo, who worked with Pulaski on the project, is struck by her panoramic vision.

"Susan looks at the world in a spiritual way, so when it comes to beauty and nature she has a real sensitivity to that," she says.

Rita Unz, a longtime group member, credits Pulaski for providing Ridgeophiles with an outstanding trip down memory lane.

"Bay Ridge has become more historically-conscious because of Susan," says Unz.

Even Pulaski's failures are success stories. She was unable to save the Green Church on Ovington and Fourth avenues from the wrecking ball, but she tracked down its famous stained glass window. It will be prominently installed in the forthcoming Green School there.

"People will walk by and remember that window," envisions the conservationist, whose hard work has earned her a distinguished place in Bay Ridge history for keeping its past in the present, for future generations to enjoy.

ELLEN F. SALPETER

Arts-smart champion promotes culture in Brooklyn

BY JON REISS

You can go to the Grand Army Plaza area of Brooklyn, sit in a botanic garden, see a fine art exhibit, watch exotic animals, and go for a run in the park — all in the span of a few hours, thanks in part to Ellen Salpeter, former director of Heart of Brooklyn.

Salpeter has been at the helm of the conglomeration, a cultural partnership between a network of cultural agencies in and around Grand Army Plaza in central Brooklyn, for more than a decade. The organization is comprised of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the Brooklyn Museum, the Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Brooklyn Public Library, Prospect Park, and the Prospect Park Zoo — and they are right next to each other.

Salpeter wishes for Heart of Brooklyn to become truly dear to Brooklynites.

"In a world where everything moves at lightning speed with the Internet and technology, it's amazing to know that there are these incredible physical spaces and intellectual-physical projects that belong to you as a Brooklynite, and we want you to use it," she says.

Salpeter's success in combining the efforts and identities of these cultural institutions has been such that cities throughout the country have taken notice, and now they look to follow suit. As a result, Heart of Brooklyn has developed a national task force to research how cultural partnerships can help forecast community needs in order to help other major cities follow their lead.

"These types of institutions are great, but only if they work for the community they serve," she says.

Another priority for Heart of Brooklyn has been to pass its cultural resources onto the next generation through its award-winning Brooklyn Cultural Adventures Program, which seeks to connect young people through games, projects, and educational tours.

"Ultimately they're going to be the next generation of stewards, artists and horticulturists," says Salpeter.

Her dream for the institutions of Heart of Brooklyn is for locals to have a sense of pride in them, to feel like the Botanic Garden is their garden, or the museum is their museum, but for now,



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

she is embarking on the next chapter of her career in culture as deputy director of external affairs for the Jewish Museum in Manhattan — but her heart is still in Brooklyn!

"I could have stayed there forever, but life begins outside your comfort zone," she says.

Salpeter hopes to use her knowledge about community, economic development through tourism, and cultural

partnerships to help enrich the Jewish Museum so that New Yorkers can expect new things for the 108-year-old archive.

"I think it's very exciting to take an institution and help it into its next iteration while still maintaining all the wonderful things that make it the Jewish Museum," she says.

Raised in New York, Salpeter grew up on Manhattan culture, regularly attending museums and the theater with

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Prospect Heights.

OCCUPATION: Deputy director for external affairs; former director of Heart of Brooklyn, A Cultural Partnership.

COMPANY: The Jewish Museum.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Co-founder of Heart of Brooklyn."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My grandmother Bernice Tannenbaum, founder of Hadassah International, for being able to see into — and also shape — the future."

MOTTO: "Forgive early, kiss slowly, love wholeheartedly, laugh loudly."

her parents. When she attended school at Georgetown, Salpeter did her work-study at the Smithsonian. She says she's always loved the arts, but realized in college that she's not an artist, but an arts worker. She believes strongly that cultural and creative solutions should be a major aspect of treatment for cultural problems, such as obesity or diabetes, rather than being haphazardly woven into the solution.

