

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN
of DISTINCTION
2016

Honoring the women who have shaped the borough

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Letter from the Publisher

Smart, proficient women are a dynamic Brooklyn resource.

Community News Group and Courier Life Publications feel so strongly that our borough would be a lot less distinctive without their influence that we've dedicated an entire publication to these pistons of power — for the sixth consecutive year.

Our 2016 Women of Distinction magazine showcases 27 of our best and brightest female workers and volunteers, nomi-

nated by their peers and selected by an independent panel for distinguishing themselves in their chosen fields.

They represent women we see every day walking on our streets, shopping in our stores, and seated next to us on the bus or train.

Some of them have conquered extraordinary obstacles along their personal and professional journeys.

Others have paved the way for future generations to succeed with confidence. Yet all of them have demonstrated a com-

mitment to work, attention to duty, and love of community that has inspired, educated, healed, and uplifted Brooklyn in good and bad times.

They are making today and tomorrow better than yesterday, for all of us.

We hope that you enjoy this publication as much as we did compiling it, and consider it a token of our gratitude and appreciation to our 2016 Women of Distinction, whose formidable contributions have placed Brooklyn on the map as a productive, resilient, friendly — and distinctive — place.

— Jennifer Goodstein,
President and Publisher,
Community News Group



BROOKLYN'S WOMEN *of* DISTINCTION

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

June 7, 2016

Dear Friends:

It is a great pleasure to welcome everyone to the Sixth Annual Brooklyn's Women of Distinction Gala Awards.

Tonight, the people of Brooklyn will come together to celebrate some of the hard-working women who have distinguished themselves as leaders in their fields and made an important difference in their communities. Thanks to their determination, intelligence, and willingness to innovate, this year's honorees have been able to thrive, overcoming obstacles and meeting challenges head-on in their quest to succeed. As we continue working to ensure that our city remains a place of possibility where everyone has a fair chance at achieving their dreams, regardless of their gender or background, Chirlane and I are proud to join in recognizing these outstanding women for their efforts to improve neighborhoods across Brooklyn and inspire the next generation of leaders.

On behalf of all New Yorkers, congratulations to the many outstanding women being honored this evening. Please accept our best wishes for a wonderful event and continued success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill de Blasio".

Bill de Blasio
Mayor



**WHERE THE STORES ARE
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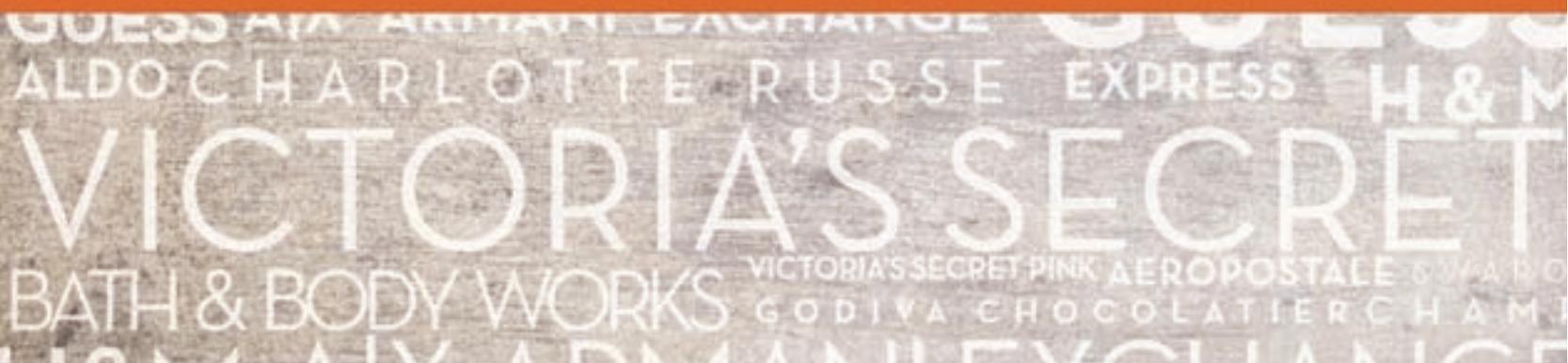
AND ALL HONOREES

2016 BROOKLYN WOMEN OF DISTINCTION



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OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

ERIC L. ADAMS
President

June 7, 2016

Les Goodstein
CEO
Community Newspaper Group (CNG)
1 Metro Tech North
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Dear Mr. Goodstein:

Brooklyn has a long and illustrious tradition in journalism and the arts, and offers a rich array of exhibitions, musical venues, museums, publications, restaurants and galleries for the enjoyment of its visitors and residents – greatly contributing to the betterment of our borough and city. I am pleased to extend my warmest greetings and congratulations to you, Courier Life Publications, and the Community Newspaper Group (CNG) team, staff, and supporters as you gather on the joyous occasion of Brooklyn's Women of Distinction 2016.

Community Newspaper Group has been dedicated to sharing stories of events that affect our local communities. I applaud Community Newspaper Group for recognizing and honoring the stories and contributions that women have made in our great borough. I join with Community Newspaper Group to pay tribute to these amazing and inspiring women whose commitment, dedication and excellence in their fields has earned them our respect and gratitude. The unwavering dedication and support that these women have given to our communities is truly remarkable.

On behalf of all 2.6 million Brooklynites, I salute you, Mr. Goodstein, for your exemplary and steadfast leadership over the years. I commend everyone for making this extraordinary evening possible and for your ongoing commitment to sharing those stories that represent the character of Brooklyn. Furthermore, I congratulate those distinguished individuals who have generously and selflessly supported the noble mission and work of Community Newspaper Group. Finally, I thank everyone for helping us move forward together as *One Brooklyn*.

Sincerely,

Eric L. Adams
Brooklyn Borough President

REGINA ANDRIOLO

Attorney and PR maven goes to the mat for boxing clients

BY TIM PERRINS

Attorney, public relations specialist, and community outreach expert Regina Andriolo is an expert in the medical, sports, and entertainment industries, and her charitable work has made a real impact on many people.

There's a common thread through her diverse accomplishments.

"You really have to enjoy what you are doing in order to do it well," says Andriolo, a legal representative to professional boxers, managers, and promoters. "Otherwise it's not worth doing."

Legendary boxing trainer Tommy Gallagher, who has known Andriolo since the days when very few women were involved in the sport, was knocked out by her knowledge.

"Gina understood fighters, understood all of the ins and outs of the business, and made sure they got the money they were entitled to," he says. "She knew everything."

In 1993 Russian-American boxer Sergei Artemiev was seriously injured in a fight in Atlantic City. After surgeons removed a blood clot on his brain, he faced a difficult recovery and staggering medical bills, but Andriolo



Photo by Juliet V. Foster

went to the mat for him, even though Artemiev wasn't her client, says Gallagher.

"We did a variety of fund-raising events both here in New York and down in Atlantic City to help offset his medical expenses, and he remains a friend to this day," he says. "Gina put every-

thing together at no cost, she made the deals, she set up the auctions."

Andriolo would move on to other industries, but she stayed connected to boxing, becoming the only female board member and officer of the Boxing Writers Association of America. As head of Andriolo Communications, she provided public relations support to athletes, artists, and entertainers, including The Village People, and Jefferson Airplane, while serving as executive director of Liberty Health Foundation. The philanthropic branch of the Jersey City Medical Center had an image problem, despite transforming itself into a top-notch facility, until the Woman of Distinction came along.

"It had been the old hospital up on the hill that looked like it was out of a Fritz Lang movie," explains Andriolo, whose fund-raising, outreach, and public relations work helped make it one of New Jersey's top-ranked hospitals.

Andriolo's accomplishments are not limited to her professional work. She and her husband adopted a baby boy from Azerbaijan in 2002, leading to her involvement with the Azerbaijan Society of America, through which she has helped Azerbaijani-Americans connect with their cul-

BROOKLYN'S WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Dyker Heights.

OCCUPATION: Attorney, fundraiser, special events consultant.

COMPANY: Liberty Health Foundation.

CLAIM TO FAME: "I'm a woman involved in professional boxing."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: "Any place with a great view of the Verrazano Bridge and New York Harbor."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother, a professional working woman who juggled a family, a demanding job, and two houses. She set a great example, and guided and encouraged us to achieve our goals and dreams."

MOTTO: "When opportunity knocks, open the door!"

tural heritage. She also works with the Be Proud Foundation to organize food drives and send care packages to troops overseas. Her son, now 15, helps out as well.

Her journey has been one of curiosity and self-fulfillment, she notes.

"I've always enjoyed what I've done," says Andriolo. "Sometimes it hasn't been a conscious choice, as one thing opened into another — if something presents itself and it looks like something you want to do, you should grab it."

ANNA BECKER

There's no business like show business to theater director

BY ILY GOYANES

This Woman of Distinction lives and breathes theater.

Anna Becker is the current executive director of On Stage At Kingsborough Performing Arts Center, where she is responsible for booking dance, theatre, and music performances, as well as overseeing operations, including financial, marketing, press, and audience services.

Prior to her current gig, she founded a performance series in Westchester, which presented artist discussions and productions in advance of their New York City premieres.

"We had a great following, and I am proud of having introduced the world of Off-Broadway and its outstanding artists to Westchester audiences," says Becker. "The series won a Best of Westchester Award early on, and this really propelled us."

Becker was also honored with an award from the Barrow Group for her outstanding contribution to the arts. The accolade recognized Becker for her work in the theatre community, particularly as a



Photo by Georgina Benvenuto

funder and producer.

As a tried and true New Yorker — she left for a few years as a young adult, but came running back — and a theater buff, it is no wonder that Becker loves Babs so much.

"Of course I admire Barbra Streisand because she is a multi-talented, entirely gifted performer," she says. "But I also admire that she has always been uniquely herself, even before doing so was accepted for a young entertainer."

Streisand redefined beauty while daring to show her comedy chops, in a combination that was not mainstream in her day, says Becker.

"We can thank her for showing that someone can be talented, beautiful, and a character!" she says.

There isn't a single soul who could imagine Becker working in any other field.

"I am passionate about the international arts scene, which is part of what I love about my current position," Becker explains. "We present Russian ballet companies, Spanish flamenco artists, British children's theatre, Irish music, and so forth."

Even her dream gig involves art. "I think it would be enormously satisfying to be an arts ambassador in a foreign country," she says.

Becker's friend Stacy Topalian says the honoree is dedicated passionately to bringing world-class artists to perform at On Stage at

BROOKLYN'S WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Bay Ridge.

OCCUPATION: Executive director of the Performing Arts Center.

COMPANY: On Stage At Kingsborough.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Bringing world-class performing artists to Southern Brooklyn."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Shore Road Promenade.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "The original Brooklyn gal, Barbra Streisand, for her immense talent, her humor, and for breaking through barriers on and off the stage and screen."

MOTTO: "Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere." — Albert Einstein

Kingsborough.

"Anna has created a sensational experience for arts lovers in Southern Brooklyn," she says. "And consistently selects the most outstanding talent from the world of music, dance, cabaret, and theatre that audiences adore."

The work is self-fulfilling.

