


WOMEN *of* DISTINCTION

2014 EDITION



*Honoring
women
who have
shaped the
borough*





We salute the

Courier Life's Brooklyn Women of Distinction
and congratulate the 2014 honorees.





A message from the editors

“**W**omen hold up half the sky,” states the old Chinese expression, and we at Community Newspaper Group and Courier Life Publications say the following pages prove the point.

Our 2014 Brooklyn Women of Distinction magazine celebrates 25 of the borough’s best and brightest female workers, nominated by their peers and selected by an independent panel for distinguishing themselves in their chosen fields.

They represent all walks of life and a range of professions, yet they all have one thing in common — a commitment to hard work, while advancing Brooklyn’s reputation as a borough of distinction.

They are the women we see shopping in our stores, walking in our streets, and sitting next to us on the bus or train, yet their remarkable contributions of good citizenship have amended our communities for years to come.

We appreciate the opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments, and we hope that you enjoy reading their uplifting stories as much as we did bringing them to you.

Vince DiMiceli, Shavana Abruzzo, and Courtney Donahue

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BROOKLYN'S WOMEN *of* DISTINCTION

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OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

May 21, 2014

CNG Community Newspaper Group
1 Metro Tech North
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Dear Friends,

Brooklyn is home to some of the most influential news organizations in journalism, as well as those in the arts, which 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 Publisher Cliff Luster, and Courier Life Publications and the CNG team as well as supporters and special guests as you host the Fourth Annual Brooklyn's Women of Distinction.

Women are among the primary characters of the fascinating tale that is Brooklyn's story of success, without whose labor, intelligence, creativity and heart our borough could not have thrived and prospered. It is therefore fitting that we recognize and take note of the tremendous contributions of women to our borough and beyond. Courier Life Publications pays tribute to 25 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 dynamic, compassionate and selfless women who epitomize what Brooklyn is all about.

On behalf of all 2.5 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. May there be more occasions for us to celebrate together, as One Brooklyn, in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,

Eric Adams
Brooklyn Borough President



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VERNA DUBERRY ADEMU-JOHN

Program manager helps Brooklynites to be health smart

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Health advocate Verna DuBerry Ademu-John and 200 other volunteers rolled up their sleeves last summer to erect a park at the Willoughby Courts apartment complex in Bedford-Stuyvesant, complete with a jungle gym, monkey bars, a slide, and flowers — a magnum opus they accomplished in less than seven hours.

“It took a community working together to build a playground in a day,” says the program manager for the Partnership for a Healthier Brooklyn at the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation. “The children’s smiling faces told the story.”

The park, built in conjunction with Forest City Ratner and KaBOOM!, is a crown jewel of Ademu-John’s collaborations with a borough-wide coalition of individuals, community groups, stores, and faith-based organizations to address the leading causes of death, while promoting active and tobacco-free living, healthy eating, and reducing underage and excessive alcohol use, to advance the city’s robust health campaign.

The uphill road begins with a personal commitment, she claims.

“If we have the information and act on it, we can live a fuller, more beneficial life that can help others, instead of having to experience the suffering that many of us do,” says the “50-something” pioneer, who helped to institute a farmer’s market at Marcy Plaza last year with the Brooklyn Rescue Mission urban farm, and introduced a healthy retail initiative at the Foodtown at Fulton Street and Brooklyn Avenue, to encourage fresh food options.

Featured displays at Foodtown’s aisles and check-out counters — once girth-expanding frontiers for soft drinks, chocolate, confectionery, and chips — now offer healthier substitutes, such as coconut water, kale chips, and locally-sourced produce, much to the delight of shopper Sharon Leverett.

“Vegetables and fruits are the first thing I see now when I walk in through



Photo by Elizabeth Graham

the door, and they’re all fresh!” she says. “I see juices, nuts, and whole grains in places where there used to be candy, cookies, and cakes — it’s a healthier alternative for me and my family.”

Monthly meetings of the Ingersoll Houses’ residents association in Fort Greene now come with nutritious snacks, thanks to Ademu-John’s “workplace agreements.”

“We have come a long way from having cookies, cakes, soda, and chips,” reads an e-mail from the organizers. “It was exciting to see the kids run back for more fruit, and watch some of the people try hummus for the first time, and like it.”

The Woman of Distinction is augmenting positive behaviors with vigorous programs at Restoration, the nation’s oldest community development corporation whose wide-ranging port-

folio includes financial counseling, help with benefits and services, and promoting education — with a college on campus.

Ademu-John accessed free CitiBikes for residents, distributed signs at Long Island University’s Brooklyn site encouraging people to ditch the elevator for a brisk trot up the stairs, and launched a sonic stairwell at Restoration’s Youth Arts Academy — an eye-pleaser with murals of famous actors, artists, and musicians, and accompanied by narratives and music — to spike interest in putting a healthy foot forward.

“Folks can now take the stairs and be entertained going up or down,” says the honoree, who works with building managers to adopt smoke-free policies, a move approved by the Bridge Street Development Corporation for one of its apartment houses.

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Program manager for the Partnership for a Healthier Brooklyn

COMPANY: Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation

CLAIM TO FAME: “Helping to make the healthy choice the easy choice.”

FAVORITE PLACE: Brooklyn

PERSON I ADMIRE: “My late mother-in-law, Jeredine Ademu-John, because her faith, generosity, and kindness lives on in the people she touched.”

MOTTO: “Choose to be joyful.”

Ademu-John is also at the forefront of alerting youngsters to the hidden harms of alcohol abuse beyond drunk driving, like passing out, rape, sex abuse, violence, and suicide.

“Not many people realize that alcohol is the third leading cause of preventable death,” she says.

One recent partnership had students environmentally scan their communities for the number of bars, liquor stores, and alcohol-related advertising. Another joint effort invited people to jot their alcohol tales on index cards, with some of them making it onto a poster showcased at Columbia University’s Health Disparities Conference in March.

The harrowing accounts include the rape of a 24-year-old college student after she passed out from drinking, and the terror felt by a 10-year-old girl who fled for her life from a friend’s house after the father began brandishing a knife in a drunken rage.

Restoration’s approach to individual and collective well being is as revolutionary as it is creative, but it hails from a place of concern and consideration, insists Verna DuBerry Ademu-John.

“We’re not pointing fingers,” she says. “We’re highlighting the healthy things, and giving you options to access them.”

On behalf of the staff of
The YWCA of Brooklyn,
we would like
to congratulate our boss,

Martha Kamber

on her selection as one of
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The Yemeni American Association
of Greater New York wishes to congratulate
Mrs. Kathrine Khatari
for being acknowledged as a Woman of Distinction.

The Yemeni American Association and I,
Sadik Kaid, salute Mrs. Khatari for her tireless
effort to help the community in general and our
association in particular.

 **YAA of Greater New York
Sadik Kaid**

Christine

We are delighted to celebrate &
honor you for your unending,
outstanding achievements
Congratulations!

NANCY & DANNY



The Sterling School Staff is proud to
congratulate Ruth Arberman on being
honored as a Brooklyn Woman Of Distinction.
Her generosity and breadth of knowledge are
an inspiration to all who've been
privileged to work with her.

The Staff and Management of N. Cheng & Co., P.C.
extend their best wishes to

Martha Kamber

for being selected as one of Brooklyn's
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Verna,

Our heartiest congratulations and best wishes on
this well-deserved recognition. The borough of
Brooklyn is rich in blessings due in part to your
tireless contributions over the years. We applaud
your giving spirit and look forward to hearing
about and sharing in your future successes.
May God continue to grant you favor and blessings.
All of our love, Stephanie, Ian, Christian, Kaitlyn and mom.

Congratulations to
Verna Ademu-John
for being selected as one of
Brooklyn's Women of Distinction.
Your dedication and service to your
community is an inspiration.

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RUTH ARBERMAN

Reading specialist is in a class of her own

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Her son's first complete sentence was, "Daddy, maneuver the car carefully, please," but Cobble Hill reading specialist Ruth Arberman was left idling when she tried to find an elementary school with a program for her articulate boy, after he was diagnosed in 1996 with dyslexia — a language processing disorder he shared with Albert Einstein, Whoopi Goldberg, and his mom.

She located one in Brooklyn, but it had a long waiting list.

"I didn't know what I was going to do," says Arberman, who stumbled upon the solution one day in the waiting room of the State College of Optometry at S.U.N.Y. where she ran an award-winning reading program, while discussing her predicament with other parents of highly intelligent children unable to read, write or spell at grade level.

"One parent said, 'Wherever you go, we'll go,'" she says.

Arberman, 60, came home and told her husband, who suggested she start her own primary school. The idea intrigued her.

"I thought I could make the school that I really want for my child," says the educator, whose own dyslexia went undiagnosed, and who learned to read from the bird walks she took as a girl with the Audubon Society, enabling her to connect words with actual experiences.

Arberman scoured the internet — then a fledgling tool — to bone up on curriculums and state regulations. Albany gave her the nod after she created a syllabus based on the Orton-Gillingham Approach, a phonics-based industry gold standard.

In 1999, she opened The Sterling School in a vacant storefront on Pacific Street, between Smith and Hoyt streets in Boerum Hill, with five students, and herself as principal, teacher, and chief cook and bottle washer.

Today, nine staff teach 24 students with dyslexia or attention deficit disorder to read, write, do math, spell, study



Photo by Elizabeth Graham

language arts, cook, sew, play chess, and learn other skills in an individualized, integrated, and friendly environment where the children vie to sit at Arberman's table for lunch.

She seizes those moments to diffuse their anxieties.

"When I tell them that I have dyslexia, there is a sigh of relief — it's as if they're thinking, look she's running a school, it must be okay," says Arberman, who has trained city and private school teachers, and whose institute has drawn visits from Danish school officials looking to improve their own programs.

"Most children, once you tell them we know what this is and we know what to do about it, it makes them feel a whole lot better," she adds.

They are her best advertisement.

"I really could not go to school before, it was difficult for me," says an 11-year-old Sterling student, whose family requested anonymity. "But now I love it."

His mother remembers the turning point that changed her son's life.

"As soon as he walked in the door on his first day, he felt an immediate comfort," she says. "Before, he was very shy and would never say

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Founding principal

COMPANY: The Sterling School

CLAIM TO FAME: "Giving hope and skills to children and their families."

FAVORITE PLACE: "My bubble bath."

PERSON I ADMIRE: "My mother Ethel Greenberg because when I was a kid and struggling, she always said, 'You know you can hire a secretary!'"

MOTTO: "Live in the present."

what he felt, now you can't turn him off!"

Credit that to Arberman's stimulating curriculum that keeps students plugged in with exciting field trips and absorbing projects.

Their novel scheme to reduce noise in their lunchroom with bubble wrap, sound-diffusing paint, and cardboard carpeting is on the website of the Hall of Science, which selected the Woman of Distinction for its coveted Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics fellowship in 2012.

Her triumphs are indisputable:

One alum is studying geo-mapping and urban planning at the University of Southern California. Another is an electrician at NBC television. One more is a chef who studied in Paris. Arberman's son Ethan is a computer specialist who works for an Internet Technology firm, while overseeing Sterling's computers. And she has opened new opportunities for students otherwise doomed to failure, recognizing their unconventional gifts as unique pathways to success.

"Children need to see themselves as somebody who can learn because what may be a disability in third grade doesn't have to become a life disability," says Ruth Arberman, whose advocacy for the learning disabled continues to be in a class of its own.

Congratulations Christine

*On this great accomplishment
I can't think of anyone
more deserving of this honor,
Dad would be so very proud of you
as I am today*

Love Mom

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JOSEPHINE BROWN

Program director makes new memories for dementia sufferers

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

A new client in his 40s with early-stage dementia posed a dilemma for Josephine Brown, program director of New York Memory Center in Park Slope.

He wasn't suited to the services available for people with advanced memory loss, and he wasn't eligible for disability funding.

"We didn't have any way to help him because he didn't fit in anywhere," says Brown, who was determined to find a solution.

She secured a grant from the Brookdale Foundation Group, and spent the next several months conducting research with a colleague to create the nation's first early intervention and support program for people in the initial stages of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

The new Lotus Club allowed the man to participate in a peer support group, attend cognitive therapy classes, and enjoy supervised trips to ball games and the New York Aquarium, while making new friends in a club-like setting without suffering the isolation often accompanying an early diagnosis.

"Now all the facilities have a program like ours," says Brown, whose job title doesn't begin to address her manifold duties at the community-based facility, founded in 1983 as the Park Slope Geriatric Day Center, where she trains staff and oversees multiple memory-enhancing programs — including music, dance, yoga, meditation, poetry, and exercise therapies — designed to slow the rate of disease progression, reduce agitation, and improve disease-related behavioral symptoms.

Brown arrives at work at 7 am and spends up to 13 hours making sure her charges enjoy their day beyond their physical and emotional limitations.

She is outside most mornings helping them off the bus, and at their side assisting them on the computer. She makes sure their meal times are a pleasant experience, and supervises their toileting. She roots for them when they create paintings in an art therapy



class, and then arranges for their masterpieces to be displayed at New York Methodist Hospital and other community venues. And she coordinates visits with area students to form lasting, inter-generational friendships.

Her initiatives take weary guardians into consideration, too.

Brown helped to introduce the Memory Arts Cafe — a popular series of free cultural events for families, co-produced by the Alzheimer's Poetry Project — to reduce caregiver burnout.

"We give them a family atmosphere where caregivers get peace of mind and clients get a sense of purpose," says the Woman of Distinction, 55, who trains social workers at other managed-care facilities to handle their workloads.

Manhattan lawyer Michael Marcus says Brown has helped his family cope with his father's debilitating battle with Alzheimer's disease.

"When you look back at your life, you look at the memories, and my dad has lost all that," says Marcus, adding that

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Program director

COMPANY: The New York Memory Center

CLAIM TO FAME: "I help people with memory loss to live and be happy."

FAVORITE PLACE: "My living room."

PERSON I ADMIRE: "Our former executive director, Marianne Nicolosi, for being a creative and educational force."

MOTTO: "It is what it is."