Though the Jewish Museum may be far different from Heart of Brooklyn, Salpeter sees it as a natural step for her, having been brought up with — and educated in — the core values of Judaism. She cites Tikkun Olam, the Jewish value of repairing the world, as a major value.

"There's nothing more satisfying than helping with and working for your community," she says. "I'm really looking forward to doing that at the Jewish Museum."

Brooklyn's loss is Manhattan's gain, according to Sarah Shannon, acting director of Heart of Brooklyn.

"I've never met someone with more dedication to an organization or to a community at large than Ellen," she says. "She is a visionary for the role of arts and culture in a community."

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Cathie Gearity

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Eileen O'Connor

Cecilia Clarke

Geneva Farrow

Josephine Sanfilippo

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Today we join with many others to say thanks and congratulations to you and your fellow honorees. Aida, you are an inspiration to all of us. May God continue to enlarge your heart and share your love with others.

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JOSEPHINE SANFILIPPO

A good sport with a pioneering spirit

BY CAMILLE SPERRAZZA

Men have played golf at the Dyker Beach Golf Course since 1897. But there was no formal women's golf club there until Josephine Sanfilippo decided to trade tea time for tee time, and established the Brookridge Women's Golf Club in 1955. She would go on to become a local golf champ and, today, is still involved with the organization.

Actually, Sanfilippo was never the type of woman to sit around drinking tea. Before she was a golfer, she was a competitive tennis player. She was so good at the game, that a boys' team wanted her to join, but the coach wouldn't allow a woman player, she says. Instead, she honed her skills at the tennis courts on Bay 19th Street, and was sponsored in tournaments that took place in New York City, Long Island, and New Jersey, she says.

"I went to New Utrecht High School, and was active in all the school programs," she says.

Besides playing tennis, she enjoyed bowling, and earned an award for playing basketball. Then, a friend introduced her to Helen Mikrut, who happened to like to play golf. Sanfilippo, always interested in learning a new game, took up the sport. Living in Bath Beach at the time — where she still lives, in the same home in which she was delivered by a midwife — it made sense that she engage in her new hobby at the local Dyker Beach Golf Course. The men there already had their own club — Shoreview Men's Golf Club — which had been in existence since 1930. But there was no organization for women who wanted to play. Not until Sanfilippo formed one.

One might imagine that in 1955 there would be objections to such a proposal. After all, there are still women who are banned from golf clubs today. But Sanfilippo says there were no hurdles to overcome.

"Females were accepted into the game of golf at Dyker Beach," she says. "There were no objections."

She credits Brooklyn with being a great place for women to play sports.