"I love bringing artists that are masters of their form to On Stage At Kingsborough, and I am thrilled to see and hear the reactions from our audience when we do," Becker says.

TO AN
INCREDIBLE
WOMAN
FOR AN
INCREDIBLE
ACCOMPLISHMENT



REGINA ANDRIOLO



Boxing
Writers
Association
of America

NANCY COLT

Raising funds in the fight against cancer

BY ILY GOYANES

When you work for the American Cancer Society, you're basically a philanthropist 24-7. To prove it, let's take a look at how Nancy Colt describes her job.

"I manage the American Cancer Society's Relay For Life portfolio in New York City," she says. "This year we will hold close to 30 events all around the city, and our goal is to raise close to \$2 million to fuel our mission."

The American Cancer Society's Relay For Life initiative focuses on fund-raising events at the grassroots level.

"Relay For Life brings communities together to support our family members, neighbors, and friends in the fight against cancer," says Colt.

The Woman of Distinction works with businesses, companies, schools, organizations, individuals, and anyone else who has an interest in the fight against cancer to raise money to fund the American Cancer Society's research programs and to offer support help to patients, survivors, caregivers, and families who are affected by the disease.

Many people volunteer their



Photo by Louise Wateridge

time to this cause — a selfless act that Colt truly admires — and her favorite part of the job is the hard work and selflessness of the volunteers.

As much as she admires the altruism, Colt wasn't always planning to dedicate herself to such a

cause. She attended the University of Vermont as a fashion major before changing to economics. She might have changed her mind about what career to pursue, but she knew one thing for sure — she belonged in New York.

"I have lived in New York since I graduated from college 30 years ago," she says. "It was the only place I wanted to be."

And she adores Brooklyn.

"I think it's all about the different neighborhoods, and that fact that we are such a melting pot," she says. "As far as I'm concerned Brooklyn is the center of the universe."

Colt is married to her college sweetheart, Michael Colt, and she has two children, Sophie, 21, and Charlie, 19. The family loves going to Brooklyn Bridge Park.

"It's right on the water overlooking Manhattan," says Colt. "Last year we were in a bocce ball league, and played every Thursday night during the spring — it was so much fun, and the views can't be beat!"

So is this born-in-Jersey-girl a true borough convert? Joe Gillette, who nominated Colt for this acco-

NEIGHBORHOOD: Brooklyn Heights.

OCCUPATION: Income development and community engagement.

COMPANY: American Cancer Society.

CLAIM TO FAME: "I make the best sticky buns from scratch!"

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: The bocce ball court at Brooklyn Bridge Park.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mom Joan Greene because she helped blaze the trail for today's women who have families and successful careers."

MOTTO: "Don't ask for permission; beg for forgiveness."

lade, had this to say:

"When you are born in Brooklyn, you identify with the neighborhood where you grew up, but Nancy grew up in Jersey and became a Brooklyn girl," he says. "Void of that allegiance most of us Brooklynites have to our neighborhoods, Nancy has been able to equally embrace all of Brooklyn, and that trait is reflected in her work with the American Cancer Society and how she has performed outreach for those in need in every corner of our great borough."

Congratulations!

Diane Marino & Nancy Falco

aka

"Mema" and "Neenie"



We are so proud of all that you do!

For all that you do for the kids at Tiny Tots Express Inc. and for all of us, we have never met two more deserving people of such a wonderful award.

Love,

Dennis, Michele, Sean, Greg, Antonia, Anthony, AJ, Victoria, Elizabeth, Isabella, Meaghan, and Natalia

DR. SYBIL DeVEAUX

College educator passionate about students' success

BY ILY GOYANES



Photo by Jason Speakman

tures of North Korean soldiers.”

DeVeaux finds her work at Empire State College as adrenaline-boosting.

“I always love the beginning of each term because students are usually tentative about approaching the studies I teach,” she shares. “Statistics is the most fun because I hear stories about how many times students have failed the study, yet after two or three weeks, their perspective is completely changed.”

That passion is why some of her students have called her their best teacher.

Although she's a New Yorker through and through, DeVeaux doesn't forget her Jamaican roots. She has funded two scholarships — one that benefits a student from her high school in Jamaica, and one that benefits a student of Jamaican descent in Florida. She's also held several fund-raisers for various schools in Jamaica.

Her educational philanthropy isn't only institutional, it's personal.

“I am also very dedicated to my students, for whom I try to provide texts just to mitigate their expenses,” says DeVeaux in another example of her dedication to the

NEIGHBORHOOD: Canarsie.

OCCUPATION: College professor.

COMPANY: Empire State College (SUNY).

CLAIM TO FAME: “Visiting the Freedom Bridge, and doing a television commercial.”

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Empire State College — “a wonderful place to work.”

WOMAN I ADMIRE: “My late aunt, Ivy Adore Hazle. She raised me!”

MOTTO: “Share your knowledge. The more you share, the smarter you become.”

next generation.

The Woman of Distinction's own life has been marked by the sacrifices of others. She was adopted by her Aunt Ivy when she was only 3 months old and she recalls her aunt giving up a lot to give her an ideal life, while making education a top priority.

Matt Sanders, who nominated DeVeaux for this plaudit, says the honoree has many positive qualities, but one stands out above the rest.

“I would single out Sybil's compassion,” he says. “She cares deeply for her students, giving of her time, so that each one has the chance to achieve his or her dream and the higher education they always desired.”

dom Bridge, is more of a traumatic memory than a cherished one.

“This bridge is notable because it marks the demilitarized zone, which prevents human traffic between North and South Korea,” she said. “While on a day tour, I was almost shot while attempting to snap pic-

Congratulations

To two amazing women:

Be Proud Foundation's President Ms. Regina Andriolo, ESQ.

&

Our dear friend Ms. Angelika Pisakhova

You both inspire all of us with your love, kindness and compassion,

your honor and courage, your beautiful souls!

The work you do for our people will never be unnoticed.

You are the hearts of this community !

*And your selflessness, caring, dedication to your work
and you will to share your spirit of life are priceless.*

We are so proud of you!

Be Proud Foundation



AUDREY DOORN

Lions Club volunteer excels in helping others

BY ILY GOYANES

Audrey Doorn works in management, but it is her volunteer work that makes her a real standout.

Doorn volunteers extensively for Lions Club International, a non-religious, non-political service organization. As a member, she contributes to society in a number of ways. Doorn helps feed the homeless population and also performs three annual visits to battered women's shelters, where she and other Lions members distribute personal items to the women and children, and assist the women with resume-writing and other job-seeking skills, such as how to dress for success.

Doorn also encourages the youth arm of the Club to engage in community service, debates, and career day events.

"I would definitely be a coordinator of a 24-hour program for underprivileged children, where they will be fed, clothed, have possible medical attention, be able to play games and enjoy all the possible care that could be provided in 24 hours," says Doorn about her dream position. "Children are innocent and do not deserve to be born into certain circumstances."



Photo by Jason Speakman

Lorraine Wade, who serves with Doorn in the Lions Club and nominated her for this award, first became aware of her positive energy back in their home country of Guyana, where Doorn was a professional basketball player. She's a natural Woman of Distinction, adds Wade.

"Audrey's the first person who came to mind," she shares. "Community service, sports, fashion, finance. I admire her, I don't know if she knows."

Doorn's drive for helping other people also impresses Wade.

"Audrey wants to see young people do well, excel, is good at identifying a quality that has potential, she is good at motivating people and finding ways to get things done."

Doorn is also quite good at interacting with others.

"My favorite part of my job is customer relations and learning about the culture of the diverse nationalities that pass through our business," she says.

Diversity is a very important factor to Doorn, and one of the reasons she loves Brooklyn.

"In my travels as a Lion, Brooklyn is one of the most diverse communities," she says. "I was privileged to interact with many cultures right here."

But the diverse population isn't the only reason she loves the borough.

"The Brooklyn Bridge is one of the most beautiful places for a long walk when the weather is good, and provides for a great view in the evening when driving on it," Doorn says.

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: East Flatbush.

OCCUPATION: Manager.

COMPANY: Alex Air BnB and Lions Club International.

CLAIM TO FAME: "My community service."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Bridge.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Actress Cicely Tyson, who is a perfect example of not letting a little detour in the road hamper the journey to success."

MOTTO: "Bridge experience with energy."

As accomplished as Doorn is, the former professional basketball player, finance manager, fashion plate, and volunteer extraordinaire gives all the credit to her mother, Cecily Evadney Doorn.

"She lived her life for family and was her husband's and children's biggest fan, cheerleader, guide, and source of support," explains Doorn. "Even under the toughest of circumstances, she managed to say she was fine and mustered a smile to try to assure us of that."

So that explains why Doorn has been successful in a variety of industries, but why all the volunteer work?

"There is a direct line from my heart to my actions," she says.

PAMELA ESPOSITO-AMERY

Amazing lady informs women about the signs of ovarian cancer

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN

Tell every amazing lady about ovarian cancer.

The message became a mission for Park Slope resident Pamela Esposito-Amery after her sister, Louisa McGregor, died in 2011, following a four-year battle with the disease that went undetected at first.

"Louisa had signs and symptoms for a very long time, and visited various doctors, but was not diagnosed until she was at a late stage because there is no screening test for ovarian cancer," says Esposito-Amery.

When McGregor was released from the hospital, the sisters searched for a sponsored walk, but were surprised to learn none existed for ovarian cancer. They decided to create their own — and then some. They formed the Tell Every Amazing Lady About Ovarian Cancer, Louisa M. McGregor Ovarian Cancer Foundation to promote awareness and education of the signs, symptoms and risk factors, and offer support to survivors while raising funds for research to find a cure.

"We set out to make a lot of noise in Brooklyn," says Esposito-Amery.

Eight years later, TEAL has raised money for research nationwide, funded



Photo by Louise Wateridge

research at some of the country's most prestigious hospitals and institutions, and partnered with the New York Mets for the annual Ovarian Cancer Awareness Day at Citi Field. The TEAL Walk and Run Program has expanded across the country, the organization enjoys a global presence, and board members,

survivors, staff and loyal supporters were invited to open the NASDAQ Stock Market for Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month in September.

The successes are largely due to the Woman of Distinction, says board treasurer Gina Pappalardo-DeFillippo.

"Pamela's passion to bring education and awareness of this deadly disease is what drives her every day," she says. "I know Louisa would be proud of how far she has taken — and will take — TEAL."

Esposito-Amery, who gave up a successful career to work full time at the organization, is excited about the future.

"Great research is coming out and exciting things happening," she says. "But for now recognizing signs and symptoms is vital."

There is no definitive screening test for ovarian cancer and no official diagnosis until surgery. A pap smear does not test for the disease, but a trans-vaginal ultrasound and a pelvic-rectal exam can help yield red flags. Symptoms are vague and subtle, including back pain, fatigue, indigestion, and bloating, making a visit to the doctor imperative if unusual changes last for more than two weeks, says Esposito-Amery.

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Park Slope.

OCCUPATION: Chief Executive Officer and co-founder.

COMPANY: Tell Every Amazing Lady About Ovarian Cancer, Louisa M. McGregor Ovarian Cancer Foundation.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Raising awareness about ovarian cancer."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Prospect Park.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Comedian Ellen DeGeneres for reminding us to be kind to one another, and to dance and laugh every day."