Brown has visited with his family on weekends and been a phone call away in her efforts to guide, advise, equip, prepare, and brainstorm strategy along every step of the way.

"Josephine has been a blessing because she has laid out a timeline so that we can prepare at each stage for what is going to occur," he says. "She has taught us to meet my father in his own world, and it has helped allow him to stay in his home for a longer period of time."

Marcus is overjoyed at some of the social skills his father, a former stock broker and saxophone enthusiast, has reclaimed since becoming a center member, including entertaining his peers with jokes and Frank Sinatra songs.

"He can't remember what he has done there when he gets home, but because I have observed it firsthand, I know when he's there he's enjoying himself," he says.

The high praise is a towering testament to Josephine Brown's work, which bears a distinction all its own for uplifting people at a low juncture in their lives, while leaving a memorable mark on her own.

"We are all related," she says. "My work gives me a feeling of contentment and joy because it means something to me."

Photo by Elizabeth Graham

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KIMBERLY R. CLINE

College prez envisions an entrepreneurial ecosystem at LIU

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Kimberly R. Cline, Long Island University's new president, is a chief executive who shuns the ivory tower.

She sprang from her seat at the Barclays Center on a frigid Sunday in February to cheer the L.I.U. Blackbirds, when the men's basketball team triumphed over the St. Francis Terriers, 69-68, on the herringbone-patterned home court of the Brooklyn Nets.

"It was my privilege to come and watch," says Cline, who traveled from her home on Long Island on her day off to rally the hoopsters, and immerse herself in the college community she inherited in July when she was appointed head of the seven-campus learning institute.

Delighted students responded by making a beeline for the affable prez.

"They came running up to me, and hugged me," says Cline, 55, a North Carolina native whose down-home manner belies her critical position as an L.I.U. ambassador, but one equally efficient power-broking with corporations and donors, brainstorming with faculty, and chatting with students in the cafeteria.

Blackbirds' senior point guard Jason Brickman considered her attendance a home win.

"I think it's great that President Cline was at our game," he says. "For her to take the time to come watch us play is awesome, and shows that she supports us as student athletes."

Cline scored her own slam dunk when she became the first woman president of the 87-year-old college, whose distinguished alumni include Rose Bird, the first woman chief justice on the Supreme Court of California, Terry Semel, the former chairman and C.E.O. of Yahoo!, and Velma Scantlebury, America's first black female transplant surgeon.

The Woman of Distinction's momentum is driving the ball home.

Her aptly named L.I.U. Promise program pledges to help students chart their academic victories by assigning them "success coaches." The



Photo by Elizabeth Graham

on-campus mentors help pupils fast-track enrollment, select the right major and scholarships, and identify internships and study-abroad opportunities, while creating e-portfolios and introducing them to prospective employers, in some cases spurring careers before they graduate.

Modernism is key to the helmswoman's future plans for her scholars.

"I want to help prepare students for an ultimate career in life, and make sure they have the support they need," says Cline, who devotes her time and talents to the New York State Department of Education's Advisory Committee on the Statewide Plan for Higher Education, the East Coast Conference Presidents' Council, and the American

Council on Education's Women's Network Board, among other institutions.

She envisions an entrepreneurial ecosystem at L.I.U. to tap emerging tech talent.

Cline led the team that persuaded ThoughtBox creator and venture capitalist Mark Fasciano to relocate his high-profile business incubator to the Brookville campus in December, with plans to launch the program at the university's Brooklyn site by fall.

The exciting hatchery, renamed ThoughtBox@LIU, is part of an on-campus innovation quadrangle including an entrepreneurship center, a branding center, a stock trading floor, and a site for student-run businesses.

It is a win-win enterprise: Student

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: President

COMPANY: Long Island University

CLAIM TO FAME: "Helping to create a high quality educational environment for students"

FAVORITE PLACE: Fire Island

PERSON I ADMIRE: "John Ryan, C.E.O. of the Center for Creative Leadership, for his mentorship."

MOTTO: "Be humble, but be effective."

techies have an opportunity to work on their startups, and the small technological companies nurtured by ThoughtBox can interact with them and the faculty while gaining access to research facilities and cultural amenities.

"If you are a student who wants to be an entrepreneur, you can now work on that idea here," says Cline, whom university officials recruited through a lengthy, nationwide search with a head-hunting firm because they were impressed by her take-charge efforts in past jobs.

She boosted student enrollment at Mercy College, where she was president from 2008 to 2013, from around 9,000 to more than 11,000.

She also introduced new measures during her prior nine-year tenure as vice chancellor and chief financial officer at the State University of New York, where her initiatives included helping to reduce the application process time from more than a month to less than a week.

The amazing feats have all been in a day's work for the visionary, who lives by a rule that has served her well.

"To me, everyday we should be asking ourselves, 'Did I do a good job today?'" says Kimberly R. Cline, who deserves a resounding "yes" for helping to equip the next generation with ground-breaking tools to launch the career of their dreams.



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DONNA MAE DEPOLA

Heroic counselor helps others gain salvation

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Donna Mae DePola has walked in the shoes of the people she now helps conquer incest, addiction, and trauma issues, along her heroic journey to self-preservation.

The founder, president, and chief executive officer of the Resource Training and Counseling Center in Sunset Park was 5 years old when her alcoholic father began sexually molesting her.

He jangled coins in his pocket while climbing the stairs to her room during a ritual of terror she endured silently for 12 years, before pulling a knife on him one day.

"I told him I would kill him if he didn't stop," says DePola, who never carries loose change around, and who entitled her memoir "Twelve Tins" after the dozen cans of film she found in the dropped ceiling of her father's home following his death, documenting the rapes.

She has never viewed the filthy footage.

"It would leave an everlasting imprint on my whole, entire soul," says DePola, 64, who started using drugs at age 9.

"Quaaludes, then ups, downs, mushrooms, acid — anything to make the pain go away," she adds.

She became a daily cocaine user and a sexually promiscuous teen.

"I used sex to make guys like me," claims DePola, who married a Norwegian seaman on a whim and moved to Norway to escape her agony.

The marriage was short-lived and DePola returned home, tormented by her inner demons, imprisoned by drugs, and hampered by a short fuse. She kept up appearances through a succession of jobs, including working as a nurse's aide, a deli owner and operator, and an emergency medical technician who helped to found the Bravo ambulance service in Bay Ridge.

"I was doing \$4,000 worth of coke a week, but I never missed a day of work," says DePola who married and divorced again.

Her turning point came in 1985.



Photo by Elizabeth Graham

Seated in the office of the coffee shop she ran at Lutheran Medical Center — where her mother was having open heart surgery — she stared glumly at the mound of cocaine on her desk, her life flashing before her.

"I couldn't believe that I was letting this white powder control my life," DePola says. "I didn't realize it had turned me into a miserable, mean person."

She finally sobered up, after several attempts at rehab and a stint in a psychiatric hospital, opening the Sunset Park center in 1994 with a business partner — three avenue blocks away from the childhood home of her nightmares.

Today, DePola is a mighty weapon in New York's arsenal of support services.

She has four training schools across the city and state for alcohol and substance abuse counselors to attain their credentials, with upwards of 4,000 graduates and counting. She opened a counseling institute a few years ago at the original Sunset Park site to help people in recovery. And her work is bolstered by thousands of success stories, such as the joyous reunion between a former crack-addict and her 10 children, who were once in foster care but now watched proudly as their mom

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: President and C.E.O.

COMPANY: The Resource Training and Counseling Center

CLAIM TO FAME: "Caring for people who are less fortunate than I am."

FAVORITE PLACE: Work

PERSON I ADMIRE: "Oprah Winfrey because she came from nothing and created her own empire."

MOTTO: "The only person you try to be better than is the person you were yesterday."

graduated from the center — a special occasion she attended in a white wedding dress.

"She told me she wore it because she was married to her new life," says DePola, more than half of whose workers are former addicts or victims of trauma, but all of whom are her devoted fans.

Sarah Schmitt, once a pill-and-booze-soaked corrections officer who runs the 24-hour hotline, says DePola's gut instinct is fearless — and spot-on.

The Woman of Distinction flew into action when a hulking trainee erupted in rage, yelling and slamming his desk, claims Schmitt, who states the 6-foot-plus man towered over DePola, but his anger melted away when she placed her hand on his arm, looked him in the eye, and said, "I understand."

"Donna treated him with dignity," says Schmitt. "She lives beyond a level of courage and generosity that is unlike anything you'd ever see in a person."

Donna Mae DePola has been to purgatory and back for salvation, but she claims it was preordained.

"I've been put on this earth to help others," she says. "And I do it every day with a smile on my face to let people know there is hope for them, as there was for me."

Best Wishes to
Wendy Z. Goldstein

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Heartfelt Congratulations to Irina Roizin, Executive Director of Brighton Ballet Theater & The School of Russian American Ballet for being recognized as the recipient of the 2014 Brooklyn Women of Distinction Award! Your continuous leadership goes above & beyond promoting arts, dance, and culture in our community.

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SUSAN EATON

Fund-raiser boosts hope for bone-disease patients

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Distraught people from Peru, England, and Australia contact Bay Ridge resident Susan Eaton for information and a shoulder to cry on in their battle with multiple hereditary exostoses, a rare bone disease affecting one in 50,000 people, worldwide.

"They don't know what to expect, and they need someone to talk to," says Eaton, who cofounded the M.H.E. Research Foundation because she had nowhere to turn to after her son Vincent was diagnosed at seven months with the incurable medical condition that develops lumps on bones and stunts growth. "I tell them to take life one bump at a time."

Today, the resilient young man — the youngest of Eaton's three children — is a sophomore at Villanova University studying to be an orthopedic surgeon. He has undergone 32 operations and conquered cancer, costing him two ribs after a spur turned malignant.

Vincent's tough mom has played an integral role in his progress, making the day before his surgeries a family party day, while working to support the wider M.H.E. community.

"Life is precious, you have to make the best of whatever it throws your way, and it was our mission to help find a cure," says Eaton, 52, the advocacy and fund-raising arm of the voluntary, charitable organization she cofounded in 2002 with her husband Craig Eaton, chairman of the Brooklyn Republican Party, and Sarah Ziegler, the mother of a child with M.H.E.

She christened the disorder "an orphan disease."

"M.H.E. is not on the radar, and we're trying to get it on the map," says Eaton, whose foundation offers an unprecedented frame of reference for people like Judith Taylor of Australia.

The Perth resident, whose son has coped with M.H.E. for 40 years, located Eaton on the internet last year and claims she has been a source of



Photo by Steve Solomonson

strength in their lonely struggle.

"I had not met any other family who had this disorder before finding Susan," says Taylor. "From one mother to another, she has been an inspiration, and reached out to me and answered many of my concerns — her foundation gives hope to me and my son that one day no other family will have to endure the pain of watching their child suffer."

Eaton's group — the first that crops up when you Google M.H.E. — helps people locate physicians, information, referrals, research updates, and connect with others. It also navigates parents of young children through

what can be grueling school years.

"There might be mobility, pain, fatigue, social, and medical issues that need to be addressed," says Eaton, who was ill prepared for some of them herself.

She was horrified when a physician informed her that Vincent's left arm had stopped growing and that he would need a surgically placed device called an external fixator to regenerate growth — with her as his chief home nurse.

"He told me that I would have to adjust the screws four times a day," she says. "I almost passed out in his office, I was getting sick to my stomach."

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Cofounder and director of fund-raising

COMPANY: M.H.E. Research Foundation

CLAIM TO FAME: "Helping to raise awareness about M.H.E. around the world."

FAVORITE PLACE: "My house, when it is full of family."

PERSON I ADMIRE: "The late Mother Teresa because of her selflessness and willingness to help others."

MOTTO: "Live in the moment."

Eaton panned her squeamishness, as she probed the facts.

"I did my own research, and I tell others to do the same — they have to let doctors know that they are knowledgeable, and ask about options to surgery," she says. "I make sure they understand that my son's case is an extreme one, and they can't think this is going to happen to them or their child."

She coordinates her fund-raisers — organized with help from Vincent, and his siblings Christopher, 25, and Danielle, 22 — with the same intelligence, naming them "Funtasias."

Last year's benefit at El Caribe Country Club in Mill Basin came on the heels of multiple deaths in Eaton's family, but provided a grand time for attendees and raised \$45,000.

"My beef with good causes is if you're pulling people out of their homes and charging them a fixed amount of money, then you can't make them sit there and listen to speech after speech," she says. "When I do a fund-raiser, I want it to be fun."

Susan Eaton's heartbreaking odyssey to a tenuous place is not for the faint hearted, and her attitude is no less compelling.

"At times, there's a thundercloud hanging over us, but falling apart has never been an option," she says.



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CATHOLIC GUARDIAN
SOCIETY
AND HOME BUREAU

ARLENE FIGARO

Principal delivers a lesson in good citizenship

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Visitation Academy was once an inebriates' home where General Ulysses S. Grant — overly fond of the bottle — came to dry out after the Civil War, but supporters toast the Bay Ridge school these days for its squeaky-clean academic record and sober neighborliness.

Credit that to Arlene Figaro, a Visitation alumna who scarcely imagined that one day she would become its First Lady.

"I walked these floors as a child and I wasn't the smartest one in the class, but look who got brought back to be the principal," laughs Figaro, who has made Visitation a highly ranked school since her appointment in 2001.

It is routinely selected for prestigious financial aid awards, such as the Marymount Butler and Sacred Heart Headmistress scholarships, and Figaro's students make all the top schools, with even average pupils topping the honor roll.

Yet the notable credentials are just part of their overall education, claims the Woman of Distinction, who refers frequently to the motto of Visitation's patron, St. Francis de Sales: "Be who you are, and be it well."

"I teach my girls to believe in themselves and to have confidence, which is 50 percent of the work," says the lifelong, "50-plus-year-old" Ridgite, whose work is steeped in the waterfront community first developed in the late 1800s as a summer playground for the privileged, earning it the nickname of "Brooklyn's Gold Coast."

The sprawling enclave remains as distinctive, today, claims Figaro.

"Some people think we are very transient here and not community-minded," she says. "But Bay Ridge is a like small town, we know our neighbors, we know our schools, and everyone comes together at community meetings looking to help each other."