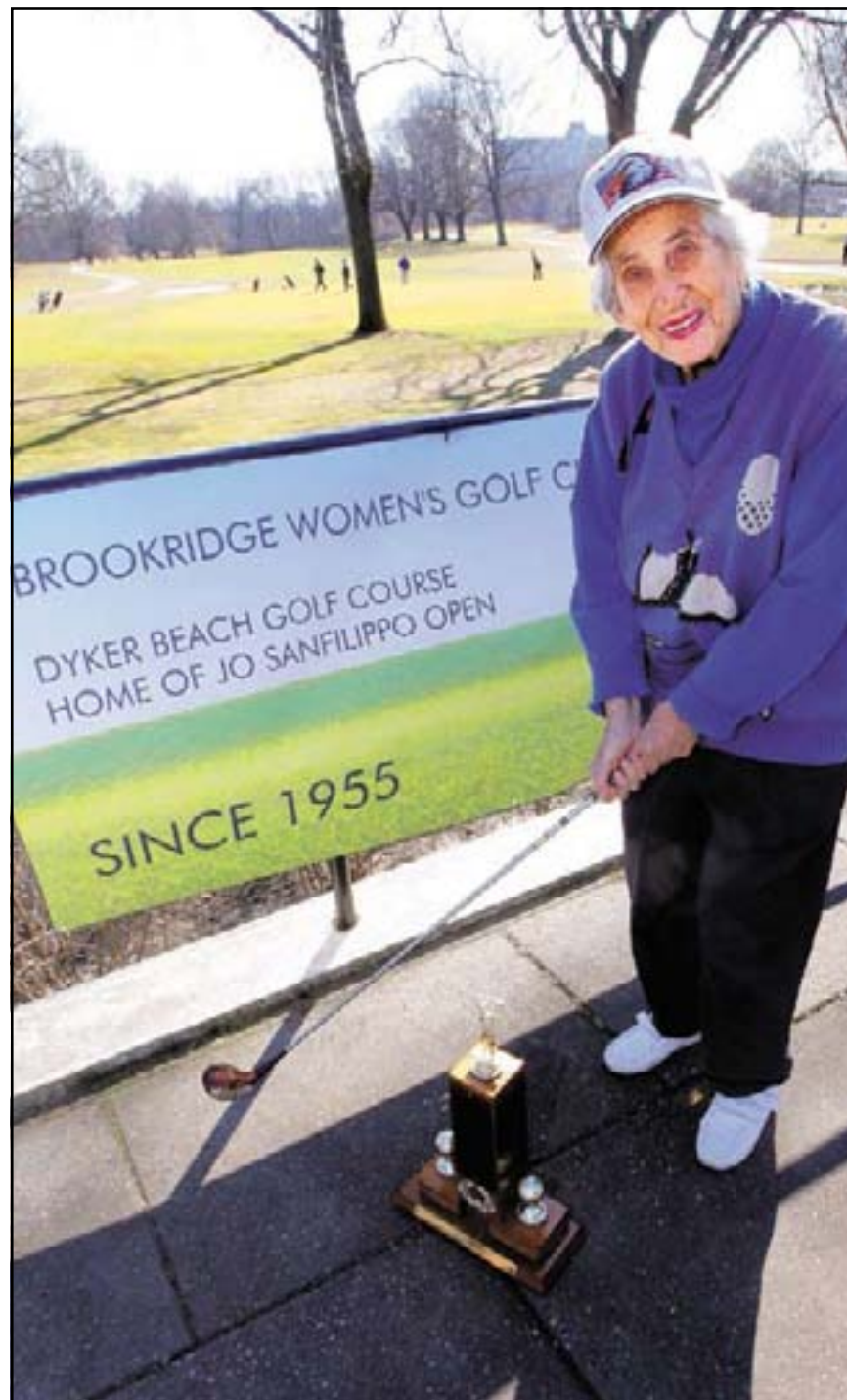


Photo by Steve Solomonson

The ladies at the golf club supported each other, too, she says, helping each other to learn the game. They contacted the U.S. Golf Association for advice about rules and regulations, and

together, they figured out what to do, with Sanfilippo yelling, "Hit the ball!" and "Keep your head down!"

In the process, the ladies developed lifelong friendships. Last July, some of

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Bath Beach.

OCCUPATION: Founder of the Brookridge Women's Golf Club.

COMPANY: Dyker Beach Golf Course.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Forming a women's golf club in 1955."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Dyker Beach Golf Course.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Karen Bannister, a tennis instructor who encouraged me to compete — and all my sporting endeavors after that, I owe to her kindness."

MOTTO: "Ignore gossip."

them surprised Sanfilippo with a 90th birthday party, presenting her with a cake shaped like a golf course.

Sanfilippo's longtime pal Patti Melina says Sanfilippo is a living legend — a view, she says, that is shared by golfers, both male and female.

"Jo was club champ many times, and she won all the majors for the Brookridge Women's Club," says Melina. "She won the last club championship when she was well into her 60s."

Schaefer Breweries sponsored golf tournaments back then, says Melina, and Sanfilippo won more than once.

When she wasn't playing golf, Sanfilippo worked, supporting herself, her parents, five sisters, and two brothers. Her jobs included working at the St. Finbar's Rectory for 21 years, keeping the books at the Strand Bowling Alley, and later working for the New York City Housing Authority.

She prides herself on being a good sport, and admires those who are honest and show good sportsmanship.

"I would like to see more people caring for each other," she says.