MOTTO: "If you're not excited about it, it's not the right path."

"Listen to your body," she says. "Be persistent and if you are not happy with a doctor, get a second opinion."

Grassroots help is available at the new community center Esposito-Amery and her team opened last year to reach more people through workshops and other outreach.

"Now anyone can walk through our doors and get support," she says.

Their challenging stories of pain and suffering are familiar to the honoree.

"I've developed a thick skin and can relate to family members on their level because I went through it with Louisa," she says.

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CONGRATULATIONS Nancy Colt on being recognized as a Woman of Distinction

This honor comes as no surprise to those who know you and to those whose lives you have touched.

Brooklyn is a better place since this Jersey Girl crossed the river.

*Wishing you all the best,
all the days of your life,*

Joe Gillette



*We would like to Congratulate
All this years Honorees
Who have Devoted
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To improve the Lives of Others
Throughout Brooklyn*

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NANCY FALCO & DIANE MARINO

Sisters' day care has offered pre-K for all for 30 years

BY SHNIEKA JOHNSON

Sisters Nancy Falco and Diane Marino have been dedicated to providing the highest quality services for Brooklyn children and families for more than 30 years.

Their Marine Park preschool, Tiny Tots Express, demonstrates success in clear and measurable ways through educating and caring for kids of all ages. Established in 1985, the school has highly trained, licensed, certified teachers, and is part of the Department of Education's Universal pre-K program.

"With pre-K for all now established by Mayor DeBlasio, it is important to have good quality preschools in Brooklyn," says Falco, who also teaches in the Education Department at St. Francis College.

It's "a blessing" to come to the office everyday, adds Marino.

"First, to watch the excitement in the children's eyes when they learn something makes it all worth it; second, the women that work with me because I have the best staff anyone could ask for;



Photo by Georgine Benvenuto

and finally, knowing that parents have entrusted us with their most precious commodity — their child," she says.

It's a happy, productive environment, remarks Marino.

"I love what I do because I love nurturing young minds," she says. "I have an added blessing of working side by side with my sister, and having our children and now my grandchildren at work with me each day."

Fellow educators admire their commitment to their community and the next generation.

"Nancy and Diane are two of the most

kind, good-hearted, generous, and hard-working individuals I have had the opportunity to work with in my professional career," said Robert Oliva, director of special events at St. Francis College.

Oliva met the dynamic duo when he worked at Xaverian High School, where their sons were students.

"They were always the first to volunteer for our fund-raising efforts, and I could always count on them," he says.

Falco and Marino remained involved with the school after their sons graduated. They also continued their relationship with Oliva, employing students from St. Francis College as teachers, assistants, and mentors at Tiny Tots Express.

"They do an incredible job educating young people in Brooklyn, but more importantly they are role models for the students of St. Francis College," Oliva says. "I was not surprised when I found out they were named Women of Distinction."

Brooklyn couldn't ask for better ambassadors, he notes.

"Diane and Nancy are loving, caring,

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NAME: Diane Marino

NEIGHBORHOOD: Marine Park.

OCCUPATION: Executive director.

COMPANY: Tiny Tot Express.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Being married to an amazing man for almost 40 years, being mother to two outstanding children, and 'Mema' to five beautiful granddaughters."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Coney Island.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Mother Teresa, who said, 'Do small things with great joy.'"

MOTTO: "Faith, family, and friends."

NAME: Nancy Falco.

NEIGHBORHOOD: Marine Park.

OCCUPATION: Educational director.

COMPANY: Tiny Tot Express.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Having a successful day care and Universal pre-K school for more than 31 years."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Marine Park.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My fellow honoree, partner, and sister Diane Marino, who has always been there for me, my family, and everyone around her."

MOTTO: "Enjoy and treasure the little things in life."

give back to the community, and consistently make a difference in the lives of others," Oliva claims.

LENORE FRIEDMAN

Senior center director gives members home away from home

BY ILY GOYANES

Born and raised in Brooklyn, Lenore Friedman has worn many hats in her life. Daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, friend.

But to many she is known as the person who runs two of the best senior centers in town at the Senior Citizens League of Flatbush, where she is the executive director of the Senior Citizen's League of Flatbush, and the Senior Citizen's League of Flatbush, Midwood Branch.

No matter who you speak with about Friedman, certain adjectives come up again and again. She is described as warm, caring, giving, and an incredible organizer — the key trait that makes her so good at her life's work.

Friedman and her staff provide senior center members with an abundance of activities, all of which they plan and execute. Whether it's exercise classes, music programs, discussion groups, karaoke sessions, weekly talent shows, English for Speakers of Other Languages classes, bridge and mahjong groups, serving daily lunches and homebound and weekend meals, as well as welcoming autistic adults four days a week to help out around the centers, Friedman's passion and dedication



Photo by Jordan Rathkopf

result in her members leading rich and fulfilling lives in their golden years.

Some might think that planning all those activities is an insurmountable task, but Friedman says it is the favorite part of her job.

"Along with the warm socialization," she adds.

Interaction between herself and her members is definitely a key part of both her life and that of the seniors she works

with and for.

"It has been an amazing experience to watch the members evolve and grow over the past 40-plus years," says the Woman of Distinction. "I am constantly inspired and amazed by their energy, intellectualism, and desire to engage the world."

Aside from all the time and energy she puts into improving the quality of life for her members, Friedman has also spent her life being heavily involved in the community, including acting as president of a parent-teacher association and co-chairing her high-school reunion.

Active members Pearl Rubin and Marilyn Batchelor both expressed admiration at Friedman's level of involvement.

"Lenore will always come to your aid when you have a problem and try to straighten it out," says Batchelor. "She takes interest in you personally, and takes time to talk to you every day."

Rubin adds: "I know Lenore for 34 years. Marvelous human being. Knows each person by name. Whatever she does is better than excellent. Better than marvelous."

No director works harder than Friedman, claims William "David" Binn, who nominated her for this award.

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Flatbush and Midwood.

OCCUPATION: Executive Director.

COMPANY: Senior Citizens League of Flatbush.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Making our centers a warm and welcoming home to people of all backgrounds, races, and religions so that they feel a part of our 'one family,' as well as our memorable, awesome parties and special events (according to our members)!"

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: My two wonderful centers.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Eleanor Roosevelt because she was one of the most influential American women of the 20th century."

MOTTO: "Treat your family like friends and your friends like family."

"Lenore gives seniors a home away from home and gives the best party you'll ever have," he says.

The two centers she runs are a source of comfort and joy for Friedman.

"Because of the seniors' warmth and appreciation, and the loving dynamic between our staff and our members, the centers are my home away from home," she shares. "I truly look forward to going to work every day. It has been an amazing experience to watch the thousands of members I've met evolve and grow during the last 40-plus years."

BONNII GARGANO

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

Dance teacher instills confidence in children through movement

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN

A peek into Bonnii Gargano's dance studio on any given day might provide a snapshot into the legacy she has created in Brooklyn: "Sit still. Sit tall," a mother might tell her daughter as she prepares for her first class. Many moms have already been students of Miss Bonnii themselves, and they know the drill.

"Dance is everything," says Gargano, co-owner of Bonnii and Cathy's Dance Showcase in Canarsie. "Dance gives children inner confidence that they cannot get anywhere else. Then they learn that they can do anything."

As a child, she always loved to dance and her mother would take her to all the local television studios to perform live.

"We'd go from Channel 2 to Channel 7 to Channel 11," Gargano says.

When she was 13 years old, her father created a dance studio for her in the family's basement, complete with a raised wood dance floor. Gargano began taking neighborhood children as students, foreshadowing what would become a lifelong vocation.

Although known as one of the best dancers in her corner of Brooklyn,



Photo by Georgine Benvenuto

an audition at the High School of Performing Arts (now the Fiorello LaGuardia High School) in Manhattan left her flustered. Gargano realized she was unprepared for the stiff competition, but used her learning curve

later to benefit her students.

"I promised myself I would always have my students ready," she says. "I never want any of our kids to feel ill prepared."

After high school Gargano danced on stage at Carnegie Hall, accompanied by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Leonard Bernstein. Soon she met her future husband, Frank, and they had two boys. While married life and motherhood were wonderful, she felt that something was missing. In a near repeat of history, Frank soon converted their two-car garage into a dance studio and Gargano began teaching students once again.

In 1990 she joined forces with long-time friend and fellow dance instructor Cathy Consalvas to open Bonnii and Cathy's Dance Showcase. Twenty-five years later, "Miss Bonnii" continues to bring joy and confidence to aspiring dancers, at least 10 of whom have opened their own studios, while several others have danced on Broadway.

The Woman of Distinction is a champion for parents, too, claims Simone Henry, mom to 14-year-old Amelia and 10-year-old Kenya. Henry met

NEIGHBORHOOD: Canarsie.

OCCUPATION: Dance teacher and owner.

COMPANY: Bonnii and Cathy's Dance Showcase.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Instilling confidence and a love for dance in children."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: My studio.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother, she was amazing, I could not admire anyone more."

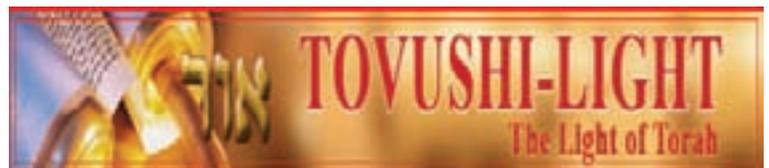
MOTTO: "Have integrity and respect for others."

Gargano 11 years ago, after the girls' father passed away, and helped to bring peace to the devastated family.

"I became a single mom and Bonnii gave me the outlet to continue to keep going and get the best out of life for my girls," says Henry. "I don't know where I would be if I didn't meet her."

Her accomplishments are grounded in the joys of dancing, claims our honoree.

"I love how the children look when they are gliding through space and enjoying the movement," says Gargano. "Dance helps kids blossom and become more than they can be without it — I love that and I give them all I have from the bottom of my heart."



Congratulations to our dear Ms. Angelika Pisakhova !

You are the inspiration to all of us! You show us love, kindness and compassion, courage and wisdom. Words can't describe how much we appreciate everything you do. You are so special to us with your caring, dedication to your work and your will to share your spirit of life.

*You make us so proud!
Tovuhi Kavkaz
Jewish Youth Center*

LAURA GLAZIER-SMITH

Kingsborough grad returns to provide for students, alum

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN

Little did Laura Glazier-Smith know as a student at Kingsborough Community College that she would return to her alma mater someday as director of the alumni department.

After graduating high school at age 16, she enrolled at Brooklyn College before deciding at the last minute to attend Kingsborough.

"I'm so glad I did because Kingsborough helped build the confidence I needed to pursue a four-year degree," says Glazier-Smith.

After graduating with an associate's degree, she pursued her bachelor's degree at Baruch in mathematics, and later her master of business administration in organizational effectiveness and human resources management. After working as an actuary and pension consultant in Manhattan for 20 years, the Woman of Distinction came home to her Brooklyn roots — and to Kingsborough, the place she first began her post-secondary education.