Figaro has worked at Redeemer St. John Nursery School and St. Finbar School, and cannot walk the streets without running into an acquaintance,



Photo by Steve Solomonson

thanks to her continued efforts to integrate the community.

She is a constant blip on the Ridge radar, whether leading costumed munchkins as grand marshal of the popular Ragamuffin Parade; or helping to launch a pre-school at the former Arabic Lutheran Church; or serving on the board of Fontbonne Hall Academy; or collecting enough presents to fill two trucks for annual toy drives at Fort Hamilton Army Base; or helping the underprivileged through groups such as the Mapleton Kiwanis, Community Mayors, Reaching Out Community Services, and Ronald McDonald House; or raising money to keep unwanted pets away from the slaughter house; or fill-

ing multiple SUVs with personal items for domestic abuse victims; or helping to coordinate autism walks; or assisting gravely injured soldiers through the Wounded Warrior Project.

A school bake sale for Valentine's Day last year raised \$4,000 dollars for the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers and Gary Sinise foundations to help build a smart home for Kensington veteran and triple amputee Bryan Dilberian, who lost both legs and an arm in Afghanistan.

The normally reclusive war hero was so touched by the thoughtful gesture that he came to Visitation to personally thank Figaro and her students, who feted him with patriotic songs and homemade

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Principal

COMPANY: Visitation Academy

CLAIM TO FAME: "Educating children and developing the character to be able to say that I made a difference."

FAVORITE PLACE: Metropolitan Opera House

PERSON I ADMIRE: "Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for her unshakable belief in her own ability to succeed."

MOTTO: "Be who you are, and be it well." — St. Francis de Sales

"From Our Heart to Your Heart" posters.

The magnanimity also moved Fort Hamilton Army Base's voluntary community liaison Larry Morrish, who attended the event.

"It was beyond superb," says Morrish, who claims Figaro is modest about the charitable projects she launches at her school. "Arlene doesn't look for any credit, but she is the most outstanding example of a giving and caring person that you could mention."

After Hurricane Sandy, Visitation raised thousands of dollars for storm victims, finding some of them shelter through local realtors, and bringing several displaced students into the school without charging them tuition, while donating money to overlooked firefighters and security guards at Breezy Point.

Arlene Figaro's intuitive curriculum has made her school as distinctive as its principal, and her academic skills and acts of kindness will resonate for years to come with the students she primes for success and good citizenship.

"It helps children to know there they are a part of something bigger than themselves, that we are all neighbors and if there's anyway we can help you, we are there for you," says Arlene Figaro, delivering a lesson all Brooklynites can be proud to learn.



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ANNETTE FISHER

Fiscal expert has a file of charitable works

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Loan officer Annette Fisher was helping a wheelchair-bound senior with her reverse mortgage application, when she noticed the woman didn't have a ramp outside her house.

"I saw that she couldn't get in and out," says Fisher, also a certified senior advisor, who arranged for the client to have a temporary slope installed instead of hassling with the permits and high costs of obtaining a permanent one.

"Just because you're in a wheelchair doesn't mean that you should just wither away," says the Sea Gate resident, whose free advocacy for the golden generation flies in the face of financial cut-throats out to make a buck instead of a difference.

Fisher's work as a loan originator and a real estate agent has been a springboard for the referral service network she formed in 2010 to connect seniors and their caregivers with legal, medical, real estate, home care, and other vital resources in their community.

Clients of People Empowering Seniors Independence and Dignity — a membership-free offshoot of Fisher's elder-friendly marketing and advertising company Golden Maturity — have become like family to her.

A lonely widower having trouble coming to terms with his grief stopped going out because he felt there was nowhere for him to go, until Fisher alerted him to a senior center five blocks away, with a slew of activities designed to give him a new lease on life.

"It helped to put him in a different frame of mind," she says. "If you can keep people going and being active, it gives them a reason to live."

Another client, a 90-year-old woman with two accountants, hadn't claimed her federal discounts for 25 years, until Fisher took the unusual step of looking over her tax bill and informed her that she was eligible for enhanced benefits through a state tax program for qualifying senior homeowners.

"Nobody had filled out that part of the form for her," says the honoree,



Photo by Steve Solomonson

53, who rallies clients at monthly networking meetings she coordinates at assisted living facilities and restaurants, including Cebu Bar and Bistro in Bay Ridge, and at the seminars, expos, and senior appreciation days she holds throughout the year with other elder-care groups.

Fisher's efforts to improve the lives of elders include creating WalletICE, a free, potentially life-saving, wallet-

sized card containing the carrier's emergency contact, medical, and living-wish information, and publishing "Seniors Get Your Ducks in a Row," an advice and information book with tips from a dietician, an elder-care attorney, a realtor, and a cyber expert, among other industry professionals.

Her work is as tireless as it is unpredictable.

Fisher has grieved with clients, been

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Loan originator, real estate agent, and company founder.

COMPANY: Golden Maturity, Inc.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Educating seniors about their right to a better and more dignified life."

FAVORITE PLACE: The beach

PERSON I ADMIRE: "My mother Joyce Soden because she never gives up."

MOTTO: "We can't become who we want to be by remaining who we are."

there for caregivers grappling with the fate of a loved one on life support, and battled greedy tradesmen on behalf of helpless seniors on a fixed income.

Kensington resident Lydia Samuels, 79, was at her wit's end when the contractor remodeling her kitchen did a shoddy job, leaving the trim work unfinished, the moldings improperly installed, and piles of debris scattered everywhere.

Fisher was having none of it.

She told the contractor to finish the job or she would report him — forthwith — to the Department of Consumer Affairs and the district attorney's office.

The contractor stepped up and fixed the problems within a week, claims Samuels.

"Annette was wonderful, who else are you going to get to do things like that for you?" says the senior. "Nobody!"

Annette Fisher, once a successful graphic artist, switched careers because she longed for more job satisfaction. The Woman of Distinction has fulfilled that wish and then some, parlaying her entrepreneurial spirit into multiple premiums and bonuses for a community often overlooked.

"Seniors appreciate what you do for them," she says. "And I tell them I am there for them till the day they are no longer on the planet."



Tiffany Raspberry, President
Brooklyn Women of Distinction Honoree

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LILIYA GELFAND

Tour operator goes the distance for her travelers

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Brighton Beach tour operator Liliya Gelfand was traveling to Cape Cod in the 1990s with 50 tourists on a Fourth of July trip when the bus broke down on Interstate 95, infuriating passengers whose worst nightmare had come alive in the dark ages before cell phones or the internet.

"They were yelling at me and threatening to sue me," claims the New Tours founder who braced her nerves, pulled into a nearby rest stop, and spent the next several hours depositing a small fortune into a coin-operated phone box to call for help, while keeping her angry travelers at bay with promises of free tours to make up for the inconvenience.

A repair crew finally arrived and fixed the bus, just in time for them to make the fireworks display.

Gelfand spent the rest of the trip taking the group on a comprehensive tour of the historic peninsula, stopping to sight-see, visit museums, and whale watch, while trekking to Plymouth, Martha's Vineyard, Sandwich, and other time-honored towns, sharing juicy tidbits about their illustrious pasts.

On the trip home she reminded the travelers to call her office and book their free tours, but to her surprise they refused.

"They told me to forget about the compensation because they had enjoyed such a good time," says Gelfand, 60, whose master skills ended up being her saving grace.

Successful tour guides must be walking encyclopedias with a keen knowledge of the history, culture, customs, theater, architecture, and famous people associated with a destination, while being friendly, prepared for emergencies, and on the edge of the latest news and information, she claims.

"He or she cannot know less than the people on the bus," says the former tour guide who formed her company in 1991, shortly after moving to the U.S. from the former Soviet Union with her husband Mikhail, ahead of the huge wave of Russian-speaking immigrants



Photo by Steve Solomonson

who came to Brooklyn after the socialist state collapsed, dubbing Brighton Beach "Little Odessa."

The Woman of Distinction's plan to educate and enlighten the settlers about their new homeland with coast-to-coast tours was an ambitious one because she was a recent immigrant herself.

She joined multiple libraries, read everything she could get her hands on, and took night college courses to learn about American history, politics, and traditions.

"I started my education all over again," says Gelfand, whose hard work paid off.

Today, she is the proud recipient of industry awards, including one

from Borough Hall; New Tours serves more than 30,000 tourists annually; its award-winning trips include tours to Boston, Niagara Falls, Florida, California, Las Vegas, Alaska, and Canada; and her clients — some of whom have met and married on her getaways — return with friends and family.

"I feel very good about that because this is what we are working for, to make people happy," says Gelfand, also a community philanthropist whose charitable works include sponsoring events for the New York Association of Holocaust Survivors and the American Association of Invalid and Veterans of World War II, and participating in annual toy and food drives.

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Founding president and C.E.O.

COMPANY: New Tours

CLAIM TO FAME: "To make people happy traveling around the world."

FAVORITE PLACE: New York

PERSON I ADMIRE: "My good friend Nelly Braginsky, who tragically lost her son Alex on 9-11, for her strong spirit."

MOTTO: "Get up and go."

Raisa Chernina, founder of the BeProud Foundation, marvels at her selflessness.

"Liliya lost a lot of things during Hurricane Sandy, but she said to me, 'Do you know anyone who needs anything?'" says Chernina, adding that Gelfand donates tours as prizes for her group's annual "Your Highness Grandmother" pageants, and looks out for people in dire straits.

"Liliya spent hours last year helping to package 600 parcels of food for our Passover food distribution," says Chernina. "She is a kind and generous person, and you can always count on her to help."

Gelfand's savvy skills have also kept her business afloat over the years, as she successfully steered New Tours through devastating events that can spell doom for the tourist trade, including terror attacks, health epidemics, political unrest, and natural disasters.

She lost a tour bus, and computer and phone access to Sandy, but continued working from her brother's home.

"We are like the stock market, everything affects our business," says Liliya Gelfand, who toils around the clock to accommodate global time zones, but refuses to retire because wanderlust speaks to her soul.

"Traveling makes people think differently, it brings families closer together, and it fills the heart," she says. "What is better than that?"



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Kyle, Kevin, Terence and
Michael*

WENDY Z. GOLDSTEIN

Hospital boss heals ailing institution

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Wendy Z. Goldstein had the odds stacked against her when she was appointed president and C.E.O. in 2001 of Lutheran Medical Center — a community teaching hospital in Sunset Park, and the heart of the Lutheran HealthCare system.

The staff was leaving. The board was aging. The quality was slipping. The finances were crashing. And she was a practicing Jew tasked with reviving a Christian-based health facility languishing on the site of a former abandoned factory that trustees had bought for a buck from Mayor John Lindsay in the 1970s.

"It was an institution that had largely lost its way," says Goldstein, the former director of Mount Sinai Hospital with more than 30 years experience at some of the country's finest academic medical establishments, including Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and New York University Medical Center. "It had all the elements of success, but there was no vision for how to bring them together."

One hurdle was restoring Lutheran's relationship with the church. The sole corporate member was distanced from the hospital due to the borough's dwindling Lutheran community — a far cry from 1883 when Sister Elizabeth Fedde of Norway founded the facility to serve Scandinavian Lutherans who dominated Sunset Park and christened its areas "Little Norway" and "Finntown."

Goldstein wanted to make Lutheran more than a word on the awning.

She began visiting church officials at the presiding synod in Chicago, instituted a community service awards program commemorating the foundress, and participated in local events such as the Norwegian Day Parade in Bay Ridge, waving to crowds from atop a decorated Lutheran float.

Her unprecedented creation of the position of senior vice president for mission and spiritual care helped to launch a faith-health coalition of more than 50 congregations, a counseling center and a parish nurse program, in addition to



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

annual Mission Week celebrations.

The new office is a major artery in the neighborhood, claims Bishop Robert Rimbo, head of the Metropolitan New York Synod and a Lutheran board member.

"It really is the life of the community," says the clergyman, who credits Goldstein with working steadfastly to unify the church and Lutheran HealthCare.

He recalls being pleasantly surprised at how many of the workers she knew by name when they walked along the hospital corridor last year.

"That demonstrated to me Wendy's ability to connect with the people, as well as her amazing ability to know what is going on in the institution," he says.

The Woman of Distinction's other goal

has been to make Lutheran the provider of choice.

"I had to find a niche," says Goldstein, 62, a resident of Scarsdale, N.Y. "Why come to Lutheran, what will Lutheran do better than anybody else in Brooklyn?"

Her "aha" moment came during a lecture she attended on using cultural competence as a business method.

"I realized the way to distinguish yourself is not to appeal to one ethnic group, but to create an environment that all ethnic groups can feel good in," says the honoree, who oversaw Lutheran's complete transformation, securing more than \$200 million in state, federal, and other funds, while appointing a vice president for cultural competence to serve the area's Ortho-

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: President and C.E.O.

COMPANY: Lutheran HealthCare

CLAIM TO FAME: "I became the first woman vice president at Memorial Sloan Kettering at 29 with two year-old twins."

FAVORITE PLACE: "Anywhere with my kids!"

PERSON I ADMIRE: "Margaret Sanger who, as a mother of three, fought to legalize birth control and whose efforts led to the founding of Planned Parenthood."

MOTTO: "Sacred Cows make the best hamburgers."

dox Jews, Latinos, Arabs, and Chinese populations.

The results were astounding: Lutheran's multi-lingual medical staff increased by 125 percent, and its hospital discharges by more than 30 percent. Dozens of ambulatory sites were added. The Chinese inpatient health care units are Brooklyn's first, offering round-the-clock care by staff trained in the beliefs and customs of their patients, with authentic Chinese meals prepared by a Chinese cook. A \$93-million makeover overhauled the hospital, the core of Lutheran's network of family health centers, a nursing home, a community care organization, and senior housing. And Albany decided to keep Lutheran open, while closing 107-year-old Victory Memorial Hospital in Bay Ridge.

The recovery was divinely inspired, according to Wendy Z. Goldstein.

"Everyone is put on the earth to make it better," she says. "My faith's tradition of 'Tikun Olam' — 'to heal the world' — enabled me to steer a course back toward the church."