Today, Sanfilippo spends her days shopping with her sister, Joan, who is 83 years old. And, yes, she still visits the Dyker Beach Golf Club!



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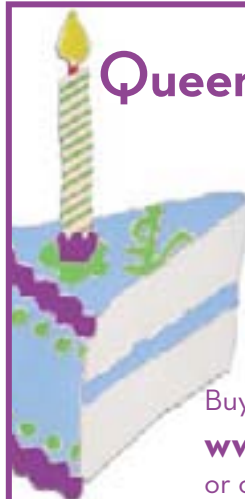
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MARY SANSONE

Organizing the rights of human beings

BY ANDREW LINDERMAN

Mary Sansone still remembers the look on Henry Ford's face when she met him in 1947. Sansone, then an executive director of American Medical Aid to Italy, was in Detroit to raise funds for the Italian relief effort.

"I asked Mr. Ford, 'Why don't you hire Jewish workers? You only have Christians,'" Sansone remembers. "He was kind of embarrassed. He couldn't even look at me."

After the meeting, Ford, a well-known anti-Semite, handed Sansone a check for \$25,000.

"He knew I was right," she says. "Nobody frightens me."

For Mary Sansone, standing up to authority is part of her daily routine. She's been fighting for equal rights since she was 12 years old when her father, a union leader with the International Workers of the World, would take her to Union Square.

"He used to sit me on a box and I'd watch him speak," Sansone remembers. "That was when I decided that I would become a labor leader when I grew up."

She started organizing on her own at age 18. It was dangerous work.

"The people in the garment factories were treated terribly, and the employers sexually abused the women," she says.

When World War II broke out, Sansone began working for the Red Cross. She excelled and, after the war, she was picked to be the executive director of a new program administering medical aid to Italy. Through her work with Italian refugees on the Brooklyn waterfront, she met Zachary Sansone, a like-minded lawyer from Naples. The pair was married in 1949 and raised two children together. "My husband was my favorite person," Sansone explains. "Whatever he thought up, I would implement."

As organizers for the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, the Sansones came into contact with every influential person in the movement. They marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. in Washington. Mary was also friendly with Bayard Rustin, the civil rights organizer responsible for many of the freedom rides. The two later collaborated to form the first coalition of



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

African Americans, Latinos and Italian Americans in New York.

"My name is on the Wall of Tolerance in Montgomery, Alabama," Sansone states, adding that Rosa Parks recommended it be placed there.

Her work also caught the attention of political leaders around the country, and soon her house in Borough Park became a popular meeting spot. Lyndon Johnson ate at her table, as did former Mayor John Lindsay. She claims that she came up with a community outreach group called the Congress of Italian-Americans Organization — or C.I.A.O. — during a meeting with Lindsay in the early 1960s.

Sansone estimates that the group, which she founded in 1964 with her husband, helps 150 people a month do everything from getting food stamps to processing Medicaid. In some cases, it even helps people pay their bills.

"When something went wrong, you went to Mary," recalls Linda Pullara, Sansone's assistant there for 26 years. "She would give the best advice."

At certain times, though, Sansone's

advice was difficult for her rivals to stomach. In the mid-1970s, political boss Meade Esposito reached out to Sansone to try to get her to support mafia leader Joe Colombo's Italian-American organization. Sansone refused to work with Colombo, and the two men responded with threats of physical violence.

"Meade Esposito told me, 'Don't forget I'm the boss,'" Sansone remembers. "And I said, 'Don't forget I don't give a damn.'"

Sansone has remained a force for change in Brooklyn. In 1988, she founded the Community Understanding For Racial and Ethnic Equality, or C.U.R.E., to reduce ethnic and racial tension while promoting mutual respect and understanding. The group has helped bring people together during difficult times, Sansone asserts.

Through it all, she's remained a source of strength for people who are struggling — and an inspiration to her fans.

"Working for Mary is an honor," says Lisa Bova, Sansone's longtime friend and assistant. "You learn to care about the things she fought for all her life."