Fellow alum Ellen Zucker says she met Glazier-Smith while trying to obtain a beach pass. Zucker had come back to Brooklyn to care for her aging mother and says that Glazier-Smith's kindness and help during that time was



Photo by Jordan Rathkopf

immediately striking.

"Laura's an incredible person," says Zucker. "She's just such a happy, genuine person, amazingly organized, caring, devoted and passionate."

Glazier-Smith says she was more than happy to help a Kingsborough sister.

"Ellen was very thankful that we

had open arms in welcoming her back," she says. "She had very fond memories of Kingsborough, and strong connections to classmates, so she was very happy to reconnect."

Not surprisingly, this is what Glazier-Smith enjoys most about her new job.

"I love meeting people, both alumni and students," she says. "I hadn't anticipated this when I took the job, that I would be meeting so many wonderful alums and hearing their success stories — like me, they have a deep appreciation of Kingsborough."

The majority of Kingsborough students are driven and they love school, and she is lucky to have the opportunity to give back to the community that helped form her career, says the honoree.

In addition to providing help to alumni, Glazier-Smith helps raise money for student scholarships, including smaller-scale needs, such as books and transportation.

"You may think these costs may be minimal, but they matter greatly and can make a difference whether a student can get to school and pass the class," she states.

Another aspect of her job that Glazier-Smith thoroughly enjoys is arrang-

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Sheepshead Bay.

OCCUPATION: Director of Alumni Relations.

COMPANY: Kingsborough Community College.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Helping the Kingsborough community thrive."

FAVORITE PLACE: "On my boat, in the ocean, in Jamaica Bay, which overlooks Kingsborough."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My sister because she has raised five children, and they are all phenomenal, fabulous people."

MOTTO: "Love what you do."

ing speaking engagements for alumni to come back and share their success stories. Several Kingsborough graduates hold master's degrees and doctorates, and they encourage the current students to strive for the very best after graduation.

"The speeches from the alumni inspire each current student to be the very best he or she can be," she notes.

Glazier-Smith inspires all the people she meets at Kingsborough Community College, whether they're past or present students, claims Zucker.

"Laura is like an angel because she is a true people person, and a role model for me to be a better person myself," she says.

LYNN HARRIS

Writer uses humor to bring light to inequality

BY SHNIEKA JOHNSON

Humanity belongs to everyone, claims Lynn Harris, vice president of communications at Breakthrough, an organization focusing on global human rights and preventing violence against women.

"Today, people get it — not all people, but enough people," she says, adding gender-based violence and inequality, and their intersections with LGBT issues, race, class, and more, are understood not as personal problems, but as society's problems. And as urgent.

Harris spent the first 20 years of her career as a writer, author, journalist, and comedian, trying to find mainstream, accessible ways to push for gender equality and other visions for social justice and human rights before blazing new trails at Breakthrough, where she has worked for the past five years with a staff of bright juniors who keep her coming back for more.

"Don't believe anything anyone says about young people being lazy and apathetic," Harris says. "They are so insightful and dedicated and creative and passionate about human rights and social justice — they



Photo by Jason Speakman

school me every day!"

The Woman of Distinction, who writes about gender, culture and social justice issues, is also co-creator of Breakup Girl, a character that counteracts cliches that only women

talk about relationships. The website houses comics of the character and an advice column.

Fans say Harris's integrity is refreshing and infectious.

"Lynn's just not going to take anything lying down, but it's the way she delivers her righteous indignation that's so scrumptious," says her friend Amy Keshysian. "She can make you laugh at yourself, while owning that what you just said was so wrong — you want to thank her for setting you straight."

The pair became friends in 1991, after a friend arranged a meeting.

"I wanted to get into magazine writing, and Lynn was honest, kind, encouraging, and helpful," says Keshysian. "I can't think of a more distinctive woman than her."

Harris's unique talent for blending humor and advocacy — she is currently busy forming a youth program she calls "Gold: Comedy for Girls" — keeps her abreast of modern-day trends and their relevance in our society, while striking a chord with people about personal feelings and controversial issues.

"I'm especially drawn to the use of pop culture and humor for social

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Park Slope.

OCCUPATION: Vice-President of Communications.

COMPANY: Breakthrough.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Being funny. Not just a hardy-har-har jokester, but someone who can use humor not to make light of challenging issues, but to help make sense of them."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Coney Island. "Gritty, shiny, diverse, beautiful."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Dolly Parton. She is a remarkable musician and a hilarious wit. No matter how funny and exaggerated her persona, she is authentically serious about and dedicated to the most important things. She stands for equality and opportunity for everyone. That's why I went to Dollywood for my 40th birthday. Someone please bring her to Celebrate Brooklyn!"

MOTTO: "Lean in? Meh. Jump in."

change, that's always what's guided and inspired me," she says. "Pop culture and humor reflect societal norms and they are powerful tools for changing those societal norms because they reach so many people, and challenge them from a pretty friendly and accessible place to think in new ways."

NATALIE ISIKLI

Graphic designer brings restaurant into the modern age

BY TIM PERRINS



Photo by Georgine Benvenuto

Natalie Isikli has a deep affection for Sahara restaurant, and it's not just because it's a place where people from all over the world come together, or because, as she likes to say, "It is the mother of all Turkish restaurants in New York City." It's because she's become a part of the Sahara family.

Since 1996 Isikli has been the Gravesend restaurant's graphic designer and web guru, and in 1997 she married John Isikli, who owns the dining establishment with his mother Sahinda.

"His family welcomed me with open arms to the operation," she says.

Isikli was given freedom to apply her skills as an artist and graphic designer to enhance the haven of Turkish cuisine, and she gave the place an online presence long before it was commonplace. But more than that, Isikli and husband began to develop a vision for the place, building on the ideas of his late father, Yaaya, who opened the restaurant in 1986. As she sees it, Sahara serves Turkish food, but "it has a Mediterranean-getaway atmosphere, where anyone can feel

comfortable and at home," adding, "That was Yaaya's vision originally."

When she came on board, Sahara was a small place, but in the years since then it has grown by leaps and bounds, and expanded many times over. Isikli, who studied graphic art, psychology and web design at the School of Visual Art and Long Island

University, has left her mark on the colorful, inviting rooms, which are adorned with many of her own artworks. Between this and her shaping of marketing materials and bringing online-ordering to eager customers, it's evident that Isikli has done a great deal to help in Sahara's continued success.

Limor Ziarno, a friend and herself a 2015 Women of Distinction, is amazed by what Isikli has done for Sahara.

"Natalie brought Sahara into the modern age," Ziarno says.

Isikli remains modest about her contributions, preferring to emphasize the work of others, like Sahinda, who is on-site daily.

"She is a woman of distinction," Isikli asserts.

Her work anchored in respect for the legacy of the renowned eatery.

"It's very important for me to maintain the art and the image, and the legend that Yaaya created," she says.

Art is the spice that lifts the spiritual palate, Isikli claims.

"My art is created with a strong sense of love and unity," she says. "I've always believed that everyone is

NEIGHBORHOOD: Gravesend.

OCCUPATION: Graphic, web designer, and spiritual artist.

COMPANY: Sahara; yungadesign.com.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Empowering women and creating new possibilities for the creativity that exists within us all."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: The Verrazano Bridge.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Audrey Hepburn, who said, 'Nothing is impossible – the word itself says I'm possible!'"

MOTTO: "I believe creativity is within us all, and a natural way for connectedness, empowerment, awareness and self-expression."

a treasure and everyone is a creative soul."

Isikli finds that much of her work at the restaurant these days is maintenance, which leaves her more time for her own art.

"I'm ready to work on my own self expression and empowerment as an artist," she says.

The Woman of Distinction has begun holding art workshops for women so they can empower and express themselves.

"It is a beautiful program for women, who I believe are the real super-power of the world," Isikli claims.

Congratulations

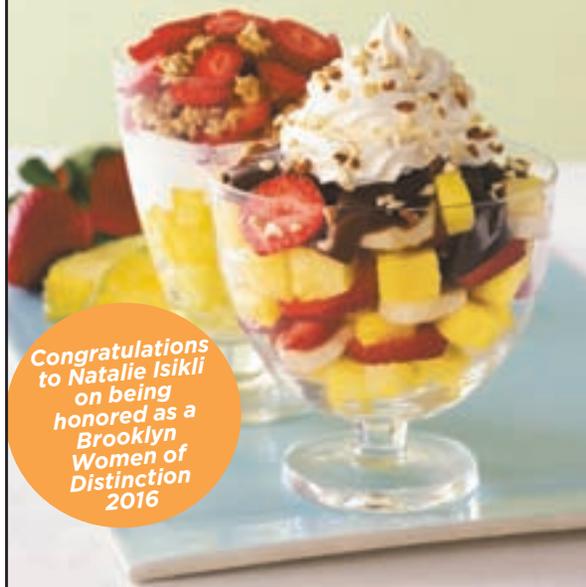
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MICHELE JERRY

Social worker encourages kids to march to their own drum

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN

When students at Evergreen Middle School see school social worker Michele Jerry, they witness everything she would want them to be.

The bubbly African-American woman with red hair marches to her own drumbeat, and in a world where teens have a tendency to become a product of their neighborhood and circle of friends — or their followers on Instagram and Tumblr — she feels a unique calling to help them discover their individuality.

“I always appreciate kids who are different, make their own status quo, don’t care what friends think and instead put their all into basketball, education, dancing, and other values,” she says. “I tell them, ‘Don’t get caught up in what teens typically do, realize you are so much more than your neighborhood.’”

Jerry’s previous positions prepared her for the vital one of helping to shape the next generation. She started out working in foster care, and then went on to join New York Presbyterian Hospital’s oncology department — a time memorable and dear to her.



Photo by Louise Wateridge

“One of the most moving experiences was when families would ask me to participate in memorials,” Jerry says. “It meant so much to me because it showed they thought of me as much more than a social worker.”

The Woman of Distinction deployed her new skills to help grieving families cope with the heartbreak of

losing a loved one.

“There was no more pain, they said their good-byes and made peace,” she says. “The whole medical team taught me what good physician care was about, and modeled for me how to act with people throughout my professional career; it was a blessing.”

The experience taught her to treat people with respect, regardless of circumstances, and to be patient with everyone and acknowledge their existence, Jerry says.

These days she loves to encourage kids to develop their own personalities, learn how to feel comfortable within themselves, and speak up and stand up for self-justice.

“I tell them not to cower and become less, when faced with a new situation,” she says. “I tell them to step outside of their neighborhood.”

Jerry’s support network consists of a group of colleagues and friends who join her for lunch everyday.

“We now call our small group ‘Ladies Lunch,’ even though there is one honorary male member!” she says.

The honoree goes above and beyond for others, says Ladies Lunch member and school counselor Lucila Macias.

BROOKLYN'S WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Bushwick.
OCCUPATION: Social worker.
COMPANY: Evergreen Middle School.

CLAIM TO FAME: “Providing emotional and supportive counseling to at-risk youth.”

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: “My own neighborhood near Pratt Institute.”

WOMAN I ADMIRE: “My mother, she has been my number-one advocate and supporter at all times.”