Today, thanks to her determined efforts, the once-flatlining Christian hospital is alive and well, with a thriving corporate strategy and a core mission rededicated to its inclusivity.

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MONIQUE GREENWOOD

Innkeeper jump-starts a community renaissance

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Lewis Avenue, between MacDonough and Decatur streets was prime sirloin for drug-dealers and petty crooks in 2000, when innkeeper Monique Greenwood — a former editor-in-chief of Essence magazine — bought a pair of mixed-use buildings on the Bedford-Stuyvesant block, and jump-started a small-business revolution that transformed the sagging strip into a bustling commercial corridor and fueled a neighborhood renaissance.

Greenwood, who owns and operates Akwaaba Mansion Bed & Breakfast on MacDonough Street, became a landlord on a mission to reclaim the historic area which birthed the Teddy bear, established one of the nation's first free-black communities, and was once a vacation destination for wealthy financiers, but now had fallen prey to urban decay.

She scrutinized tenants looking to launch businesses in her storefronts, insisting they open choice shops, live in the vicinity, and commit to hiring locally.

"I wasn't looking for a liquor store," she says. "I wanted well-rounded, small businesses that gave neighborhood kids a shot at work experience, and where you didn't have to pass money through a bullet-proof glass."

A book store, an antique shop, a coffee house, and a restaurant opened within a year, igniting the change that Greenwood — author of the self-help book "Having What Matters: The Black Woman's Guide to Creating the Life You Really Want" (HarperCollins 2001) — had hoped for.

The Woman of Distinction — on a roll — helped to create the Shops of Lewis Avenue Merchants Association and served on Community Board 3. She instituted sidewalk soirees that extended four blocks away to Halsey Street, and started annual Christmas tree lightings at Fulton Park, once the blighted playground of junkies and crack peddlers.

Marlene Calixte, owner of Marlene Hair Stylist on Lewis Avenue, says she looks forward to attending the Yuletide celebrations, and claims Greenwood has re-energized the area.



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

"Monique started the changes here because she wasn't afraid to buy the buildings," says Calixte. "Before you would have to look over your shoulder, but now people are not afraid of walking on the block."

City Hall and the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce recognized Greenwood's work, hailing her with small business of the year awards.

"It was a way of acknowledging the community as well," she says. "Because you cannot do that on your own, without the customers and the community where you operate."

Greenwood, 54, is undeniably a smooth operator, but one without the airs and graces of a former media mover-shaker who has directed Queen Latifah and Denzel Washington on cover shoots, and set

such lasting publishing trends as Essence's popular "Street Scene" series about looks sported by real black women.

She splits her time these days between her pair of bed and breakfasts in New Jersey, another one in Washington, D.C., her deluxe resort and spa in Pennsylvania, and her Brooklyn inn — an Italianate villa she opened in 1995, restoring its architectural details, including 14-foot ceilings and ornate fireplaces, as part of a decor combining Afro-elegance with antiques.

Greenwood named her empire Akwaaba — "welcome" in Twi, a language of Ghana — because it spoke to the ambience she sought for her guests.

"'Welcome' is the most hospitable word you can use," says the hotelier, who cooks meals, ensures the rooms are ap-

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Owner and "chief enjoyment officer"

COMPANY: Akwaaba Bed & Breakfast Inns

CLAIM TO FAME: "Living my best life and inspiring others to do the same."

FAVORITE PLACE: "My own bed, where I rarely sleep!"

PERSON I ADMIRE: "My daughter Glynn Pogue because her passion, compassion, and positive spirit give me faith in the next generation."

MOTTO: "Make it happen."

pointed with rose petals, champagne, music, and a cozy bubble bath, and even shovels snow off patrons' cars to make their stays memorable.

The attention has not gone unnoticed.

"I love this place, it's my home away from home when I'm in the city," enthused hip-hop artist and actor Mos Def on her website, after a visit to her Brooklyn inn.

Another guest discovered the spectacular scope of the Akwaaba experience, when he called to say he wanted to propose to his girlfriend at one of Greenwood's bed and breakfasts.

"I told him we'd make it a real surprise, and that he should pack her bags and bring one of her formal gowns," says the honoree, who set up a private dining room and cooked the sweethearts a sumptuous steak dinner.

Monique Greenwood's belief in neighborliness has expanded her business holdings, and helped to position Bedford-Stuyvesant for success and prosperity — but it hasn't been all about dollars and cents.

"There's a different way business gets done when you know you're serving your next door neighbor or the lady around the corner," says the industrialist, whose vision for living well has improved countless lives and reclaimed a community.



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LISA JONES

Advocate turns storm warrior after Hurricane Sandy

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Shattered, sobbing people poured into the trailer near MCU Park like a post-apocalyptic human river after Hurricane Sandy, astonishing Coney Island relief worker Lisa Jones who was new on the job and racing around the clock to help residents who had lost everything.

"It was like a war zone, and everyone was in survival mode," says Jones, director of Brooklyn Community Services' storm assistance team. "People didn't have power, water, food, or clothing, and they needed a place to go to get direction."

Jones' personal history — a tapestry of tragedy and triumph — gave context to the hardships ahead.

She had overcome a troubled childhood, buried more than a dozen teens as a former community organizer with an anti-gun violence program in Red Hook and Crown Heights, and she was still recuperating from a recent life-threatening illness.

"I've seen a lot of grief in my life, and as a result I see the glass half-full all the time," says the former co-director of the Red Hook Community Center Beacon program and ex-program consultant for Girl Scouts U.S.A. "You can take a disaster and say, 'What can I do to make this better?'"

The positive attitude helped as she combed the People's Playground with her workers, canvassing door-to-door, entering pitch-black high rises and basements with flashlights, and reaching out to schools, churches, and businesses, to distribute basic essentials, supplies, and token cash, while navigating the catastrophic problems of the crowds that showed up at the trailer and at the community rallies she organized.

Their stories were haunting.

A group of Mexican day laborers, who lost their livelihoods because floods swept their tools away, revealed a pressing new need when they told her that Sandy had emotionally scarred their families.

"Their kids were afraid to take showers and hid every time it rained," says Jones, who brought in counselors to



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

help them and others experiencing similar stresses work through their ordeals.

The Woman of Distinction is a guardian angel, claims wheelchair-bound Beverly Williams, who has Lou Gehrig's Disease and was trapped in her beachfront house for weeks before contacting Jones, who immediately rushed to her aid.

"I lost everything, but Lisa came, put her arms around me, and told me, 'Don't worry, we'll take care of you,'" says Williams, adding Jones gave her a bed, clothing, silverware, and crockery, and helped her to apply for expanded federal

funds and secure another home, while visiting her regularly after she settled in.

"Lisa gave me my life back," says the appreciative woman, who received the group's inaugural Human Spirit Award — an uplifting reminder of a terrible time she proudly displays on her new coffee table. "It's one thing for someone to give you things, but it's another for a person to actually pick up your spirit."

Yet, more than a year later, many storm victims are still sleeping on floors in unrepaired homes, claims Jones, 50, also executive director of the Astella Development Corporation.

"As time passes, more and more ser-

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Director of Coney Island programs; executive director

COMPANY: Brooklyn Community Services; Astella Development Corporation

CLAIM TO FAME: "I've worked hard to help improve the lives of others."

FAVORITE PLACE: The beach

PERSON I ADMIRE: "My grandmother Lilly Mae Johnson for seeing the good in all."

MOTTO: "Tragedy is an opening for some good to come."

vices disappear," says the urban warrior, an accomplished metal sculptor working to rekindle the flame with Brooklyn Community Services' new One Brooklyn Community campaign, and the group's merger with Astella.

"We need to have a collective consciousness so that we can understand that no one need is greater than another, and that we can all come together and make some positive change," says Jones, a recipient of service awards from the Coney Island Community Council and New York Disaster Interfaith Services.

Her positive changes have healed and uplifted the borough through such outreach efforts as mural beautifications and new programs for youngsters in need of support services.

Two brothers unfamiliar with cameras ended up being natural shutterbugs after attending a photography class she launched at the Citizens Committee of New York City, with one sibling receiving a camp scholarship and the other selling his masterpiece in a traveling exhibition, inspiring everyone involved with the project.

"There was a sense of belonging, and a sense of joy and accomplishment," says Lisa Jones, who has succeeded in achieving those lofty ideals — time and again — for people in need.

REV. DR. EMMA JORDAN-SIMPSON

Clergywoman fights for youth with her faith-powered message

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

The Rev. Dr. Emma Jordan-Simpson was shocked to learn that a playground at the city's Tompkins Houses in Bedford-Stuyvesant was built like a penitentiary, with the word "jail" printed brazenly on its prison-orange jungle gym.

The executive pastor of the Concord Baptist Church of Christ and the former head of the Children's Defense Fund New York went to take a look for herself.

"It was intentionally designed like a jail!" says Jordan-Simpson, who was incensed to see the janitor giving it a lick of polish. "He was shining it up and buffing it."

She snapped pictures and spoke to distraught grandmothers who said they had tried to remove the offensive word for the past eight years, but the city only repainted it and scolded them for defacing public property.

"It was part of the cradle to prison pipeline, but nobody was paying attention because nobody listens to poor people," says Jordan-Simpson, who knew the diabolical statistics — one in three black, and one in six Latino, boys risked landing in prison during their lifetimes.

The clergywoman called Brooklyn Community Foundation founding president Marilyn Gelber, who contacted the Daily News, which ran a front-page story embarrassing city officials into removing the sign and eventually redesigning the playground.

Yet the mountain may not have been moved, if not for the Woman of Distinction's red alert.

"Emma has both a generosity of spirit and a strong and powerful voice when it comes to defending the interests of young people growing up in Brooklyn," says Gelber, who invited Jordan-Simpson to sit on her advisory committee when the state planned to close upstate detention facilities and transition young people back into the community.

Youth incarceration is an American apartheid that endangers children, leading to marginalized lives and in



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

some cases premature death, according to the honoree, 51, whose own childhood was tumultuous.

She grew up in Newark, N.J. — one of seven children of a single mother who worked two jobs — in a blighted climate that collided with the aftermath of the 1967 Newark riots that left 26 people dead and hundreds injured.

"Hunger, poverty, substandard housing, these issues were my issues," says Jordan-Simpson, who delivered her first sermon at age 17 about the Lord's Prayer to a crowd of rapt youngsters who also came from homes with absentee fathers.

"It was important for me to talk about what it meant to have an 'Our Father' beyond our earthly parents," says Jordan-Simpson, whose prayers have been published by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. "I felt called to help them."

The vocational journey has taken

her through grassroots knolls and international pastures on behalf of under-served children, including leading visits to city youth detention centers with local clergy members, creating the social justice blog "A Voice in Ramah," helping to launch collaborations between aspiring artists and the Brooklyn Academy of Music for the acclaimed DanceAfrica festivals, and addressing social justice issues at Fisk and Columbia universities, while speaking out against structural poverty at the University of Greifswald in Germany.

Poignant, chance moments have stayed with her, such as the trip to a now-defunct detention facility in Crown Heights.

"They brought in a group of young boys and the youngest one was 11 years old, and all I could think about was putting him in jail could not be the best answer we could have for him," says

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Executive pastor

COMPANY: Concord Baptist Church of Christ

CLAIM TO FAME: "I've raised awareness about the cradle to prison pipeline."

FAVORITE PLACE: Prospect Park

PERSON I ADMIRE: "Abolitionist Harriet Tubman because she believed in freedom."

MOTTO: "Teaching others to stand up and fight is the only way our struggle survives." — Ella Baker [1903-1986]

Jordan-Simpson, who has worked to pave a more hopeful way.

She instituted college showers to equip first-generation college students with dorm essentials, as past executive director of Girls Incorporated of New York City.

"They had the grades, they had the scholarships, but they didn't have the basic things like bedding, lamps, and toiletries," she says.

Jordan-Simpson continues to power the next generation at her 167-year-old church, where she is the second woman ever ordained.

When youngsters at Concord's summer Freedom School expressed dismay over education budget cuts, she had them make posters and took them on the subway to rally outside the New York Stock Exchange.

"They marched outside with signs that read, 'I'm a valuable resource' and 'Invest in our future,'" she says. "We educated them on how decisions are made."

America's debate on vulnerable children and the issues they face might confound lesser mortals, but Rev. Dr. Emma Jordan-Simpson meets the maelstrom with a sweet, spiritual message.

"Bring your faith and understand that this is a journey — there is no deadline," she says.

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MARTHA KAMBER

YWCA exec restores grace to abused women

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

The construction helmet on Martha Kamber's desk bears witness to her work as the tough-as-nails chief executive officer of the YWCA of Brooklyn, an organization dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and human dignity, but one that had become a weary warrior — until she came along.

The hard hat symbolizes Kamber's struggle to regenerate and wrest the financially strapped Boerum Hill facility from the clutches of greedy developers, some of them willing to shell out \$25 million for the crumbling, 11-story structure built in 1927 that contained a women's residence, an art deco theater, office space, a gym, and a pool.

She arrived seven years ago to find the place in shambles. The roof leaked. The pool dripped into the day-care room. The gym was failing. And there was no safety system in place.

"By day four, I was pretty sure I had made a mistake," says the social justice and community development advocate, who was not ready for the battle ahead with contractors, architects, and building inspectors. "I knew nothing about boiler issues."

A bigger picture propelled her onwards.

"I was uniquely unqualified, but I believed in the organization," says Kamber, a Sunset Park resident who worried about the 200 low-income women who lived on the top five floors, many of whom were former abuse victims, but all of whom represented generations of destitute females who had sought temporary refuge there over the years or made it their home. "I thought if we put these women out on the street, then who are we, and what is our commitment to our mission?"

The Woman of Distinction's concern was deeply personal.

Kamber grew up in an unstable home where she witnessed her father frequently beat her mother, who sought solace in drugs and alcohol. She was bounced from home to home, and lived



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

on the streets as a teen. And she raised her daughter as a single parent.

"I suffered a lot of the same things as these women," says Kamber, 52, whose first job was in a battered women's shelter at a YWCA in her home state of Massachusetts.