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Borough Park.

OCCUPATION: Human rights organizer.

COMPANY: Congress of Italian Americans Organization, and Community Understanding for Racial and Ethnic Equality.

CLAIM TO FAME: "My work with Sacco and Vanzetti, anarchists convicted of murder during a 1920 armed robbery in Massachusetts. We got Congress to review the case. They gave me a proclamation declaring that discrimination was used in deciding the verdict."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: My bedroom.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Eleanor Roosevelt — I met her once briefly, she was quite something."

MOTTO: "Where there is love, nothing is missing."



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PAT SINGER

Brighton Beach booster bolsters an entire community

BY JON REISS

They say that New York is the city of a million stories, and if that's so, at least half of them must belong to Brighton Beach activist Pat Singer.

Her numerous duties across the board include overseeing dances for the U.S.O., writing a song about the Penguin for the "Batman" TV series, and working as an advertising agency executive at Ogilvy and Mather. Singer has also served on the Brooklyn Board of Boy Scouts of America, and been a member of Community Board 13 since 1979. Singer says community service was something impressed upon her from childhood — as busy as her parents were raising six children, they always offered to help a neighbor in need.

"As a child we put on a stage show in the backyard to raise toys for one of the local hospitals," she says. "I grew up in a home that taught me great values."

Singer's mother met her father, a visiting Australian sea captain, in Brighton Beach, and one thing that's clear about Pat Singer from the get-go is her unbridled love for that neighborhood. Inextricably linked to that love is her desire to protect it. So a career as a neighborhood activist was only natural.

Brighton Beach was becoming a community in decline during the late 1970s and, after a rash of muggings, Singer, a young mother in the neighborhood at the time, decided to step in. She began papering the area with flyers for a forum to discuss ways to take the area back. After two planning meetings, the group coalesced, numbering near 500 in a demonstration at the intersection of Brighton Beach and Coney Island avenues. The group, consisting mainly of senior citizens with wheelchairs and walkers, held traffic up for more than four hours, successfully expressing the need for more police protection in Brighton Beach. Out of this protest, the Brighton Beach Neighborhood Association was born.

In describing one of her greatest achievements as a local activist, Singer recounts the time she was nearly arrested trying to get heat for her building.



Photo by Steve Solomonson

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Brighton Beach.

OCCUPATION: Founder and executive director.

COMPANY: Brighton Neighborhood Association.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Spearheaded rallies to encourage residents of Brighton Beach to fight back against the deterioration of their community."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Coney Island Boardwalk.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My daughter Laura who lost her dad at 10 years old, but managed to be the first grandchild to finish college and evolve into the beautiful intelligent woman she is today."

MOTTO: "We are given one journey on this earth, leave a visible footprint that others can follow."

"I had all the tenants stand in the lobby because we had no heat, and the landlord showed up with two cops and said 'arrest her!'" she says. "My 7-year-old daughter started crying, so I brought all the people outside in front of the building so they couldn't touch us."

Afterwards, Singer went to then-state Senators Chuck Schumer and Donald Halpern, insisting there be a law allowing tenants to organize in a public area of their building to address building-wide problems. That became one of two laws regarding tenants' rights that Singer is responsible for getting on the books.

"I'm very proud of that!" she says.

Singer has since become the go-to local person for advice on matters of tenants' rights, helping the large immigrant population of Brighton Beach to understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants. The Brighton Neighborhood Association, now operating out of a bank after the flooding of its former storefront, is still going strong,

with only four part-time staff people.

"People come to me with all kinds of problems," Singer says, recounting the man who came to her because his wife's tombstone fell over and he wanted it restored, and the Spanish family who suffered a fire in their Brighton Beach apartment, for whom the group raised \$14,000 in a week. All of them were non-contracted, essentially pro bono, projects.

Singer says her daughter, currently a legislative aid for Assemblyman Steven Cymbrowitz (D-Sheepshead Bay) calls her "Mary Sunshine," because she's always happy.