MOTTO: “All things through Christ who strengthens me.”

“Michele has become an amazing role model for her students,” Macias says.

“She shows them love, caring, and empathy, and relates to them as a big sister and friend — they truly love her, and we are all extremely happy and proud to work with Michele.”

Community and faith are integral in her life, says Jerry, a proud member of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Fort Greene.

“Church is my foundation and I believe that I am made whole because of God’s mercy and grace,” she says. “I’m a flawed person, and I try to treat people I come in contact with kindly.”

DR. SAUNDRA JOHNSON

Program director strives to give at-risk youth options

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN

It’s no surprise that Dr. Sandra Johnson’s motto is, “dear child, I see the beauty in you.”

The Woman of Distinction has been seeing the beauty and potential in Brooklyn’s kids for years, as director of Medgar Evers College’s Cornerstone and Beacon programs — the former providing young people with academic enrichment, homework help, and access to recreational activities; the latter partnering with the school community, neighborhood residents, businesses, and other community-based organizations to provide after-school programs incorporating a wide variety of activities.

“Keeping children busy is the key to saving them,” she says. “Providing alternatives to negative behaviors can offer better outcomes.”

Dr. Johnson is known throughout Brooklyn for her work in showcasing the talents of young people. She developed programs specifically designed to expose young people to the arts, implement sports and recreational activities of interest, and provide educational support, special events, work readiness and employment opportunities.

Her work is vital, claims her former supervisor.



Photo by Louise Wateridge

“Saundra’s programming is provided after school, when many children are unsupervised and vulnerable to negative community influences,” says Dr. Madeleine T. Gamble, the retired special assistant to the Dean of the School of Professional and Community Development at Medgar Evers. “The programs, provided under qualified adult supervision, include educational support,

sports and cultural activities, counseling support services, and opportunities for youth to demonstrate their success to the community.”

Children who participate in these activities learn teamwork, tolerance, and civic responsibility, Dr. Gamble adds.

“They learn that to be part of something good you have to work hard and strive to do your best,” she says. “These programs not only help students to do better in their day school, but also expand their options for college admissions because they have been exposed to athletics, music, leadership training, and community service.”

Dr. Gamble has witnessed Dr. Johnson’s dedication firsthand.

“I have seen Sandra inspire both colleagues and students to do their very best,” she says. “She has helped to train thousands of staff and provided after-school programming for thousands of young people. No matter how challenging the work environments, how the negative influences that work against positive youth development, or how challenging it is to raise the monies to support students and their families through positive programming, she has never given up — her energy and commitment are endless.”

BROOKLYN'S WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Brownsville and Bedford-Stuyvesant.
OCCUPATION: Director.
COMPANY: Medgar Evers College, CUNY.

CLAIM TO FAME: “Helping children learn through play.”

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Academy of Music.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: “My mother, Lena Mae Spellman.”

MOTTO OR LIFE SAYING: “Dear child, I see the beauty in you.”

Being in a position to make a difference to others is the best reward of all, claims the honoree.

“I deeply care about the youth and families in our community and I try to stay connected and work alongside those whose mission is to serve,” says Dr. Johnson. “My work has been my pleasure so it has always been a welcoming activity to contribute to the families in my community.”

Consider her a community savior, say associates.

“Saundra works in communities that most people have given up on,” says Dr. Gamble. “Failing schools, high unemployment, gang violence, and crime discourage many from getting involved, but Saundra has never been afraid to try to help young people, no matter where they live — she is saving lives.”

INGRID LEWIS-MARTIN

Making policy to impact generations to come

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN

You might say that Ingrid Lewis-Martin's life has always been all about Brooklyn. Born at St. John's Hospital, currently known as Interfaith Hospital, she was raised and educated in the borough at various public schools. She then ventured across the river to attend college in Manhattan.

She now serves as the senior advisor to Borough President Adams, having been his chief of staff when he was a state senator. Lewis-Martin's love for her job, as well as her life's mission of serving others, is apparent.

"What I love about my job is that it has afforded me the opportunity to be a community activist, who has identified and worked hard to elect quality elected officials who truly care about the constituents that they are elected to serve," says the Woman of Distinction. "Through my role as the senior advisor to Borough President Adams, our partnership has enabled me to positively impact the lives of so many individuals who truly need supportive services, which I view as a blessing."

Lewis-Martin also values her



Photo by Jason Speakman

ability to directly influence judgments and resolutions that will have lasting value.

"It further allows me to be at the table to make decisions that will positively impact future generations for many years to come," she says.

Lewis-Martin's career accomplishments are long and varied. In 2008 she was instrumental in assisting Barack Obama's New York City primary campaign. She developed literature which was used throughout Brooklyn to ensure that delegates were elected, and Eric Adams received the second highest number of votes as a delegate in New York State.

In addition, she was the lead political strategist and campaign manager who put together the team responsible for electing Adams as the first African-American president of the borough.

In 2010 she worked closely with the campaign team of state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, and personally developed and implemented the winning strategy for central Brooklyn. In 2005 Lewis-Martin cited the Wilson Pakula Act, which allowed then-Councilwoman Letitia James to run on the Democratic Party line, after the Working Families had threatened to not provide her with its political line.

"I was told by the county that this was the second time in city history that it had ever been accomplished,"

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Wingate Terrace.

OCCUPATION: Senior advisor to the Brooklyn Borough President.

COMPANY: Borough Hall.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Being a political strategist."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother Violet A. Worrell."

MOTTO: "In life everyone makes errors. In any given circumstances, treat others in the manner in which you want to be treated. It is by far easier to be kind than harsh."

she explains.

The hard work and activism that has become a way of life for Lewis-Martin is rooted in her childhood.

"I grew up in an era during the 1970s where the local supermarket did not hire people of color," she says.

"As a child, my classmates and our parents worked with our educator, Ms. Scott, to successfully picket the A&P Supermarkets and as a result, A&P's management successfully negotiated with the community and started to hire people of color."

Since then Lewis-Martin has built upon the lessons learned in childhood to create deep and long-lasting change in Brooklyn.



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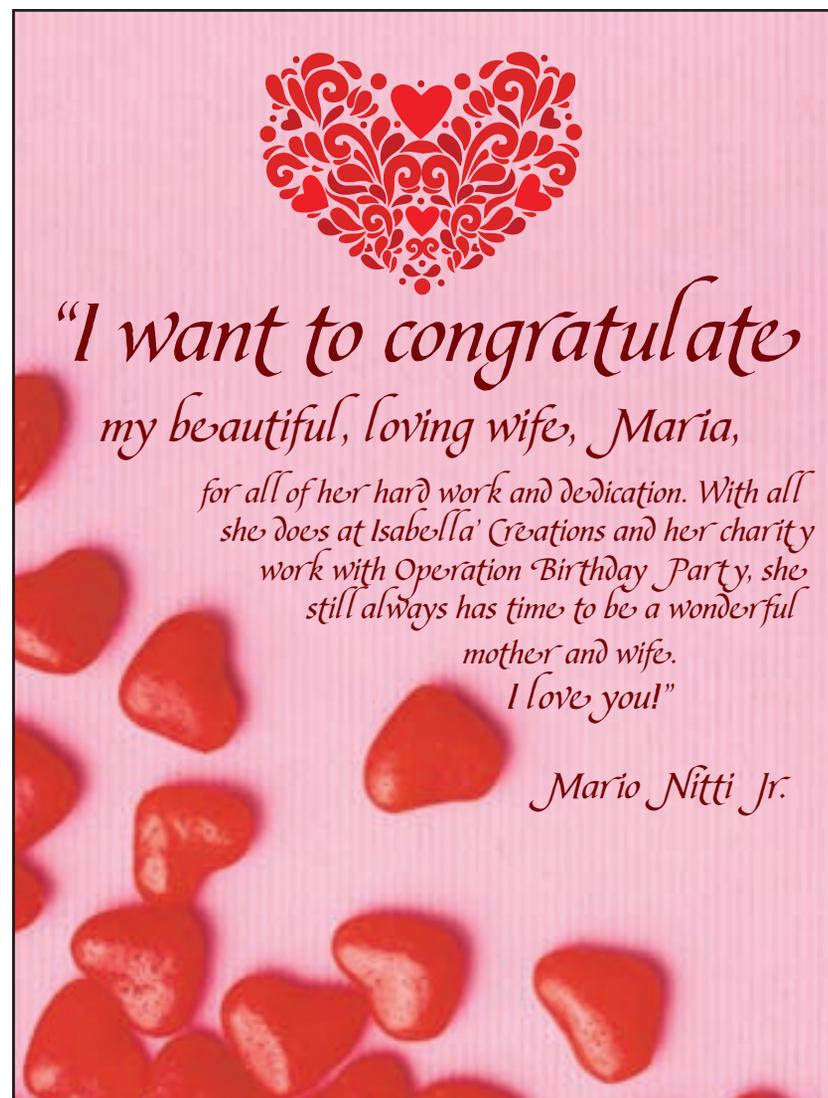
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and congratulates

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as well as this year's honorees

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- Sybil DeVeaux
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- Dr. Amy Lipnicki
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- Carmen Gloria Rosario-Olmedo
- Dawn Simon
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*"I want to congratulate
my beautiful, loving wife, Maria,*

*for all of her hard work and dedication. With all
she does at Isabella's Creations and her charity
work with Operation Birthday Party, she
still always has time to be a wonderful
mother and wife.*

I love you!"

Mario Nitti Jr.

DR. AMY LIPNICKI

Giving voiceless patients the care they deserve

BY YVONNE JURIS

When an abandoned Yorkshire terrier was found tied up in front of a Mill Basin cafe in the summer of 2014, it was brought directly across the street to veterinarian Dr. Amy Lipnicki at the Mill Basin Veterinary Clinic. The terrier, covered in dirt and urine, was suffering from a build-up of gallbladder stones, X-rays revealed.

The \$1,500 in donations, received largely from neighborhood contributions, helped cover the cost for the abdominal surgery. The stones were removed, and the terrier, whom Lipnicki named Aloisius, recovered successfully and was placed with a loving family.

As a reminder of that surgery, she keeps a compacted jar of stones, made mostly of phosphorous, in the lobby.

“Even if it’s a stray cat that somebody brought in, you want to know you are doing the right thing by that animal,” the Woman of Distinction says. “If it’s something we can fix fairly easily and it’s not so bad, a lot of times we do take on that burden.”

But these stories aren’t quite as common as she hopes. Lipnicki



Photo by Jordan Rathkopf

spoke of some of the emotional difficulties inherent in the practice of veterinarian medicine, namely pursuing the best affordable treatment plan, and balancing that with emotions and maintenance practices of the owner.

“There’s a lot of information out

there now about compassion fatigue because sadly veterinarian medicine can be really expensive to treat your pets, and a lot of times we don’t want to put them to sleep,” she says.

Lipnicki, who prefers to be called Dr. Amy, hosts a dental awareness month in February and performs micro-chipping, a procedure that entails subcutaneously placing a microchip that contains the owner’s or veterinarian’s contact information inside the dog. After working for more than 12 years as a staff veterinarian with the Marine Park Veterinarian Group, as well as three years as a staff emergency doctor, Lipnicki is the resident doctor at the Mill Basin Veterinary Clinic. She says her staff is very supportive, but cited financial burdens as one of her main challenges.