Since then, she has lobbied and rallied on behalf of abused women everywhere, including working extensively to decriminalize sexually trafficked minors forced into prostitution, and marching in Albany last year to promote the Women's Equality Agenda for equal pay, access to reproductive health, and freedom from discrimination and violence.

"I discovered not only a political and social context for the brutality of my childhood, but also an opportunity to turn my experience into something

positive," says Kamber, who rose to the occasion.

She raised \$32 million for a five-year renovation at the YWCA that added four more floors of housing, upgraded the heating system, and installed new windows and eco-friendly fixtures, among other improvements.

She availed the venue free of charge to civic groups, and made it a Community Supported Agriculture site, while bringing in area-based groups, including S.A.G.E., a service and advocacy group for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender elders, and Roulette Intermedium, a music organization that restored the 90-year-old theater.

She also helped to institute a mentorship program for women entrepreneurs with merchants along Atlantic Avenue, as a member of the belt's busi-

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: C.E.O.

COMPANY: YWCA of Brooklyn

CLAIM TO FAME: "Working for 30 years to level the playing field for women and children."

FAVORITE PLACE: "My garden."

PERSON I ADMIRE: "Late Rep. Shirley Chisholm [1924–2005] because she shattered barriers and opened possibilities for future generations of women leaders."

MOTTO: "You must do the thing you think you cannot do." — Eleanor Roosevelt

ness improvement district.

The bold investments exhilarated the downtrodden, with one former abuse victim realizing her dreams to become a nutritionist after Kamber motivated her to obtain her degree, and arranged employment for her at a hospital.

Once subdued women are expressing themselves, too, some for the first time.

Bernadette McKnight came to the YWCA in 2010 to escape a boyfriend's beatings, and says her watershed moment came when she delivered a eulogy at a memorial Kamber organized for deceased residents last year.

"I used to keep things inside, but I knew all of those women and it made me feel good to be able to share my thoughts about them," she says.

Kamber's love and support has made all the difference in her life, shares McKnight.

"Martha came up to my studio when I moved in, and she hugged and greeted me, and she told me that I wouldn't have to worry about anything anymore — and I haven't," she says.

Consider the glowing words as much a confirmation of Martha Kamber's work to restore grace and dignity to persecuted woman, as the hard hat perched on her desk.

MARTHA'S PLACE

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MELINDA KELLER

Chiropractor inspires others to be the best version of themselves

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Borough Park chiropractor Dr. Melinda Keller was speaking to students at Bishop Kearney High School about spinal health when she adjusted the talk to one of her other specialties — self-improvement.

"I spoke about chiropractic for about six minutes and spent the next 30 minutes talking about positive attitude, self-esteem, setting goals, and visualization because when you see something in your mind you can attract it into your life," says the founder of the Brooklyn Spine Center. "I wanted the students to move towards becoming their best selves."

Keller is a dab hand at realigning youth visions into realities.

She helped to institute a self-empowerment program for teens in foster care based on the C.A.N.I. philosophy of constant and never-ending improvement, as a board member at the Angel Guardian Home.

Youngsters were able to dream up, set, and achieve their goals, and be rewarded with prizes donated by area merchants, says the Woman of Distinction, who has dedicated her life to helping people become a better version of themselves, her generosity of spirit compressed in her work and deeds — a dual force that has made her a neighborhood healer and a community benefactor.

Keller donates annual scholarships — anonymously — to underprivileged students at four Brooklyn dance schools. She has traveled to Long Island to give complimentary spine adjustments to retired nuns in their mother houses. She inserts quarters for strangers in their expired parking meters — "just because." And she coaches a school basketball league on Staten Island, motivating hoopsters to visualize a slam dunk, and then go for the winning shot.

"I like to give back because I am healthy, blessed, love my life, and love what I do," says the wife and mother of three school-age children.

But her commitment to well-being has a herniated past.



Photos by Steve Solomonson

Keller became a chiropractor — a health care practitioner specializing in a drug-free, hands-on approach to spinal care — because she witnessed the epic failures of traditional therapies as a child.

"I grew up with a sick mother who was hospitalized more than she wasn't, and I had a yearning for people to be healthy," says the honoree, 56, who has enabled the wheelchair-bound to walk again, and alleviated the symptoms of asthma, insomnia, and others suffering from maladies seemingly unrelated to the spine, through chiropractic — an ancient medical discipline Hippocrates promoted to improve and strengthen the tubular bundle of nervous tissue and support cells that are the brain's

chief messenger to the body.

"Get knowledge of the spine, for this is the requisite for many diseases," the famous Greek physician wrote in 500 BC.

Yet, conventional medicine offers a costly and oftentimes needless route to vertebral wellness, according to dynamicchiropractic.com.

Medicare and Medicaid expenses for non-surgical and surgical back problems cost taxpayers a whopping \$3.8 billion last year, while up to 40 percent of spine surgeries may be unnecessary, reports the industry website.

Chiropractic is not a magic pill, says Keller, but people should be mindful of its significant capabilities before going under the knife.

"If there is a natural treatment that is

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Chiropractor

COMPANY: Brooklyn Spine Center

CLAIM TO FAME: "Inspiring others to be the best version of themselves."

FAVORITE PLACE: The ocean

PERSON I ADMIRE: "Hillary Rodham Clinton for her ability to rise above adversity, and her choice to work tirelessly."

MOTTO: "A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle."

very inexpensive, that goes to the cause of the problem with no risk of anesthesia and surgery, then everyone should explore it and see if they are a candidate," says the chiropractor, whose appointment book reads like a who's who of luminaries.

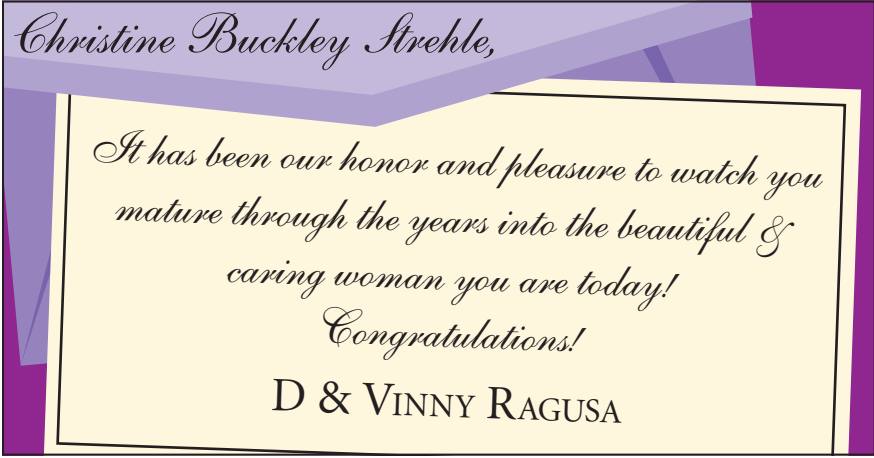
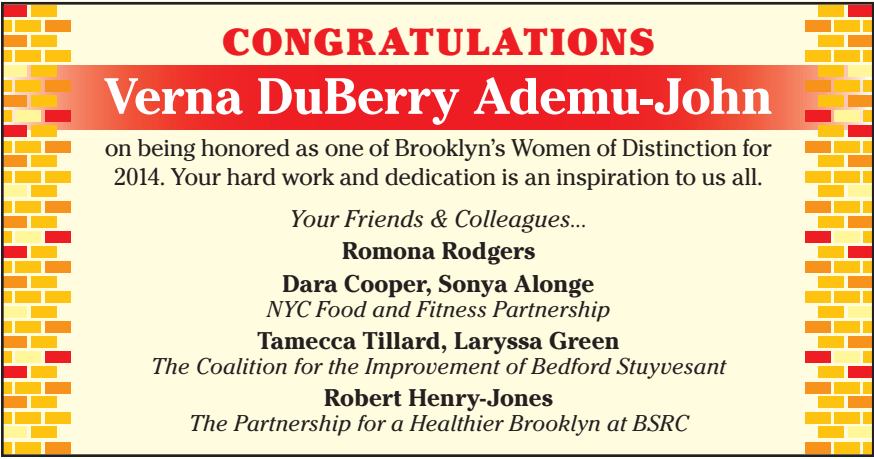
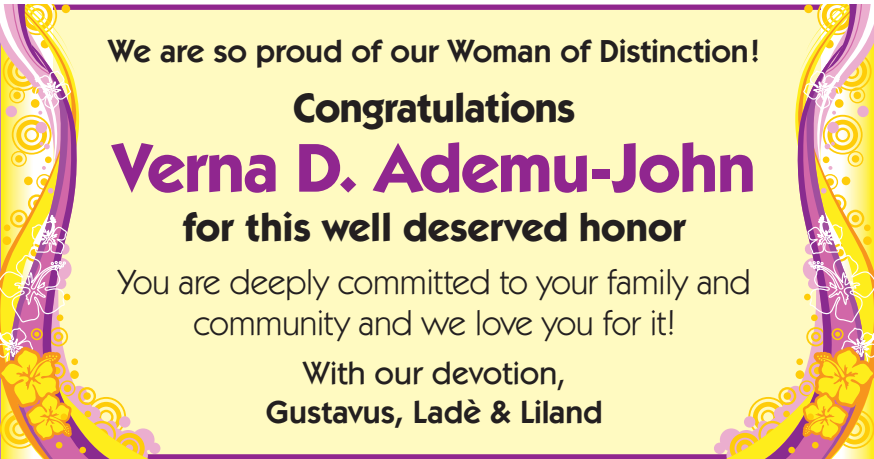
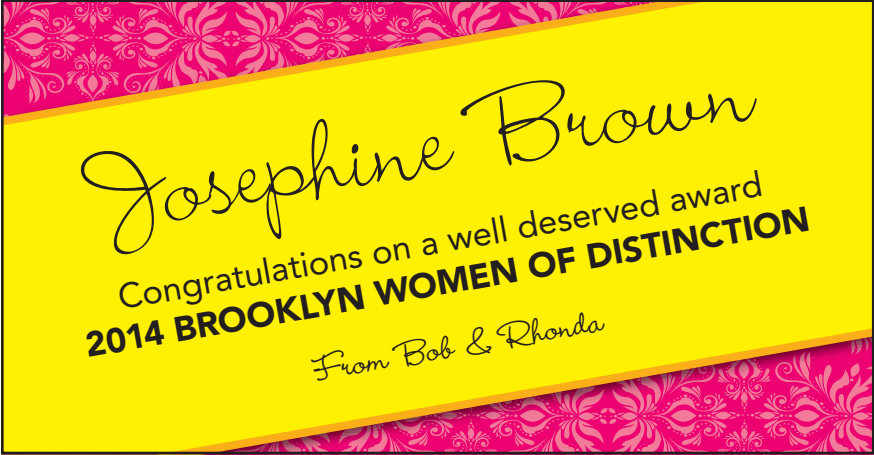
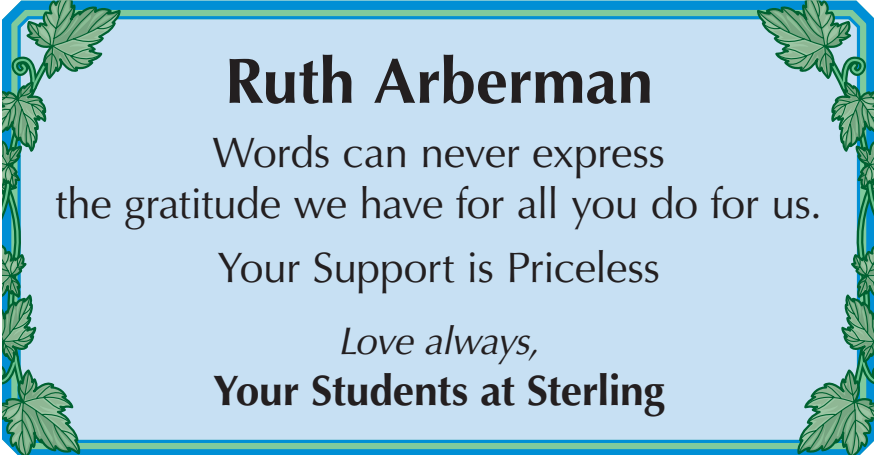
Guardian Angels founder and media personality Curtis Sliwa is her patient, as is prominent Bay Ridge cardiologist Dr. Robert Zaloom, whose testimonials are aired in Keller's office.

Zaloom — affiliated with Lutheran Medical Center, and Lenox Hill and Mount Sinai hospitals — suffered from such debilitating back pain that his wife had to help him put his shoes and socks on, until Keller corrected his problem with a course of treatments.

"I was on the floor unable to move because I was in chronic pain every single day," says Zaloom, who returns for routine adjustments, sometimes finding himself sitting next to one of his cardiology patients in the packed waiting room of Keller's 33-year-old practice. "Going to Melinda was life changing for me."

Dr. Melinda Keller is as much a life coach as she is a chiropractor, helping people to coordinate their good health through natural forces.

"The power that made the body heals the body," she says, with the authority of one in the know.



KATHERINE KHATARI

Ridge activist bridges the ethnic gap

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Katherine Khatarı would be named the Hijabed Heroine of Bay Ridge, if she was an action figure.

The Muslim-American activist, who starts her conversations with “Hello, darling,” has saber-rattled with dope-heads, wrestled petty public school officials into submission, and helped to crush the authority of rogue regimes, as a community relations specialist for the Brooklyn district attorney, a member of Community Board 10 — the first ever in a hijab — and a retired mom-and-pop store owner with her pulse on the borough’s grapevine.

Khatari, a former Catholic who converted to Islam, is fearlessly candid about critical issues facing her adopted community.

“We have an epidemic of kids dying in Bay Ridge and everyone is in denial about it,” the 52-year-old mother of six thundered at a drug awareness forum in October. “It’s mostly Arab kids dealing and dying.”

Famously private Arab Americans were moved enough to participate in a candlelit rally she organized that month in memory of an Egyptian-American teen who died from a drug overdose.

Hafida Torres, a Moroccan American who attended the march, attests to Khatari’s far-flung reach.