"It's been a roller coaster — I raised two kids without any money, then I raised an organization, and then a community!" she says. "And I think I did a damn good job of it."

Brooklyn's top official agrees.

"When future generations read about the history of Brooklyn, Pat Singer and Brighton Beach will be synonymous," said Borough President Markowitz. "Her legacy will be that enduring."

Courier Life

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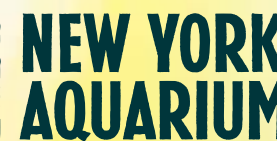
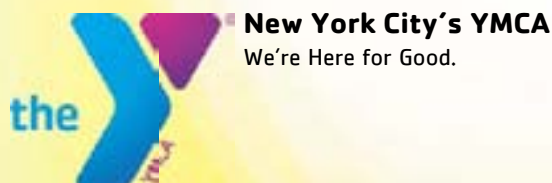
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MONICA SWEENEY

A city gladiator on a mission to eradicate AIDS

BY JON REISS

There's no such thing as a normal day at work, according to Dr. Monica Sweeney, assistant commissioner of the New York Health Department's Bureau of HIV-Aids Prevention.

"Everyday is a new experience, if I get home at 7 pm on a weeknight, it's practically a half day!" she says.

Sweeney is a physician whose mission is public health. Her aim? Prevention.

Part of the problem, she adds, is that the public and the healthcare world is fixated on the technology to treat illnesses instead of stopping them before they happen. Clean air, safe foods, regular check ups, and physical activity are at the top of her list of musts for healthy living and disease prevention.

"The public healthcare system is all about too much too late," she says.

For instance, Sweeney points out that the life expectancy of New Yorkers is above that of the rest of the country — evidence of the power of its healthy lifestyle.

"If you see older people who live in the city, they walk up and down those subway steps," she says. "Plus, we have all this healthy food and there are so many exciting places to go and people to see, it keeps you engaged, and that is wonderful for your health."

Sweeney worked for many years as a physician before being asked in 2007 to take over the helm of the New York Health Department's fight against AIDS. She was seen as a perfect fit, having written a book in 2004 about condom use and safe sex called "Condom Sense," as well as having been active in the fight against HIV-AIDS since before the epidemic. The first time the job was offered to her, she declined, stating that she was more interested in prevention on a broader scale. However, when Dr. Tom Frieden, now head of the Centers for Disease Control, called her personally to ask her to take the job, she accepted. Five years later, Sweeney says she's glad she decided to take this difficult, but rewarding, job.

Her greatest achievement, though, happened in the form of the HIV-AIDS legislation that she worked on, known as the Baby AIDS Bill.



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

"We went from 500 babies being born HIV positive to three last year," she says.

The assistant commissioner is a lifelong student when it comes to addressing the needs of others, states Dr. Linda Fried, dean of The Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University.

"Dr. Sweeney is a superb doctor and public health leader exemplifying the best of both," she comments. "She learns

from the needs of patients and applies those lessons, using them for the benefit of the whole population."

Growing up in Virginia, Sweeney went to segregated schools until the seventh grade. Of her family she says, "We were poor, but I didn't know that until I was an adult, because we always had plenty of food, clothing, and love."

She says her parents pushed her to

BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Park Slope.

OCCUPATION: Physician, assistant commissioner.

COMPANY: New York City Health Department.

CLAIM TO FAME: "I do all that I can, for everyone that I can, and I will for as long as I can."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: My home, and Prospect Park.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "City Council Speaker Christine Quinn because she has managed to achieve at the highest level without compromising what she stands for — she keeps it real."

MOTTO: "Do random acts of kindness to everyone you meet whenever you have the opportunity."

work hard in school because education was the great equalizer. Sweeney continues to work tirelessly in the fight to prevent the spread of HIV-AIDS, and a big part of that is speaking to people throughout the city about getting tested. In doing so, Sweeney never puts herself on a pedestal, always sharing her own experiences with HIV testing during her talks.