“It’s a challenge trying to separate your compassionate mind and what you want to do for the animal with the business side of you,” Lipnicki says. “We have to make a bit of money too and try to find a happy medium between the two.”

Jennifer Multeri, a veterinarian technician who works with Lipnicki, expressed joy at working with the

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Mill Basin.

OCCUPATION: Veterinarian.

COMPANY: Mill Basin Veterinary Clinic.

CLAIM TO FAME: “Rehabilitating and finding loving, forever homes for Aloisius and Agnes, two abandoned and neglected dogs that were left tied to fences in Mill Basin.”

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Prospect Park.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: “My sister, Claire. She is selfless and caring. She has always supported and encouraged me throughout my life and career. She has a sparkling and magnetic personality.”

MOTTO: “Only a person who loves a challenge would take on a patient who can’t tell them where it hurts.”

honoree.

“I absolutely love it,” says Multeri. “I have the freedom to do things I want to do.”

Lipnicki, who attended Ross University in the Caribbean island of St. Kitts, said her love for animals began early on when she was growing up in New Jersey.

“I love what I do,” she says. “I love working with the animals, even some of the challenging animals that are aggressive or scared.”

MARIA TERESA NITTI

Sweet treats make homeless kids’ birthday wishes come true

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN

The sweet phrase, “made with love,” rings especially true for celebrated cake designer Maria Teresa Nitti.

Nitti, owner of Isabella’s Creations in Dyker Heights, grew up the youngest of four children of a single working mother and delighted as a girl in the sweet aroma of baked goods stemming from the kitchen. One of her most joyful childhood memories was watching her sister bake, and learning the finer points of delicious dessert-making from her sibling and grandmother.

Nitti’s love of baking flourished and her hobby blossomed into a small business. Today the mom of two boys owns and operates her own custom cake shop with entrepreneurial triumphs that are red hot.

“I’m proud of the business I have built,” says Nitti, a self-taught cake decorator. “I made something amazing from a hobby and wouldn’t change it for the world.”

The Woman of Distinction counts celebrities among her loyal customers, and has even walked the red carpet with some of them, including late “Mob Wives” star Angela “Big Ang”



Photo by Georgine Benvenuto

Raiola, who became a devotee after Nitti provided the cake for a premiere party.

The most luscious part of all is sharing in her customer’s memorable moments, claims Nitti.

“I love my job because we become a part of a special moment in a per-

son’s life,” she says.

The creating extends far beyond the kitchen, and Nitti’s cakes have become focal points at milestone celebrations, memorable moments, and other good times for people she comes into contact with, including many children. She runs a program with other area vendors called Operation Birthday Party and travels to a local homeless shelter once a month to celebrate the special days of youngsters, bringing them gifts and throwing them a party — a first for some of them.

“The birthday parties are a little break from reality for these kids, and some have never had them before,” Nitti says. “Unfortunately, it’s something that their parents would love to do and just cannot do for them at this time, but I want them to know that there is someone out there who cares, and is willing to go that extra mile to make sure they have a great and memorable birthday party.”

Best friend and former colleague Barbara Crawford says she saw something special in Nitti as soon as the honoree hired Maria to start a business development center at the automotive dealership where she worked

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Bensonhurst-Dyker Heights.

OCCUPATION: Cake designer.

COMPANY: Isabella’s Creations.

CLAIM TO FAME: “I’ve designed cakes for celebrities who have become regular customers.”

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Bridge Park.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: “My grandmother because she taught me the ins and outs of baking delicious cakes.”

MOTTO: “Work smarter, not harder!”

before turning her attention full-time to cake-baking.

“Maria multi-tasks like no one else I have ever met,” says Crawford. “Her outgoing personality, infectious smile, along with her intelligence truly stood out to me right away.”

Nitti’s acumen as a businesswoman and her compassion for people less fortunate make her a personal heroine, adds Crawford.

“Maria is passionate about people and 100 percent committed to giving back and touching as many lives as she can,” she says. “She is an inspiring and positive force of one because when Maria sets her mind on something, there is basically no stopping her!”

ANGELIKA PISAKHOVA

Connecting Jewish children to their culture and each other

BY SHNIEKA JOHNSON

A “desire to help others and make this world a better place” is what drew Angelika Pisakhova to the community service sector four years ago. She now serves as general manager of the Tovushi Kavkazi Jewish Youth Center — a position that she has held for the past two years.

Pisakhova is also a volunteer for the Be Proud Foundation, an organization that focuses on civic and social issues, and often partners with the Tovushi Kavkazi Youth Center for programs offered in conjunction with the local New York Police Department.

The Woman of Distinction’s colleagues have only admiration for her.

“I am very happy and proud of Angelika,” says Yunna Ivzhenko, a fellow vullie at the Be Proud Foundation, upon hearing that Pisakhova is being honored. “And proud to be her friend.”

Tovushi Kavkazi Jewish Youth Center opened in 2011 because there was a need for a youth center such as this to aid working families, and to serve as a safe space for children to go, play, and take care of each



Photo by Jordan Rathkopf

other — like a community. Young Kavkazi Jews, hailing from the Caucasus Mountains of Russia, come to the center after school to play, learn, and meet caring people, such as Pisakhova.

“Angelika is very caring and giving, very modest and polite,” Iv-

zhenko adds. “She would never ask for anything, she only helps silently, not for a thank you, not for prizes or glory, not for money; she is very genuine and sincere.”

The center provides a space to connect with friends new and old, all while enabling the children to connect with their religion. It offers after-school programming that consists of varied activities, including chess and sports. One of the most popular offerings is the traditional dance class, which many children take a few times per week. The dance troop has performed at many community events around Brooklyn.

Tovushi, which means “light” in English, exemplifies Pisakhova’s role at the center.

“I ran from war and now that I am safe and my kids are raised in peace I try to give back more to all kids and families in my community,” she says. “I try my best to help them learn their culture, and value what they have.”

At the center, the children make friends with others who share the same background. They may live in different neighborhoods and go to different schools, but their culture is the same, and they connect on a

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Sheepshead Bay.

OCCUPATION: General manager.

COMPANY: Tovushi Kavkazi Jewish Youth Center.

CLAIM TO FAME: “Having kids around me.”

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: The small park under the Verrazano Bridge.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: “Svetlana Shagabaeva, who raised me as her own, became my mother, gave me proper education, and taught me everything I know.”

MOTTO: “If you believe, you can achieve!”

deeper level because of that, says Pisakhova.

The facility also offers a camp during the summer months for the children in its programs. During the religious holidays, the center serves as a gathering place not only for the children, but for their families.

Pisakhova keeps coming back day after day because her work is “part of something bigger.”

“Realizing that I help a new generation to succeed makes my work worthwhile,” she says. “I love seeing how the children grow up and become better, stronger, more beautiful people, and so genuinely happy.”

Congratulations and Best Wishes to
Dawn Simon
on this well-deserved award.
2016 Brooklyn Women of Distinction



Congratulations

★

Carmen Gloria Rosario-Olmedo P.D.

Women of Distinction 2016

From: Ruben (husband), Family, Friends and Colleagues

Congratulations to
Lynn Harris and her
fellow Brooklyn
Women of
Distinction. You
make this borough a
better place!



Congratulations to
Lynn Harris
from her parents, who have
always viewed her as a
Woman of Distinction!

Florence and Jim Harris

Congratulations to
DAWN SIMON

From Team
BK Style/Fashion Week Brooklyn
Your are a woman of distinction and
much more, we salute you.



CHINITA POINTER

Foundation founder introduces kids to classical music

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN

When Chinita Pointer lost her husband — famed musician Noel Pointer — in 1994, she and her family wanted to start a foundation to finish the many projects he left behind.

The world-renowned, Grammy-nominated, jazz violinist and composer — who made his solo debut at age 13 performing Vivaldi with the Symphony of the New World Orchestra — believed learning to play a string instrument was a transformative experience that advanced a child's life, says his wife, who has made his fantasy a reality for more than 100,000 families through the Noel Pointer Foundation.

"My initial vision was to begin a string music program for kids of color to gain an appreciation for classical culture," says Pointer, whose first fans remain the couple's children, Danai, Danielle, and Noel.

Pointer's daughter Danai says the Woman of Distinction rose above the most difficult time in her life by envisioning a youth orchestra and a music school for children to empower them, one note at a time.

"My mom took on the overwhelm-



Photo by Jason Speakman

ing task of raising three children on her own, and started to turn a nightmare into a dream," says Danai. "Through her leadership, the foundation has kept our father's legacy alive, and made her dreams come true."

The Noel Pointer Foundation started in 1998 with just 18 students

at PS 44, but quickly expanded to 26 other public schools because it fulfilled a great need for music education and the arts. Today, it offers music enrichment projects, including the Summer String and Saturday Strings programs, and private instruction in the After-School Strings Program. There is also a Training Orchestra, the Noel Pointer Youth Orchestra, and the professional Phantazia String Players, who have performed from Steinway Hall to Summer Stage. In addition, the Noel Pointer Foundation Youth Orchestra has performed with the Brooklyn Philharmonic and Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, Strings of Brooklyn, Mos Def, and Mark O'Connor.

Pointer's determination, hard work, and unique outlook have been life-changing for others, and made her a Renaissance woman, says Danai.

"From driving like Annie Oakley to dressing like Katherine Hepburn, my mom's the perfect mix of whimsical abandon and sophistication," she says. "She always seems to know what to do or say to improve a situation, bring a smile to the face of a loved one, child or stranger, and illuminate a room."

The devoted daughter says Pointer

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Bedford-Stuyvesant.

OCCUPATION: Executive Director.

COMPANY: The Noel Pointer Foundation.

CLAIM TO FAME: My children.

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: "The Promenade, where my husband and I used to court."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother — if it wasn't for her I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing."

MOTTO: "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supplies."

remains dedicated to ensuring the next generation has opportunities to create, socialize and improve their education through the arts.

"As long as our mother continues to imagine, children from Bensonhurst to Brooklyn Heights will experience the extraordinary act of playing music," says Danai.

For the honoree, music remains a magical wand with which to tap young talent.

"We have changed so many children's lives because of the vision of the program, and the wonderful and dedicated teachers we have had," says Pointer. "So many children lives have been saved simply because they have picked up that instrument."

BEAREATHER REDDY

Introducing a new generation to the blues

BY YVONNE JURIS

Ocean Hill actress, blues singer, community leader, and former broadcast news director Beareather Reddy embodies the meaning of self-reinvention.

After spending nearly 30 years working as an associate director for the graphics department for two ABC news programs, Reddy decided that she would retire and return to her passion of music and community involvement.

"My mission is to introduce community youth to blues music," says Reddy, who has a CD entitled, "Beareather sings the Classic Blueswomen," featuring Perry Bradford songs and Ma Rainey classics. "If I say my mission is to keep blues alive, then in my opinion, the only way you are gonna do that is to pass it on to the next generation."