“Kathy knows everything and everyone, she gets things done, she is an invaluable asset to the whole community,” says Torres, who formed two immigrant advocacy groups with Khatari’s help.

The Woman of Distinction’s methods are not for the timid.

One day last fall, as she walked home along Fifth Avenue lugging groceries, a commotion near 72nd Street stopped her in her tracks.

“I heard a woman screaming and I just took off,” says Khatari, who sped to the intersection to find two brothers she knew duking it out in front of their horrified mother.

One teen, seemingly strung out on drugs, stomped away on the other’s head, while Khatari tried to separate the frenzied pair, ignoring the fists flying in



her face. She ordered the aggressor to leave and told his sibling to go home, but the latter reappeared with a knife just as gun-toting cops arrived, recalls Khatari.

Sandwiched in the mayhem, she hollered to the youth, “Drop the knife before they blow your brains out!” — a warning he quickly heeded.

Khatari’s steel guts were further put to the test after 9-11, leaving her astride two cultures.

She dispatched care parcels to Ground Zero, where cops and firemen in her own family were among the rescue workers. She wore her hijab to interfaith vigils, discovering hope in the crowds that wished her peace. In between, she urged her traumatized children to take the

high road when they were attacked and called terrorists.

“They were getting labeled alongside these lowlifes who did this atrocious act, while I was teaching them to respect people who were hurting,” says Khatari, who couldn’t ignore the rising anti-Arab sentiment.

She gave school officials a piece of her mind when an 11-year-old Arab American boy was suspended for bringing a fart pellet he bought at the corner store to class.

“I thought he was harshly punished because what makes a boy more excited at that age than a stinky, old fart?” says Khatari, who bought a bunch of the pellets from the same store and dumped

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Community relations specialist

COMPANY: Kings County District Attorney’s Office.

CLAIM TO FAME: “Bridging the ethnic gap.”

FAVORITE PLACE: Home

PERSON I ADMIRE: “My uncle Jack Pritchard, one of the most-decorated firemen in FDNY history, for selflessly rescuing people from burning buildings.”

MOTTO: “No guts, no glory.”

them on the desks of baffled school officials.

“I told them the boy had exercised bad judgement, but the bigger issue was what our stores were selling to our kids,” says Khatari, whose action inspired the Parent-Teacher Association to ask the store owner to stop the sales.

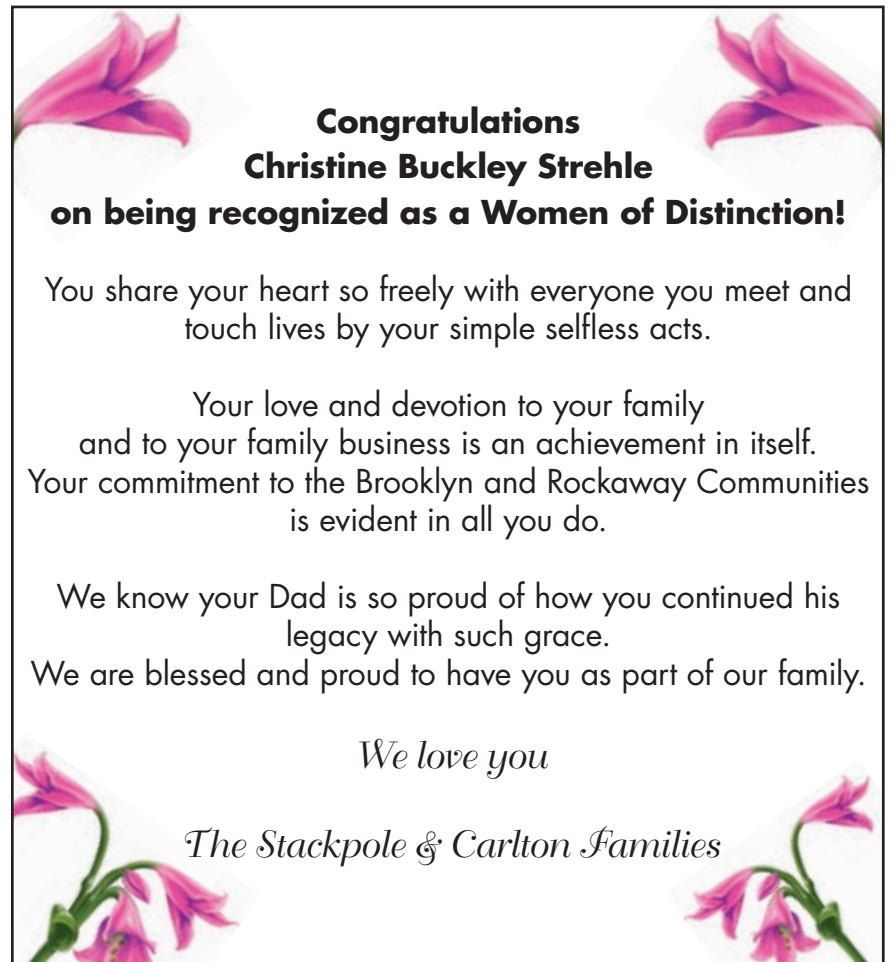
Her hard-nosed efforts have helped to regulate hookah bars, prompted federal authorities to ban chemicals used in synthetic drugs sold over the counter to minors, and delivered victims from the stranglehold of oppressive nations.

In 2011, Khatari was approached by the distraught relatives of an Arab-American woman being abused and held against her will in Yemen. She worked with Rep. Michael Grimm (R-Bay Ridge) to help secure her release, and was surprised when the grateful woman rushed to see her as soon as her plane landed.

“She came straight from the airport, she was so emaciated that another week and she would have passed away,” says Khatari. “She hugged me and cried, and I thought that could have been my daughter.”

The “Hijabed Heroine” has been alternately spat on and glorified in her fight for a better Brooklyn, but her driving force has remained unchanged.

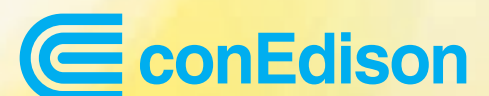
“You try to do what’s right,” says Katherine Khatarı, speaking her mind — as usual.



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COMPANIES**



JOAN KRYSTAL-LEVY

Social worker and professor embraces dual careers

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

A student of adjunct professor Joan Krystal-Levy at the Touro College Graduate School of Social Work was so disheartened about a problem on her field assignment that she came to class wanting to quit the program, abiding the lesson silently.

"I was going to chuck the whole thing and just give up," says the working mom of six, who requested anonymity because of her sensitive field cases.

An e-mail the next morning from her instructor flabbergasted her. "Joan wrote, 'You seemed quiet in class, is something bothering you?'" she says. "I was so taken aback by her caring."

Krystal-Levy — a licensed social worker from Marine Park and a Touro alumna — kept a vigil over her student for the next several weeks with a flurry of encouraging phone calls and e-mails.

"She let me know that dropping out wasn't an option," says the pupil, who was motivated enough to resume her studies. "Joan stands out as someone who really cares, and that's refreshing."

Krystal-Levy is among a rare breed of professionals with dual careers, and she employs her Midas touch with equal aplomb as director of social services at the Sephardic Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Bensonhurst, where neglected caregivers are among her chief concerns.

"When someone is in here because they suffer from dementia and can no longer be cared for at home, the family suffers great guilt in making that decision," she says.

One caregiver was so conflicted over putting his mother in the nursing home that he wished she would pass away, until Krystal-Levy reconciled his shame.

"I was able to make him understand that he was not a bad son because he was making the only decision that could be made," she says.

Another guardian, irked that his ailing father was selling his car to a stranger instead of offering it to his grandson, began venting about unresolved childhood issues, until Krystal-Levy counseled him and helped him to reconnect



Photo by Steve Solomonson

with his dad.

"I made it okay for him to be vulnerable," says the honoree, who is as conscientious off the clock.

One evening she was leaving for the day, when she saw the daughter of a heart-attack patient waiting in front of the facility. She approached the woman and learned that her mother was being re-admitted by ambulance, but was worried that her non-resuscitation directive might not be honored if she died during the night.

Krystal-Levy returned to her office and made the arrangements.

"I didn't wait until the next day because I recognized the importance of her wishes," she says.

The attention to duty can be traced to her unconventional childhood.

Krystal-Levy moved into her maternal grandmother's home with her mother and her sister Madelyn after her parents divorced, although her father remained a constant, devoted presence. She realized it was the quality of life within the home and not the quantity of parents who lived together that influenced the child, she claims, finding herself in the role of peacekeeper and caregiver of three generations of women.

"I was like a social worker," she says. "Someone who knew that the solution is only a good one if it doesn't destroy the person's spirit."

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Director of Social Services; adjunct professor

COMPANY: Sephardic Nursing and Rehabilitation Center; Touro College Graduate School of Social Work

CLAIM TO FAME: "The ability to listen and hear what is not said."

FAVORITE PLACE: Sedona, Ariz.

PERSON I ADMIRE: "My sister Madelyn Hill, the smartest, most ethical, and most spirited person, I know; she keeps me strong and smiling."

MOTTO: "If God leads you to it, He will lead you through it."

Yet her own resolve imploded when her husband died unexpectedly in 2003.

"I was left in shock and despair," says the woman, whose sister — her "rock" — helped her work through her grief and persuaded her to return to school for her master's degree and license.

Krystal-Levy studied full time, worked full time, and graduated on the Dean's list with a 4.0 grade point average, eventually finding a second chance at love with a man named Michael.

The Woman of Distinction has continued to help others, through it all.

A homeless man she gave a coat and a blanket to informed her that "another very nice woman" was feeding him.

"I found out the woman was my mother!" says Krystal-Levy, who routinely carries warm clothing in her trunk to give away to destitute people, and who traveled to the Rockaways and Gerritsen Beach to talk with heartsick volunteers after Hurricane Sandy.

"I went there and focused on the caregivers because they were the people who were not prepared for what they were seeing," she says, her kind gesture speaking volumes about her gift to hear — and acknowledge — the silent pleas of others.

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KATHLEEN LONGO

Estée Lauder exec ensures corporate charity is more than skin deep

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

The Mekong Delta in southwestern Vietnam is a biological treasure trove and the nation's rice basket, but poverty has forced many inhabitants to live with illiteracy, as they struggle to survive in the watery landscape of green fields and sleepy villages, threaded with brown waterways fed by the mighty Mekong River.

Their plight struck a nerve with Bay Ridge resident Kathleen Longo, director of corporate programs at Estée Lauder Companies, after she heard during a chance encounter that struggling families had to pay for books, uniforms, transportation, and school building maintenance costs, while more than 70 percent of school drop-outs were girls because educating boys was considered more valuable.

"Without an education, these girls are vulnerable to human trafficking and other exploitive or abusive situations," says Longo, who brainstormed with the Asia Foundation and her colleagues on the charitable contributions committee to launch the Estée Lauder Scholars Program in 2010.

Four years later, more than 200 young Vietnamese girls are proud Estée Lauder scholars with access to secondary-school education, including Hieu Thi Thanh Tran who was accepted into the delta's An Giang University and hopes to become a teacher, and Vo Thanh Ngoc who once supported herself selling fruit from an old fruit cart her father abandoned when he left home, but is now studying information technology at the college.

Without financial help they could not afford to stay in school, says the senior director of Asia Foundation's Women's Empowerment Program.

"This program is making a dramatic impact on the lives of young Vietnamese women," says Carol Yost. "Kathleen recognized that an education opens up a world of opportunities."

Longo sees it as a matter of birth-right.

"What we so easily take for granted here, they see as a privilege," says



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

the executive, who works with philanthropic and prospective partners seeking support from the cosmetics giant that Queens-raised Estée Lauder created with four skin care products in 1946, famously quipping, "Telephone, Telegraph, Tell-a-Woman," in the belief that if women liked her products they would spread the word.

Today, the company is an international, \$10-billion conglomerate, putting its best face forward for women's health, women's empowerment, education, health and human services, and emergency disaster relief — with Longo helping to lead the way.

She manages myriad projects everyday on behalf of the organizations Estée Lauder supports, including coordinating the company's presence at fund-raising events and evaluating fund-raising requests from philan-

thropic partners, such as the New York Restoration Project to plant one million trees in the city, Project Sunshine that provides recreational and social programs for children facing medical challenges, and the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, established by Evelyn H. Lauder, co-creator of the ubiquitous pink ribbon recognized worldwide as the symbol of breast health.

The 27-year employee keeps ahead of developments with fund-raising, grant-making, and philanthropy certificate programs she takes at New York University, relying on a time-tested blueprint for success.

"My number one goal is to be a good partner to every organization we support," says Longo, who is as proficient talking corporate strategy as she is volunteering at a soup kitchen.

The Woman of Distinction donned a

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Director of corporate programs

COMPANY: Estée Lauder

CLAIM TO FAME: "A chance meeting led to establishing a scholarship program that has provided access to secondary schools for more than 200 girls in Vietnam."

FAVORITE PLACE: Narrows Botanical Gardens

PERSON I ADMIRE: "My late grandmother, Rose Duwe, because she was strong, told it like it was, and family was her priority."

MOTTO: "No ask, no Christmas box."

hair net, apron, and gloves in the winter to serve pancakes, sausages, and oatmeal to the working poor at the New York Common Pantry in Manhattan.

"These men and women were my neighbors, my fellow New Yorkers, and I was reminded that while there are major crises and social issues all around the world, there is still a lot to be done in my own backyard," says Longo, 58, whose company was awarded the pantry's coveted Corporate Partner Award in March. "Volunteering allows me to touch lives in real time."

She also participates in Project Sunshine's Teen Turnaround event, a fun and relaxing Estée Lauder partnership that offers makeovers, mini facials, and nail painting to under-served teenage girls heading into a new school year.

"We do our best to provide them with a bit of a confidence boost, something we've all needed at one point in our lives," says Longo.

Estée Lauder built her empire on the premise that every woman can be beautiful, and career employees like Kathleen Longo are promoting the ideal by helping to change the face of the industry with corporate programs that are more than skin deep.