Speaking with Sweeney, it's clear that she is always willing to do whatever it takes to help people find the courage to get tested. She describes one of her recent talks at Borough Hall, where she informed visitors how to overcome their fears, and even offered to accompany them to get tested.

"I told them, 'If you don't have someone you trust to go with you, then call me, and I'll go with you because you shouldn't have to face this on your own,'" she says, adding that a woman approached her after the talk and told her that she'd been scared to get tested, but after hearing her speak, she finally found the courage to do it.

It's clear from her intensity in telling this story that Dr. Monica Sweeney will do all that she can, for everyone she can, for as long as she can.

A Special Congratulations to
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for your selfless acts, your thoughtful
and generous qualities you provide too others.
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who deserves this honor.

Love Always Tom

Irena Yuryeva

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We are very proud of you.



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Aida Leon

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through out your life.*

*You have been an incredible role model, for myself and
I am honored to call you my mother.*

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countless hours of service to the unprivileged communities,
so I want to say I love you Very Much.*

Love Carlos and Cinz

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to
Dr. Monica Sweeney

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IRENA YURYEVA

An administrator who goes the extra mile

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

A stroke patient with diminished speech and motor skills was taking longer than usual in the bathroom of his Sheepshead Bay rehabilitation facility, raising a red flag with general manager Irena Yuryeva, who marched to the restroom with a group of staffers, and found it locked.

She banged on the door — again and again.

"We couldn't hear him, we became worried," says the administrator of Aqua Health Rehabilitation Center, who rushed to get the key.

Yuryeva says nothing prepared her for the horror unfolding before her as she opened the door: the man, whose wife had left him, was sitting on the toilet slitting his wrists with a razor blade he had brought from home.

"There was blood everywhere," she says. "My heart was crying, but I couldn't show him that."

Yuryeva consoled the patient as best she could, and accompanied him in an ambulance to Coney Island Hospital where she kept an overnight vigil by his bedside. Later, she secured his release by putting him in touch with a private psychiatrist.

"I felt like we can't lose this man, he's so young and smart," she adds.

Her rallying didn't stop there — Yuryeva found a way for the patient to continue his physical therapy after his insurance ran out.

"We brought him in for free in the evenings," she says. "We gave him hope."

These days, the formerly suicidal man has come to terms with his limitations, and even overcome some of them, according to her.

"Now when he comes in, he says, 'Good morning my dear' to me," she states.

Aqua's physical therapy patients, many of them with critical issues, have come to rely on the Russian immigrant's Midas touch for sorting out paperwork problems on their road to recovery.

Migdalia Perez, a hip replacement client from Sheepshead Bay, was shocked when her insurance carrier bailed out on her after just two months of treatment.

"I was in a lot of pain," she comments.



BIO FILE

NEIGHBORHOOD: Sheepshead Bay.

OCCUPATION: General manager.

COMPANY: Aqua Health Rehabilitation Center.

CLAIM TO FAME: "To help people and make them feel that they are not alone."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Prospect Park.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Raisa Chernina because she's a bright person with so much energy — and if she could, she would help the whole world."

MOTTO: "Be positive all the time."

"His mother was so poor," she says. "We decided to help."

The dividends which followed were glowing.

"He wrote us a beautiful letter telling us that we were the most beautiful people in the world," she says.

Other people have also found a humanitarian in Yuryeva: She has raised money for the FDNY and the Staten Island University Hospital Burn Center, donated hundreds of gifts to the U.S. Marine Corps Toys for Tots Foundation, cheered lonely seniors by decorating Aqua with their artwork, and held Pass-over food distributions at her facility with the Be Proud Foundation.

Fifty wheelchair-bound observers who couldn't make it to the last one were pleasantly surprised when Yuryeva showed up on their doorsteps bearing kosher food parcels, says Be Proud founder Raisa Chernina.

"She packaged the food, put it in her car, and drove around for hours after work making personal deliveries," says Chernina. "Irena really cares about people, it's in her blood."

Her unfailing dedication to her community has proved to be the best therapy of all for Irena Yuryeva, who treats her clients as if they were family.