Reddy's love of the blues was nurtured in her early years growing up in Georgia. She set up free community workshops in her home, transforming her apartment into a studio dedicated to music, music theory, and blues education. These days she is a board member of the Central Brooklyn Jazz Consortium, and



Photo by Jason Speakman

the founder and executive director of her own production company, Big Eyed Enterprises. Her popular jazz festivals — she performs in them herself — welcome blues artists from across the country, includ-

ing Bobby Rush, Vinnie Knight and BET Gospel Video Award nominee Gary Samuels.

The Woman of Distinction's students are also doing her proud, making music across the borough at such venues as the Brooklyn Historical Society and Kumble Theater.

"I'm really a vocalist, but I want to see people have fun," says the Woman of Distinction, who earned a degree in performing arts from the University of Massachusetts, where she performed with such notables as Max Roach and Archie Shepp, and even made an appearance on the David Letterman Show with a gospel group led by singer Lady Peachena.

Although blues musicians have reached out to Reddy for performance opportunities, she says she struggles with marketing and profit earnings. Not only does she self-fund her projects, rent theaters and host the workshops from her home, she also pays the performers who play at her festivals.

"I can't ask people to do things for free, I don't know how to do that," says Reddy, who has written and performed one-woman showcases

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Ocean Hill.

OCCUPATION: Vocalist, actress, and producer.

COMPANY: Big Eyed Enterprises.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Producer of the annual Big Eyed Blues Festival."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: Harriet Tubman.

MOTTO: "Keep blues alive."

about women in jazz, and sang and performed skits on television.

Sylvia Ryan, a retired financial analyst who met Reddy at the Central Brooklyn Jazz Consortium, is impressed by her work with children in Central and East Brooklyn.

"It's really a lot for a person to do," says Ryan. "There's a lot of energy involved with all that, especially to be a singer, herself, too."

Reddy helped Ryan reconnect with the blues — a music genre African Americans can have a complex relationship with, Davis adds.

"A lot of African Americans think of the blues as depressing or related to slavery, and they think, 'Oh, I'm not going back there!'" says Ryan. "You have to open their minds to it."

BAZAH ROOHI

Helping women seek justice in Pakistan and beyond

BY SHNIEKA JOHNSON

Bazah Roohi has an ambitious goal — to stop domestic violence against women and end human rights abuses.

“I am always concerned with the problems faced by women, therefore, I try my best to come up with solutions and resolve their problem,” says the president and founder of the American Council of Minority Women. “Some of the problems women face are due to the culture and traditions, but some are also due to laws that make it harder for women to seek justice.”

Roohi’s organization — the first Pakistani-American organization in the country to focus on human rights abuses in Pakistan — promotes, protects, and develops minority women in the social, legal, educational and economic sectors, but it has broadened its agenda to include all abuses of human rights. Supporters — including Pakistani Americans, other Americans, and Pakistanis in Pakistan and around the world — hope her intervention will help bring social change to Pakistan.

“Serving for humanity is my pas-



Photo by Georgine Benvenuto

sion, which keeps me motivated, it makes me keep on coming back to the office day after day,” says the Woman of Distinction.

Roohi, who was born in Pakistan, established the American Council of Minority Women 11 years ago and

incorporated it in 2009. Her organization provides formerly illiterate women with a basic education to enable them to stand on their feet and help others. Its adult literacy center in Brooklyn has enabled 26 women to learn to read and write, thus far. These women not only learn English, but also the communication and computer skills that are critical for them in their jobs and everyday life.

Roohi is a friend of the community, says her friend and business partner Farhan Sheikh.

“When I heard that Bazah was nominated as an honoree, I was very happy and excited that someone who is very dear to me was getting a distinction award,” says Sheikh.

Roohi, she adds, is a great social worker, who ran a food pantry — funding it herself — in addition to conducting health symposiums on a regular basis, organizing annual street fairs, and supplying food to a shelter in Brooklyn for 10 straight days after Hurricane Sandy.

“Even on the day when the storm was happening, when everybody was in their homes, Bazah was at the shelter to supply food to the peo-

NEIGHBORHOOD: Midwood.

OCCUPATION: President and founder.

COMPANY: American Council of Minority Women.

CLAIM TO FAME: “Working for human rights.”

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Coney Island Avenue.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: “Mother Teresa because she did a lot of work for the sake of humanity.”

MOTTO: “If you want to love your creator, love His creations.”

ple,” says Sheikh. “She is an amazing woman with so many great skills.”

Roohi’s work is as necessary now as it was when she first started the organization, and her efforts have included developing networks with South Asian and Muslim domestic violence organizations, organizing events for children, and providing relief aid during natural disasters.

Roohi is philosophical about her work.

“What I have done for my fellow sisters is considered to me as a single grain in a bag of rice,” she says. “But to me I feel like I have done something, and I will continue to do it as long as I live, as problems arise everyday.”

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CARMEN GLORIA ROSARIO-OLMEDO

Renaissance woman has spent her life giving

BY YVONNE JURIS

Carmen Gloria Rosario-Olmedo is a busy Park Sloper as a doctor of philosophy, an actress, a teacher, a principal, a family woman, a Fulbright scholar, and an animal activist.

In February Rosario-Olmedo headed to Puerto Rico to host the annual festival for the Duncan's and Tuqui's Legacy Organization, a charity she founded to help promote awareness for the humane treatment of animals in the Caribbean.

"I believe in karma," she says. "One has to spend one's life giving in many ways."

The Woman of Distinction originally aspired to work as an anthropologist, until a mentor advised her to take education classes because of the difficulty women faced in the social sciences. Rosario-Olmedo took the sound advice and followed it up with an illustrious career at PS 316 in Crown Heights, where she spent 39 years as a teacher, assistant principal, and finally principal.

"I grew up with that school," she says. "I loved all my kids."

In addition to teaching the lower grades and special education, Rosario-Olmedo also taught a celebrated the-



Photo by Jason Speakman

ater program, drawing from her own theatrical background, which included acting in high school, working with the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater, and securing a principal role on an episode of "America's Most Wanted."

Rosario-Olmedo says providing students who came from low-income and single parent-homes with the chance

to perform gave them an outlet to express their emotions and frustrations.

"I found that the kids that had this restlessness, this need to be heard, were really top performers," she says. "It was a vehicle to channel their emotions."

Former PS 316 student Brenda Colon, whose son attended the same school when Rosario-Olmedo was principal, recalls having her as a teacher.

"Ms. Rosario-Olmedo was the best, everyone loved her and everyone wanted to perform with her," Colon says. "Kids that didn't want to participate would always participate in her class."

As principal, Rosario-Olmedo established pilot programs for her students to help keep them on track, including a mentorship program with Long Island University's basketball team, then called The Bluebirds.

Her work has been her reward, and the Renaissance woman's study room boasts a plethora of distinguished awards and proclamations given to her over the years; among them, Administration of the Year from Phi Delta Kappa, a national professional organization for educators, and achievement accolades from the New York City

BROOKLYN'S WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Park Slope.

OCCUPATION: Educator and chief executive officer.

COMPANY: CGO Property Corporation, and DATLO.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Try to give back to humanity what God and life have been generous enough to give to me."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Park Slope.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My mother, who was a woman of great strength of character, tenacious in achieving her goals, of superior intellect and extreme humaneness, and a natural-born teacher."

MOTTO: "Nothing is impossible, but you must work hard for it."

Council for Education. A large stack of other plaudits fill a blue bag in the back of the room.

"They take up wall space," says Rosario-Olmedo, who was awarded two Fulbright Scholarship to study Mexican and Chilean anthropology, and how it related to the educational system, and hailed a Fulbright Lifetime Scholar.

Yet every day presents a new opportunity to expand her horizons for the honoree.

"I believe everything you learn opens new doors for you," says Rosario-Olmedo.

DAWN SIMON

Marketing manager has revamped Kings Plaza

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN

If you're from Brooklyn, you know that Kings Plaza Shopping Center — on the border of Marine Park and Mill Basin — is the mall of record for serious shoppers.

Most of us have shopped there, no matter what part of Brooklyn we come from, and now with a glorious new upgrade, it has taken on a new life of its own.

The mall's success is due in no small measure to Dawn Simon, the area senior manager of marketing for Macerich — one of the country's leading owners, operators and developers of major retail real estate — with oversight of marketing at Kings Plaza, Green Acres Mall in Nassau County, and The Shops at Atlas Park in Queens. Simon has more than 20 years of experience contributing to the planning, creating and coordinating of marketing programs, and guiding the marketing and community relations efforts of shopping centers in the New York Metro region.

If that sounds like a lot on her plate, the Woman of Distinction — also a mom to daughter Tyler — feels the need to do even more. When she's



Photo by Jordan Rathkopf

not brainstorming a project at the mall, Simon takes helping others to a whole new level, working on several community outreach programs with a knack for handling multiple projects simultaneously.

Simon is a chapter director at Operation Prom, an organization

that provides free prom attire to low-income high-school seniors who are graduating, in addition to other resources, opportunities, and mentoring. Simon coordinates the giveaways for prom dresses and tuxedos.

In addition she is a board member at Heart Gallery, N.Y.C., a traveling photo exhibit that helps find loving, permanent homes for foster children.

Her motive is simple enough, says the honoree — she simply loves to help others.

"It is my passion for helping people that drove me to get involved in these organizations," says Simon, who also organizes the annual Blessing Our Block events at Emmanuel Baptist Church, where she is a long-time member, and works with other charitable groups to donate backpacks filled with school supplies to students in need, and Thanksgiving turkeys to struggling families.

Her love for business and marketing, combined with her extraordinary organizational skills, make her a natural benefactor.

"I enjoy making a positive impact on people's lives," she says.

BROOKLYN'S WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Fort Green, Clinton Hill.

OCCUPATION: Area senior manager of marketing.

COMPANY: Macerich.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Being a mom, sister, and daughter."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Brooklyn Heights Promenade.

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Elisa Padilla, senior vice president at Barclays Center."

MOTTO: "Not to spoil the ending, but everything is going to be okay!"

Simon is the best combination of capability and compassion of anyone she knows, states Kristin Crosby, who met Simon when both were undergraduates at Howard University.

"Dawn cares for people often more than is good for her, always putting others before herself," says Crosby. "What makes her exceptional is that she is an executor who knows how to get things done, so this caring and compassion always turns into action that benefits the recipients."

The awardee's kindness and generosity of spirit have helped countless people, remarks Crosby.

"It seems just about every time we talk, Dawn is working on some event that is helping a group in need."

STEPHANIE THOMPSON

Giving city public school students access to the arts

BY TIM PERRINS



Photo by Jason Speckman

aired on NBC's "Today Show" and "Fox News."

Terry Radigan leads a song-writing program for InspireCorps, and has seen previously introverted kids flourish as they begin to find their voices.

"It's been really wonderful," she says. "It's incredible for the kids."

Radigan describes Thompson as exceptionally committed, tenacious and inquiring about developing InspireCorps.

"Stephanie's work is all about the kids," she says. "She had the patience to wait and make sure that what the kids ended up getting was in the best interest for them, and not what she had envisioned for InspireCorps, or what was the best for the school."