"A gracious woman attains honor"

Proverbs 11:16 (KJV)

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VICTORIA MITCHELL

A charity worker with a global reach

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Victoria Mitchell noticed her co-workers took six weeks to prepare a financial report, painstakingly documenting the information on index cards, when she was hired in the early 1970s as a secretary for the North American affiliate of World ORT, a Jewish humanitarian organization.

The rookie employee, who was taking night classes in internet technology, took matters into her own hands.

"I went to the executive director and said, 'I want this place computerized,'" says Mitchell, who swiftly installed a software program and completed the next fiscal report within a week.

Word spread of Mitchell's resourcefulness, and she was asked to run as a union shop steward — a notion she rebuffed initially.

"I knew nothing about unions," says Mitchell, who changed her mind after hearing a union president speak at a meeting of Local 107, an amalgam of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees representing fund-raising workers for the State of Israel, the fight against anti-Semitism, and groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense Fund.

"She was a real woman of substance, I thought I could learn a lot from her," says Mitchell, who ran and was elected unanimously, winning one of her first cases on behalf of a co-worker who once balked at giving Mitchell — a Jamaican American — Passover off because she wasn't Jewish, but now faced discrimination herself for being banned from an ORT convention in California.

"She told me she never thought I would speak out for her, considering how she had treated me," says Mitchell, 52.

Today, the Woman of Distinction is president of the union, a vice president of the presiding District Council 1707 that has lauded her service, and the development administration manager at ORT America, where her award-winning efforts have helped to provide educational and job-training opportunities for students here and overseas — all of



Photo by Stefano Giovannini

it funded by big-hearted ORT members, whose donations include a quarter enclosed in an envelope and a check for \$10 million.

The solidarity fascinates and impels her.

"You need a community to build something, and Jews help each other," says Mitchell, who has traveled to Israel to visit child bomb victims in ORT-funded hospitals. "What they can't do with their money, they do with their time."

She has fund-raised to create a pair of Bramson ORT colleges in Brooklyn and Queens and a science and technology school in Brazil, while bringing high-tech classrooms to Israel and vocational

job training for orphaned youngsters in Namibia, among other philanthropic acts.

The Woman of Distinction is as much of a humanitarian in her off hours. She is founder of the Vickie Event Planning and Production company, and spends her profits cooking, baking, and arranging parties — even weddings — free of charge for neighbors in need.

She is a board member of Children of Jamaica Outreach where she has raised money for the Alpha Boys' Home, and the Marigold Child Care Center, in addition to providing wheelchairs for physically handicapped youth and completing a children's library.

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Development administration manager

COMPANY: ORT America

CLAIM TO FAME: "Helping to reduce the suffering of children."

FAVORITE PLACE: "My home in Jamaica."

PERSON I ADMIRE: "Author and poet Maya Angelou because she is a woman of substance."

MOTTO: "The best way to find oneself is to lose yourself in the service of others." — Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

The honoree and other group members went to Jamaica last year to present \$16,000 worth of scholarships, four computers, new clothing, and kitchen appliances to parishes and orphanages in Kingston — the visit captured by a besotted TV cameraman who requested the gig because he had grown up an orphan.

Mitchell was overwhelmed by the positive response.

"Everybody had given up on these kids, but they were so happy to see us," she says. "At times, I had to leave the room because I was in tears."

Organization founder and president Gary Williams says Mitchell is a team player whose knowledge, experience, and selflessness make his annual galas quality benefits — down to the flyers, decorations, and goody bags she prepares lovingly, and the ORT members she rallies for support.

"Vickie jumps in to galvanize people and get them involved, and she's the first to say, 'Let me do this,'" says Williams.

"We need people who are reliable, dependable, and who we can trust, and Vickie is all of those things."

Victoria Mitchell readily uses the word "substance" to describe others, but her work to make the world a better place — one person at a time — is a juggernaut as substantial.

To our unbelievably talented family ladies;
Ruth Arberman & Jamee Schleifer
each, not only incredible educators
but each a superbly gifted person.
Our deep respect and love,
Jeff & Ethan A. - Micheal & Gabriel S.
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OLGA NOVIKOVA

Philanthropy is 'community payback' for this good Samaritan

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

News of the grisly slaying spread across Brooklyn like wildfire on Halloween morning in 2002.

Muggers had gunned down ex-Soviet Army officer Oleg Bosenko on Voorhies Avenue and E. 18th Street at around 1:30 am, as the strapping 6-foot-6 electrician walked his wife Larysa home from the Sheepshead Bay train station, and fled with her purse containing \$10.

"Today was the saddest day of my life," the couple's 11-year-old daughter, Inna, said after the murder, which made international headlines and sank Brooklynites into mourning — among them, Olga Novikova.

The horror-struck co-owner of the wholesale food company Desly International rushed to her Sunset Park warehouse and began cramming boxes with canned food, cookies, pickled herring, chocolates, and beverages for the devastated family.

"It was like a nightmare," she says. "I heard they had nothing, so I packed everything I could think of that would help them at least survive for some time."

Novikova took the parcels to the Bosenko home and rang the doorbell, lost for words.

"The wife was in total shock, so I gave her my condolences, and left the food and my phone number in case she needed anything," says the Belarusian American, who is known in the neighborhood for rising to the aid of people in need.

The Manhattan Beach resident mobilized help for a woman she heard was handing out fliers on Brighton Beach Avenue, requesting blood donors for her 4-year-old niece who had leukemia.

Touched by the tot's ordeal, Novikova contacted everyone on her mailing list, including customers, relatives, and friends, to put the word out for a possible bone marrow match.

"The first thing was to help the little girl, no matter what," says Novikova, who teamed up with the Be Proud

Foundation to organize a press conference at National Restaurant in Brighton Beach, attended by Russian TV and police brass from the 60th and 61st precincts.

The outpouring of support helped to secure a successful transplant for the girl, whose recovery was celebrated with a community party at Tzar restaurant in Sheepshead Bay, attended by clowns from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, which donated circus tickets to the family.

"It was a real community effort, and I was just happy that we were able to be involved in this little girl's life,"

says Novikova, 41, a true-blue patriot who has sent care parcels to American troops here and overseas.

She loaded Alex Presman's van with complimentary, gift-boxed Russian candies when the Marine, who helped to liberate Baghdad and lost a leg to a land mine, paid a Christmas visit to his fellow wounded service members at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

"A lot of them came from all over the country and didn't have family around them, so they were overwhelmed and happy to receive the sweets," says the Purple Heart recipient. "I appreciated



Photo by Steve Solomonson

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Co-owner

COMPANY: Desly International

CLAIM TO FAME: "I help to make people's lives happier and sweeter."

FAVORITE PLACE: Home

PERSON I ADMIRE: "My father Marat Novikov because he is the greatest man on earth."

MOTTO: "Think of people the way you want them to think about you."

Olga's concern — she is a great and sincere person, and a proud American."

Novikova also remains mindful of the motherland she left behind, donating food and cash to the Wakefield Central Baptist Church in New Jersey when it hosted 20 children of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster seven years ago to help ease the grief and traumas sustained after the catastrophic nuclear accident claimed 31 lives, caused cancers and deformities in others, and induced wide-scale physical and psychological damage in successive generations throughout the former Soviet Union.

"It was my small way of helping the kids enjoy their time here," says the Woman of Distinction, who routinely participates in the Marine Corps Reserve's Toys for Tots drives, while sweetening lives with Desly's famous confections, which she freely hands out like candy at neighborhood events, including the "Your Highness Grandmother" pageants in Brighton Beach and the area's annual Night Out Against Crime.

Yet there is nothing candy coated about Olga Novikova's desire to improve solidarity and kinship in the place where she lives and works.

"I feel if you are in a community, you can't just be there, you have to do something in return," she says. "It's like a payback."



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TIFFANY RASPBERRY

Lobbyist advances the people's agenda — and our democracy

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

President John F. Kennedy praised them as “expert technicians capable of examining complex and difficult subjects,” poet Walt Whitman mocked them as “lousy combings and born freedom sellers of the earth,” and Brooklyn political consultant Tiffany Raspberry claims our democracy would be doomed without them.

“Lobbyists are part of our constitutional right because everybody deserves to have their issue heard,” says Raspberry, a registered city and state lobbyist, and founding president of YorkGroup Associates, a government affairs consulting firm providing strategic advice and expertise to Fortune 500 companies, educational institutions, real estate developers, and other businesses and groups on matters of public policy — no small feat for a Woman of Distinction just 36 years old.

Like them or not, lobbyists — people who try to influence legislation on behalf of a special interest — have been around since the dawn of civilization.

Ancient lobbyists frequented the forums of Greece and Rome seeking leverage with senators, courtiers wooed kings and princes as lobbyists of their day, British democracy might have dwindled if the barons had not lobbied King John to sign the Magna Carta, and American lobbyists have swayed our politics since the nation's founding, at times boldly.

Gunmaker Samuel Colt passed out pistols as gifts to lawmakers when he sought to extend a patent in the 1850s, and “King of the Lobby” Sam Ward testified to Congress in 1875, after admitting to bribery: “I do not say I am proud — but I am not ashamed — of the occupation.”

Moreover, the perception that lobbyists are corrupt forces for dishonest governance is a myth, states Brooklyn Law School professor Nicholas W. Al-lard: “Lobbyists are adaptive, forward-thinking expert advocates who are vital to a healthy, self-correcting, representative democracy,” he writes in the 2014 edition of the Election Journal.



They are also crucial catalysts in advancing and legalizing the civil rights we take for granted today, including gay marriage, public smoking bans, and proper labeling of food products, claims Raspberry.

“Behind every major legislative issue there is a lobbying campaign,” says the Bedford-Stuyvesant resident who has been involved with politics since she was 16 years old, tuning the city's former Board of Education to student concerns, such as metal detectors, condoms, and gun violence, as a former member of its student advisory committee.

“Lobbying is necessary and I've represented issues that impact the day-to-day lives of everyday New Yorkers,” says Raspberry, who helped City University of New York expand its campuses and fund its programs, advocated for a

Walmart in Brooklyn, and led efforts to preserve free after-school tutoring programs.

She represented the Lutheran and NYU Langone medical centers and the Fortis Property Group in their efforts to win request for proposals in the Long Island College Hospital bidding war, and is currently representing a gaming interest hoping to compete for a casino-operating license in New York.

Raspberry's tender age belies her vast experience in public affairs: She is an ex-policy analyst for the New York City Council, a former partner at the Parkside Group public affairs and one-time vice president at Wolf Block Public Strategies, and she has worked on statewide political campaigns, in addition to coauthoring an article in the New York Law Journal about the risk of using in-

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Lobbyist, political consultant

COMPANY: YorkGroup Associates

CLAIM TO FAME: “My perseverance — I never give up and I never accept ‘no’ as an answer or the notion that something is impossible.”

FAVORITE PLACE: “I like to travel abroad to relax.”

PERSON I ADMIRE: “First Lady Michelle Obama for establishing a new normal for black women in America.”

MOTTO: “If you can dream it, you can achieve it.”

dependent contractors.

Her swift ascent was a matter of time, claims one of her former bosses.

“It comes as no surprise that Tiffany has experienced early success in life,” said Rep. Joe Crowley (D-Queens-Bronx), who hired her as a legislative aide on Capitol Hill. “She always carried out her work with incredible passion and determination, and I am proud of everything she has accomplished.”

The American Dream may be Raspberry's toughest client, yet.

The Woman of Distinction works 18-hour days shuttling between her company offices in Manhattan, Albany, and Washington, D.C. to meet with lawmakers and network with other lobbyists to advance the people's agenda through efforts that are activism on steroids.

“There is a fine line between lobbying and advocacy,” says the honoree, whom City Hall applauded with its Top 40 Under 40 Award, and the Brooklyn Anti-Violence Coalition hailed as its Women of Courage Trailblazer. “Lobbying is just a more organized level of advocacy.”

Consider the adrenaline rush an occupational asset, she claims.

“On any given day, my work is straight from the headlines,” says Tiffany Raspberry. “That is very exciting.”

Congratulations to our beloved daughter & sister
Verna DuBerry Ademu-John

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You have been a shining light of goodness and graciousness.

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WOMEN *of* DISTINCTION

EXCELLENCE... DEDICATION... COMMITMENT...

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IRINA ROIZIN

Ballet teacher helps dancers soar to new heights

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

The Brighton Ballet Theater's dazzling dancers, opulent costumes, and spectacular scenery thrill audiences at Carnegie Hall and Madison Square Garden, but the backstage allegro is as superb.

Founder and executive director Irina Roizin oversees every last detail of her lavish productions, rallying young talent from her 27-year-old dance organization in classical pieces and eclectic performances of jazz and theater, their ethereal power moving viewers to a hush while student dancers, some as young as 4 years old, command the stage.

Her management style is strictly hands-on.

"First I control how everybody gets dressed, then the order of the production, the backstage sound system, the lights, I am the stage manager and the wardrobe supervisor, and then I make sure the parents pick up their children," says the former folk, ballet, and character dancer, whose students call her "Ms. Irina," and who trained with a circus school and a choreographer from the world-famous Bolshoi Theater in her native Ukraine, before headlining as an acclaimed soloist for national folk dance companies.

Her greatest triumph, however, is helping her dancers soar to new heights.

"It was always my dream to teach," claims Roizin, who created ballets for her dolls as a child, dressing them in costumes she made from cloth scraps.

Those skills proved priceless when she opened the Brighton Ballet Theater in 1987 as a teaching and performance company, operating in rented spaces, and working to make it the city's premier Russian ballet and folk dance group, with a current student enrollment of around 350, and additional programs for teens and adults.

The enthusiasm of Americans for the dance form that originated in the Italian Renaissance courts of the 15th and 16th centuries surprised her.

"Where I came from everybody wanted their children in ballet so that they



Photo by Steve Solomonson

could travel, but in the U.S., I didn't know it was going to be so tremendously popular," says Roizin, 55, who presented her first show — a Russian folk dance spectacle, with glittering blue-and-white costumes she made herself — at the Bay Academy in Sheepshead Bay.

Since then, the Woman of Distinction has written, designed, and presented more than 20 productions, her dancers — many of whom train with her for 10 or more years — have performed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, among other acclaimed venues, and she has instituted a scholarship program for students from low-income households.