"I feel like I'm the happiest person in the world when I see their positive results," she says.

"And I still had a year and a half to go."

The woman says Yuryeva came to her rescue by allowing her to continue her therapy with complimentary sessions while she worked out an alternate insurance plan with the company.

"I am very grateful to her," says Perez. "Not a lot of office managers would have taken the time to do this for a patient, but Irena did."

Those happy endings are rewards in themselves, according to this Woman of Distinction, who has worked at Aqua for

seven years and is quick to champion families in distress.

One woman, she recalls, became disheartened about the future after her son suffered a traumatic brain injury in an automobile accident — a tragedy compounded when the young man was turned away by nursing homes because Medicaid wouldn't insure him for therapy. Yuryeva arranged 20 free, after-hour sessions for him, enabling the man to regain some of his walking and writing skills.



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RENEE VICTORIA MCCLURE

National Grid

A native New Yorker, Renee Victoria McClure has used her strong managerial, people, and technological skills to help many organizations and associations initiate and promote their goals throughout her career. McClure is the Manager of Community and Customer Management for National Grid, covering Brooklyn and the Rockaways.

She has garnered numerous awards, including US Black and Hispanic Engineering Information Technology Women's Awards in 2001, Rockaway Development Revitalization Corporation Community Builders Award in 2000, and United Way of New York City's Women United in Philanthropy — Women of Excellence Award in 2011.



NICOLE ROBINSON-ETIENNE

Wildlife Conservation Society

A Brooklynite born and bred, Nicole Robinson-Etienne graduated from Sheephead Bay HS before earning a political science BA from Fordham University and a law degree from Northeastern.

Now at the Wildlife Conservation Society's beloved Coney Island aquarium, Robinson-Etienne does outreach to the community and local government as the center's assistant director of city and state affairs.



KATE FITZGERALD

Wildlife Conservation Society

The multi-dimensional Kate Fitzgerald has enjoyed a diverse career thus far due to her artistic talents and willingness to serve the public. Fitzgerald has acted, produced, directed, and written in various entertainment media.

She has also worked for various human- and kids-rights groups, including the Nathan Cummings Foundation, Stockings with Care, and Rosie O'Donnell's For All Kids Foundation — all while serving as a community affairs manager at the Aquarium.



ELIZABETH TOLEDO

Dodge YMCA

Elizabeth Toledo's position as executive director of the Dodge YMCA is just her latest job in a career chock-full of experiences with children and youth.

Before earning her current post in Downtown Brooklyn, Toledo was the executive director of the Bronx YMCA, and a child-care consultant for Dignity of Children.



ANTONIA YUILLE-WILLIAMS

ConEdison

In her position of director of Public Affairs for Brooklyn and Queens, Williams is involved with community outreach, corporate community relations, media relations, volunteerism, and the Renaissance Housing Program. She is also the host and executive producer of Brooklyn Savvy, a public access television show that airs bi-weekly and explores issues related to women. She sits on the boards of several Brooklyn institutions, is extremely involved with many community organizations and events, and is the recipient of numerous awards.



JOHARI JENKINS

ConEdison

Jenkins manages corporate contributions, government relations, community outreach and special events. Prior to joining Con Edison, she was Marketing Manager at the NYC Department of Environmental Protection, and did project management, event marketing and corporate sales for Clear Channel Communications, Comcast, and Sports Radio WFAN. She is a proud graduate of Rutgers University.



RACHEL AMAR

Waste Management of New York

Inspired by Al Gore's vision of an environmentally healthy country, Amar has become well known for her efforts as a community advocate on environmental and public health issues in New York and across the country. Previously, Amar worked for the Prospect Park Alliance and the Department of Education before becoming Community and Government Relations Manager for Waste Management of New York, one of the city's foremost sanitation companies.



Our in-house judges were (from left) Jeanne Eisenhardt, Carol Magluilo, Stephanie Stellaccio, Celia Weintrob, and Jennifer Stern.

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