Where does someone who works so hard to motivate others draw inspiration for herself?

"Eleanor Roosevelt was always my mentor and my model," says Thompson. "What she did was bring people together, she was a real connector and understood that everybody had to work together."

Thompson's goal was always to inspire teachers and administrators as well as kids, and InspireCorps has an ongoing relationship with PS 81 in Bed-

BROOKLYN'S
WOMEN of DISTINCTION

NEIGHBORHOOD: Park Slope.

OCCUPATION: Freelance writer; founder and executive director of InspireCorps.

COMPANY: InspireCorps.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Being a mom to my gorgeous boys, my cooking and entertaining, and getting my ideas out to the world."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: Prospect Park. "I absolutely love getting lost in the woods with my dog, Ginger."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Eleanor Roosevelt because she took her important position in the world very seriously, speaking frankly and with great empathy about how equality should be achieved with a view to people who had the power to make it happen."

MOTTO: "Let us not be ashamed to speak what we shame not to think."
— Michel de Montaigne

Stephanie Thompson isn't happy that some kids benefit from New York City's wellspring of creativity, but others don't. That's why the freelance writer, who writes about the arts, advertising, health, and education, started InspireCorps, a group that brings creative professionals and curious students together.

Thompson's own kids' school in Park Slope was rich in volunteers and funds to provide enrichment through arts, and Thompson's contributions — like fund-raising, running arts programs, and arranging author visits — didn't hurt. Yet when she volunteered as a tutor at other Brooklyn schools she found they lacked the resources needed to fulfill the anxious, distracted, uninterested — and smart — kids she met.

All that changed when she gave them a chance to express themselves creatively, and they began to focus and engage.

"Kids should love to learn — not sit in school, and be bored and upset," says Thompson, who writes the "Fearless Parenting" column in The Brooklyn Paper.

The swift transformations sparked InspireCorps, which assembles musicians, photographers, illustrators,

dancers, and other artists, who lead hands-on workshops and expose students to multiple art forms, while encouraging them to follow their interests.

"Letting kids gravitate to what they'd like to do means they're going to be the most engaged," says Thompson, whose own writing engagements have

ford-Stuyvesant, which draws a great deal of its students from the city housing development across the street — incredibly named the Eleanor Roosevelt Houses.

This is no mere coincidence for Thompson.

"I'm a big believer in the signs that show you you're in the right place at the right time and on the right path," says the Woman of Distinction.

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Carmen Gloria Rosario-Olmedo P.D.

Women of Distinction 2016

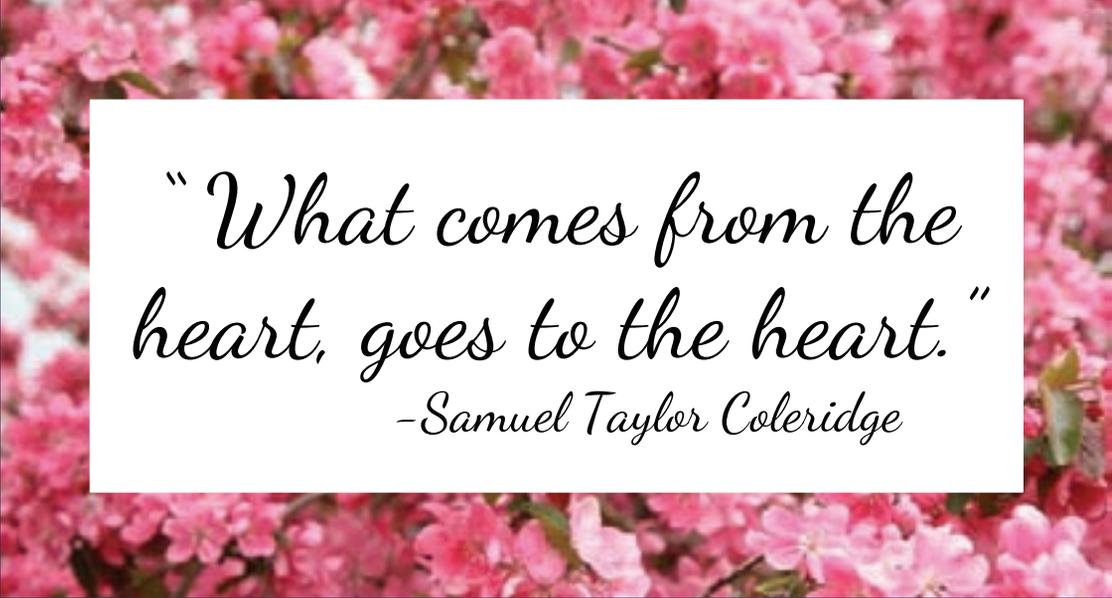
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From: CGO Property Corp and DATLO and employees and volunteers



Lenore Friedman

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heart, goes to the heart."*

-Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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We love you so much.

*Debbie, David, Donna, Erica, Gadi, Elliot, Beau, Ira, Arlene,
Alex, Peri, Halle, Edward, Douglas, Alyla, Joss...*

And countless more!

Congratulations

to the
Women of Distinction Honorees of
2016

Thank you for your hard work and dedication

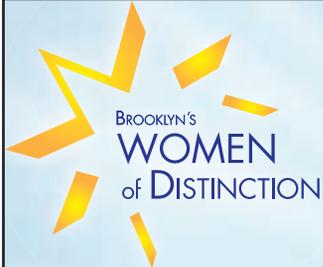
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HAFIDA TORRES

Empowering Brooklyn's Moroccan women

BY SHNIEKA JOHNSON

Moroccan-born Hafida — née Balalioui — Torres came to New York City in 1999. After living in Queens for a short period, she moved to Brooklyn and here is where she has stayed.

Once in New York, she pursued her education, receiving her bachelors and masters degrees in special education and early childhood intervention. Torres is an educator, licensed therapist, and community leader who has been active in Brooklyn's Moroccan community, helping individuals, families, and children with special needs overcome hurdles.

"Since I was young I always wanted to provide help for people," she says. "When I help someone or I present something good, it makes me feel great."

Torres is the president of the Moroccan American Council to Empower Women, her work touching such people as Naima Remmak, its vice president.

Remmak met the Woman of Distinction at a cultural event in a public school, after reading a flyer informing her that Torres would be telling stories using the Moroccan old tradi-



Photo by Louise Wateridge

tional oral stories.

"I loved the flyer, it reminded me of my childhood in Morocco, so I went in the auditorium to attend the show," says Remmak. "Hafida had a beautiful set up, including Moroccan tea and treats—the presentation was awesome and the children had a good time."

Remmak recalls going up to Torres

to thank her and congratulate her for doing a beautiful job.

"That's when I found out that she works with children with special needs just as I do," she says. "Since that day, we exchanged contact info and we've been collaborating ever since."

Torres is also a co-founder of the Moroccan American House Association, and the Moroccan Society of New York Association. She is affiliated with a number of other organizations, helping to educate Moroccans and others about their rights, and providing information about government programs in New York.

The honoree, who has received recognition and honorary certificates from the City Council for her altruism, is as enthusiastic as ever about her work.

"I like what I do because I encounter more people who need help, especially women from my culture," she says. "The community is growing more and more, and people need guidance and advice in different fields to improve their lifestyle."

Torres is "phenomenal," remarks Remmak.

"Wherever there is a need, you will find Hafida is the first one to respond,

NEIGHBORHOOD: Bay Ridge.

OCCUPATION: President and founder.

COMPANY: Moroccan Association Council on Empowering Women.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Helping the community."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: "The entire borough."

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "Mother Teresa because she was an amazing woman with a big heart, full of love for everybody. I like her quote, 'It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving.'"

MOTTO: "She saw an opportunity, so she turned it into a reality."

and people in our community know to reach out to her when they need help with any types of services," she says. "I have never met a Moroccan-American woman who is doing so much for others in the same capacity that I've seen Hafida do."

Community work is reward in itself, says Torres.

"I love working with people and I like to put a smile on someone's face and make his or her life easier," she says. "I feel more motivated whenever I provide a service and I see great result."

SHIRLEY YOUNG

Saving countless lives during decades of volunteering

BY TIM PERRINS

When it comes to serving her community, Shirley Young has been around the block a few times — literally.

The retired Flatlands Volunteer Ambulance Corps member and emergency medical technician instructor has helped to save countless lives in her decades of volunteering with the rescue unit.

Young was on the move from the get-go, graduating early from high school before enrolling in a nursing program. She worked as a registered nurse for many years, but it wasn't a perfect fit.

"In those days, you didn't question the doctors," she says.

She eventually found her calling while reading an article in the local paper concerning the lengthy response times for emergency medical services in Brooklyn.

"There was an appeal made for volunteers," says Young. "I saw the need and I filled it."

In 1974 she joined the fledgling corps as an ambulance dispatcher, quickly progressing to attendant and then crew chief — the person responsible for everyone on the ambulance.



Photo by Georgine Benvenuto

The unit now has three ambulances, but in those early days things were different.

"We originally had only an old Cadillac van to run with," recalls Young. "Someone who belonged to the corps worked for a body shop, and they converted it so we were able to take a fold-

ing cot in and out of it."

Ambulance work is not for the squeamish, and Young has seen plenty of car accidents and heart attack victims. But there were lighter moments as well.

"We had calls of people wanting to be transported some place and we had to explain that wasn't our purpose—that's what car service was for," she laughs.

Late one memorable night her daughter-in-law called at 3:30 am — in labor. Shirley went with a crew, including her husband, who was an attendant. They made it to the hospital, but not before delivering a bouncing baby boy on site.

When Young took a hiatus in 1977, it was only to fill another need — volunteering to teach emergency first aid to coast guards on Governor's and Fire islands. Young returned to the corps in 1991, staying on until her retirement in 2011.

Crew Captain Fred Wilken describes Young as a caring person.

"Shirley's there for every special event we have," he says. "I wish she was still working with us, I would love to have her back."

Along her incredible journey this

NEIGHBORHOOD: Flatlands.

OCCUPATION: Retired medical educator.

COMPANY: Flatlands Volunteer Ambulance Corps.

CLAIM TO FAME: "Being an ambulance corps member, EMT instructor, writer, poet, choral singer, and soloist."

FAVORITE BROOKLYN PLACE: "Aboard the Cyclone roller coaster in Coney Island. That's where my husband proposed to me. I said if I lived to get off, I would marry him!"

WOMAN I ADMIRE: "My second grade teacher, Mrs. Berland, who instilled in all her students the idea that helping one another in difficult as well as happy times was the only way to make your life worthwhile."

MOTTO: "See the need and fill it."

Woman of Distinction has received a 25-year community service award from Borough Hall and an American Red Cross Humanitarian Award, among several others. She has also been active in many community organizations, including Brooklyn College's Institute for Retirees in the Pursuit of Education, where she taught first aid and computer classes, and served as president for many years — just because.

"I just did it because it needed to be done," says Young.

Congratulations to our *Amazing* CEO, Pamela Esposito-Amery for receiving the
2016 Brooklyn Women of Distinction Award.

This title is especially significant for our [®]T.E.A.L. family.
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was named a Brooklyn Woman of Distinction in 2011.



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