Her nurturing environment has given hope to distressed families.

One boy being raised by his grandparents was in danger of becoming a delinquent, until his grandfather came to Roizin for help.

"He said, 'I don't want to create a professional dancer, I just want him to stay off the streets,'" she says, adding the boy ended up becoming a soloist with the Joffrey Ballet School.

Another boy, who enrolled after meningitis left him with weakened muscles, is now a dance student on a full scholarship at the French Academie of Ballet in Manhattan.

"He could not coordinate his right or left sides when he first came," says Roizin, who has brought the arts to inner-city youth through her popular residency workshops, at times using reverse

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Founder and executive director

COMPANY: Brighton Ballet Theater

CLAIM TO FAME: "Implementing dance to change people's lives."

FAVORITE PLACE: Home

PERSON I ADMIRE: "Ballet legend Maya Plisetskaya because she is a strong woman who danced until she was 70."

MOTTO: "Tomorrow will be better than today."

psychology to temper resistant children.

One rapsallion at PS 173 in East New York, where she led a ballroom dancing series, rose to her expectations after she placed him in the spotlight.

"I told him that he was the class captain, who needed to make sure everybody listened, and that it was a very important position," says Roizin, who danced with joy when the boy and his classmates wowed visitors with their fancy footwork on ballroom night.

Her efforts to champion Brooklyn's diversity are as potent.

Crown Heights resident Christal Barzey, 13, has been Roizin's student for seven years, and says she was accepted into Mark Twain School for the Gifted and Talented because of her instructor's loving preparation.

"I consider Ms. Irina like a member of my family because she looks out for me in every way," says Christal, who performed a jazz solo last year at the troupe's renowned winter showcase at the Millennium Theater in Brighton Beach.

Irina Roizin's contributions have enriched Brooklyn's cultural landscape, and she hopes they will live on.

"I have a dream that in a 100 years, when I'm not around, this school will still continue," she says, laying the foundation for Brooklyn's aspiring dancers to take splendid steps in the right direction.

DOROTHY RYAN

Theater manager takes center stage behind the scenes

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players,” William Shakespeare famously penned in 1599, but there is nothing “mere” about the role of “players” such as Park Slope resident Dorothy Ryan in bringing his timeless works to audiences around the globe, centuries later.

The managing director has no bit part as the nuts and bolts of the internationally-renowned Theatre for a New Audience, whose lavish productions of the bard’s plays, classic drama, and distinguished contemporary works have been directed by the likes of Academy Award-nominated director Julie Taymor, performed by Hollywood heavyweights such as Oscar-winner F. Murray Abraham and John Turturro, and regaled bard snobs in Shakespeare’s hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England.

“Shakespeare belongs to the world, and I create the support that allows the artistic work to happen,” says the lead fund-raiser and strategic planner for the award-winning troupe that artistic director Jeffrey Horowitz formed in 1979, and which remained an itinerant company for more than three decades before opening its first home last year in the Downtown Brooklyn Cultural District.

The scene-stealing Polonsky Shakespeare Center is a \$69.1 million, 299-seat, Hugh Hardy-designed showpiece, styled after an Elizabethan courtyard playhouse and inspired by the Cottesloe Theatre of Britain’s Royal National Theatre company. Its multi-use design allows the seats and stage to be reconfigured, and it is the first theater built in the city for Shakespeare and classic drama since the Vivian Beaumont at Lincoln Center in the 1960s.

Ryan, a former fund-raiser for the Brooklyn Museum and the 92nd Street Y, works behind the scenes with donors, contractors, and grassroots groups — troubleshooting problems, finalizing details, and forging community bonds — to ensure the company is fiscally and



Photo by Elizabeth Graham

structurally sound, while setting the stage for the borough’s second act as a top-notch entertainment mecca from a resplendent launching pad.

“We now have a spectacular home in a very vibrant, cultural community that was at one time a great theater district,” says the Woman of Distinction, 52, who wants to return the heyday of the early 1900s that drew theater lovers to such acclaimed entertainment venues as the Majestic Theatre, a 1,708-seat venue on Fulton Street — today, the BAM Harvey Theater — and the Orpheum, considered the most magnificent theater built in Brooklyn when it opened on New Year’s Eve in 1900, quickly becoming a nationally reputed vaudeville hall with acts such as Adjie and the Lions, and Helen May Butler and her Ladies Brass Band.

Ryan is advancing the vision as a member of the Downtown Brooklyn

Arts Alliance’s steering committee.

Her work to organize the arts community and her study on its collective economic impact is aiding our long-term arts and cultural successes, claims Tucker Reed, president of the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership.

“Dorothy deserves a standing ovation for her contribution to making Downtown Brooklyn a world-class destination for the arts,” says Reed. “She immerses herself in the community, working closely with development organizations like ours to help ensure the overall cultural district has a unique identity that benefits its residents and visitors.”

New beneficiaries are eagerly waiting in the wings.

The company’s humanities programs for adults and audiences of all backgrounds aim to deepen audience engagement with Shakespeare’s classic

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Managing director

COMPANY: Theatre for a New Audience

CLAIM TO FAME: “Being a stable force in the theater’s evolution to opening its first home.”

FAVORITE PLACE: “The lobby of Polonsky Shakespeare Center.”

PERSON I ADMIRE: “Master teacher Cicely Berry of the Royal Shakespeare Company because of her command of the power of voice, language, and communication.”

MOTTO: “Character consists of what you do on the third and fourth tries.” — James A. Michener

works, while its in-school residencies strive to foster a youth appreciation for them.

Students at PS 235 and the Lenox Academy in Canarsie were sufficiently inspired after studying *Much Ado About Nothing* with a Theatre teaching artist last year to create their own Shakespeare expo.

Their acceptance of the author widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language is no surprise to Ryan.

“There is a reason that Shakespeare’s plays have stayed alive for hundreds of years,” she says. “You see in them the same issues and human struggles that we look at in our political and social structures today.”

Yet the bard’s evocative works might have extinguished in the annals of time, if not for backstage industry veterans such as Dorothy Ryan, and companies such as Theatre for a New Audience, whose collective command performance is keeping the spotlight on our cherished classics — and emerging standards — for centuries to come.

JAMEE SCHLEIFER

Hip hop artist breakdances across barriers

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

A hip hop artist may seem like an odd second-career choice for a Jewish retiree from Manhattan Beach — but Jamee Schleifer is no fossil.

The self-proclaimed “first public school hip hop dance teacher in Brooklyn” is a supple spark plug stomping age and cultural barriers, as a member of Momz-N-Da Hood — America’s first breakdance group of mothers in their mid-50s, redefining cool between carpools, with close to 8,000 Twitter groupies.

“Hip hop is exciting and fun, it’s a culture that appreciates the effort and dedication of the person,” says Schleifer, who has charmed crowds at hip hop showcases around the country, including at a street dance contest in Bushwick and an international face-off in Sin City, alongside her fellow Momz — the doctor, the infant specialist, the teacher, and the masseuse — who perform their sinuous grooves and electrifying stunts like human rubber bands.

The Woman of Distinction grew up in a theatrical family, listening to classical music and show tunes in 1970s Canarsie — a world away from the gritty South Bronx, where the first stirrings of hip hop were making the rounds around the same time after a deejay began extending or “scratching” the instrumental beats on the turntable at a block party to let revelers dance longer.

“Up until the seventh grade, I was listening to Fiddler on the Roof, Guys and Dolls, and The Carpenters,” says Schleifer, who trained and taught dance with internationally renowned dancer Jacques d’Amboise, before embarking on a 27-year career as a dance teacher at Hudde Junior High School in Flatbush and PS 253 in Brighton Beach.

Her lessons in tap, ballet, and theatrical dance were too stale for Hudde’s slick students.

“They weren’t having it, I felt like I was fitting a square peg into a round hole,” says Schleifer, 55, who noticed that youngsters dispersed into corners during class to breakdance or do the wave.

She quickly realized this was the lan-



Photo by Steve Solomonson

guage of the youth, and began letting them express themselves, while exploring for herself the infectious appeal of hip hop that would spawn a culture and change how people thought about art, language, fashion, politics, and race.

“I would run home and catch the latest move on Video Music Box or MTV because if it wasn’t fresh or today, the kids would say, ‘I’m not doing that,’” says Schleifer, who devoured hip hop magazines, brought old tap dancing videos of the Nicholas Brothers to school as an educational tool, and developed a Self Esteem and Awareness Through Dance curriculum that turned her classes and

annual shows — once schmaltzy pop productions — into widely attended hip hop spectacles, with students clambering through windows into the packed auditorium.

“I wanted to make it fun for them because dance is supposed to be a joy,” says the instructor, who was as pro-active at PS 253, where her students were mostly recent arrivals to the country, spoke 62 languages collectively, and didn’t know hip hop from a clog dance.

Schleifer reverted to ancient drumming and clapping techniques to stir their creative juices.

“In dance there is nothing new un-

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Dancer

COMPANY: Momz-N-Da Hood

CLAIM TO FAME: “I am the first public school hip hop dance teacher in Brooklyn.”

FAVORITE PLACE: Coney Island

PERSON I ADMIRE: “My mother Joyce Arberman because she showed me by example how the arts have the power to change people’s lives.”

MOTTO: “Forever a student.”

der the sun, it’s how you present it,” she says.

The wise approach tapped hidden talents when she finally introduced them to hip hop, igniting a dance awakening in a Pakistani-American girl who didn’t let her burka stop her from breakdancing.

“It made it solid for her that there are all generations and ethnicities doing hip hop,” says Schleifer, whose pioneering spirit spoke volumes with industry players.

Ana “Rokafella” Garcia, cofounder of the hip hop collective Full Circle Productions, was fascinated enough to invite Schleifer on her board of directors to help create hip hop curriculums for public school students to build self-esteem and character through art.

“Jamee is a woman who is confident in her skills, and this is rare since so many women in hip-hop are insecure and dependent on someone else to validate them,” says the dance entrepreneur. “When she dances or teaches, you can see it comes from a real place of struggle and triumph.”

Jamee Schleifer’s rap on the knuckles of convention has blazed new trails and turned barriers into golden opportunities, while inspiring a new generation to follow in her footsteps.

“I want to be like her when I grow up,” says Rokafella in arguably the ultimate expression of admiration.

CHRISTINE BUCKLEY STREHLE

Charitable restaurateur serves care to her community

BY SHAVANA ABRUZZO

Christine Buckley Strehle was displaced from her home after Hurricane Sandy, but that didn't stop the co-owner of Buckley's Restaurant and Caterers in Marine Park — a wife and mother of six — from helping other victims of the storm of the century.

She turned her family-run establishment on Nostrand Avenue and Avenue S into a command post for the recovery effort, collecting water, clothing, toiletries, baby items, and other essentials for hard-hit people across the borough, and the Rockaways where she lives.

"The ocean was fierce, it had knocked homes onto the beach like doll houses, and nobody had anywhere to go," says Strehle, 45, who transported hot meals to her devastated neighbors, and contacted a realtor friend in Brooklyn to arrange shelter for people whose homes were washed away.

The restaurant, which her parents Jimmy and Kathleen Buckley opened in 1972, became a point of assembly and relief for Sandy survivors from Belle Harbor and Breezy Point, many of whom were patrons.

"It served as a meeting place for people who felt familiar enough and comfortable enough to come and find out what each other needed, and how they were all doing," claims Strehle, whose community outreach follows in the footsteps of her late father, who quietly paid the rent for people out of work and created the Buckley's to Kennedy's 5K Charity Run for HeartShare Human Services of New York, a group for people with developmental disabilities.

Today, the corner of Buckley's is called "Jim Buckley Way," and HeartShare named one of its residences and its annual golf outing after the beloved philanthropist who passed away in 2010.

The run — Buckley's signature fundraiser now in its 34th year — remains as popular as ever, thanks to Strehle, who networks with neighborhood groups, volunteers, and precincts to coordinate the widely anticipated jaunt that draws thousands of participants on



Photo by Steve Solomonson

the Sunday after Mother's Day, raises upwards of \$100,000 a year, and culminates with a family-style picnic at Kennedy's Restaurant, Buckley's sister establishment in Breezy Point.

"It's a complete community event," says Strehle, a HeartShare board member, who finds time in between six loads of laundry a day and 10-hour shifts at Buckley's — where she can be seen serving dinners and mopping floors — to fete disadvantaged youngsters at annual Christmas parties she

organizes at the restaurant, complete with food, gifts, and a merry mingle with Kris Kringle.

The revel last Christmas, attended by 82 HeartShare kids and clients from the Young Adult Institute, was a joyous one to be sure.

"They were dancing up a storm," says Strehle, who went to HeartShare's Howard Beach school after Sandy to present gift bags and Buckley's certificates to teachers uprooted by the nor'easter.

BIO FILE

OCCUPATION: Co-owner

COMPANY: Buckley's Restaurant and Catering

CLAIM TO FAME: "Being a mom to six children, managing the daily operations at Buckley's, and giving back to the community."

FAVORITE PLACE: "Our house in the Hamptons."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My sister, Kathy Ann Murray, for her strength, intellect, and loving ways."

MOTTO: "Actions speak louder than words."

HeartShare president and chief executive officer Bill Guarinello says Strehle, like her father, performs her numerous works of charity without fanfare.

"If we're having a silent auction, Christine will fill the room with items, without being asked, and never want thanks for it," says Guarinello. "If she knows there's a need, she fills it."

Strehle has contributed funds to local sports programs, including one at Good Shepherd School in Marine Park, and helped out at St. Francis de Sales Parish in Rockaway, where she personally delivers meals and good cheer throughout the year to home-bound seniors, some of whom look forward to her lively St. Patrick's Day visits — complete with delicious corned beef and cabbage dinners cooked in Buckley's kitchen.

Their appreciation is her sweet reward.

"One pair of sisters I deliver to invite me in for a cup of tea, and we watch the parade on TV," says Christine Buckley Strehle — an all-arounder Brooklyn can be proud of, insist her supporters.

"Christine fits the bill for a Woman of Distinction," says Guarinello. "She is a real good parent, and she still finds the time for other people, as well as for her business."

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