BCHS Celebrates Residents and Supporters at Talented Brooklyn Gala

More than 200 guests braved the heavy rain to attend Brooklyn Community Housing and Services’ (BCHS) Talented Brooklyn Gala on April 30th. Despite the weather, the atmosphere inside the Green Building in Brooklyn was bright and warm.

Friends, donors and honorees gathered for the celebration, which raised more than $115,000 in crucial funds to support BCHS’ work to end homelessness in Brooklyn. BCHS proudly honored Christopher Halligan, Esq., Attorney at Law with Adam Leitman Bailey, P.C., and leading supportive housing experts CSH: Connie Tempel, Diane Louard-Michel, Kristin Miller and Ryan Moser, for the extraordinary and essential services they provide to BCHS and the Brooklyn community.

While enjoying cocktails and hors d’oeuvres (catered by Brooklyn’s own Naturally Delicious), guests browsed inspiring artwork from BCHS residents, as well as a series of photos by Brooklyn-based photographer and filmmaker Liz Giamatti celebrating the women of BCHS. Attendees also bid on an exciting assortment of auction items including hand-crafted works from local artists, tickets to a taping of The Late Show with David Letterman, reservations at the super-exclusive East Harlem restaurant Rao’s, a trip to Rome, an iPad and many other unique opportunities and items.

Throughout the gala, novelist, songwriter and performer Wesley Stace entertained the crowd as special guest emcee. Later in the night, award-winning Brooklyn-based performer Jean Rohe and her band closed out the night with a lively performance of original multi-cultural songs.

We are enormously thankful to all who attended, provided support and helped put this year’s gala together. We hope to see you next year! See page 5 for more Talented Brooklyn.

Left: Jean Rohe

Above, from left: Board Members Margie Hanssens, Alexandra Bowie and Tom Castellnuovo; Honorees Connie Tempel, Diane Louard-Michel, Kristin Miller and Ryan Moser (CSH)

Below, from left: Board Member Richard Greenspan with Nekesha Sawh, Evelyn Correa and Livia Corredor (Forest City Ratner Companies); Board Member Jonathan Jones, photographer/filmmaker Liz Giamatti, and BCHS artist Hilde Freedom

Above: Honoree Christopher Halligan, Esq. (Adam Leitman Bailey, P.C.)

Photos by FreedLense Photography
In June, the BCHS Board of Directors chose new officers to lead them through its 2015 fiscal year, beginning July 1, 2014. The officers for the new term are as follows:

• Christine Spadaro is now Chairperson, replacing Ben Baxt, who is staying on as an active Board Member;

• Jens Peter Hansen assumes Ms. Spadaro’s previous position as Vice-Chairperson;

• Anthony Trani is moving to the role of Treasurer that was previously held by Thomas Castelnuovo. Mr. Castelnuovo, also a former Chairperson, remains on as an active Board Member; and

• Laura Schnell is taking on the post of Secretary.

The group also welcomed two recently elected members, Ambriel Floyd Bostic and Nadja Pinnavaia, who bring the current roster to 18 Board Members.

“We have such a devoted and energetic group on the Board right now,” says Chairperson Christine Spadaro. “I’m very excited about the future of BCHS.”

Dear friends,

Ruth wanted to be an artist since she was 5 years old. Pursuing her dream, she attended NYU with a dual major in creative writing and art and even wrote a column for the school paper.

But soon after graduating, Ruth was mugged at knifepoint and had to fight off her attacker on a darkened street. The incident left her badly shaken. Scared and uncertain, Ruth decided to move back in with her mother and sisters in their small apartment in Chinatown. However things only got worse, as feelings of anxiety and depression began to overwhelm her; when Ruth started hearing voices her family felt they could no longer care for her and, heartbroken, placed her in a psychiatric center in New Jersey.

Fortunately, a worker at the center knew about BCHS’ Scattered-Site Apartment Program and felt Ruth would be a good fit, eventually making a referral. Once at BCHS, Ruth moved into a beautiful 3-bedroom apartment with recently renovated wood floors. With the help of her case manager, Ruth began to feel more stable and safe, and developed healthy friendships with her two roommates, who were also BCHS clients. Ruth’s case manager helped her learn about her mental illness and become comfortable again living in the community.

Ruth began to feel so much better that, with the staff’s encouragement, she started participating in BCHS’ therapeutic art program and rediscovered her love of art. Today, seven years later, Ruth’s work has developed so fully that she displays her paintings at art shows in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens, and loves to talk to admirers about her influences. “My artwork makes me feel whole,” Ruth says.

I am happy to say that talented BCHS residents just like Ruth were able to display their beautiful paintings, drawings and sculptures at this year’s Talented Brooklyn Gala. The event featured innovative works in addition to a moving photo exhibit by acclaimed Brooklyn filmmaker Liz Giamatti. I am greatly appreciative for all our generous supporters who helped make the evening such a terrific success.

It was once said that “to plant a garden is to grow a community,” and in this issue of Community Notes you will see the work that was done in May to beautify gardens in and around our Brooklyn Gardens courtyard. Many thanks to our volunteers, including Goldman Sachs’ Community TeamWorks, who helped make this area so lovely and brought smiles to our residents’ faces.

Thank you so much for your support, and thank you for being part of the effort to end homelessness in Brooklyn. I hope you have had a wonderful summer!
The Navy Green SRO was honored as a finalist for the Project of the Year award at the CSH Eastern Region Supportive Housing Conference in March. Navy Green is an innovative residential project near the Brooklyn Navy Yards that includes market-rate, low-income and supportive housing on a shared site.

The Navy Green SRO provides affordable supportive units for adults with histories of chronic homelessness, including veterans and seniors. BCHS coordinates social services and case management for residents, in partnership with the facility’s owner and manager, Pratt Area Community Council (PACC).

In addition to the nomination, BCHS Executive Director Jeff Nemetsky was invited to speak at the conference about best practices in supportive housing for older homeless adults.

On January 23rd, Former Board Chairperson Benjamin Baxt and his wife Susan graciously hosted BCHS’ Annual Wine Tasting event. The Baxts welcomed a group of Board Members and more than 30 guests to enjoy a curated wine selection and delicious hors d’oeuvres.

Executive Director Jeff Nemetsky gave a brief presentation about BCHS’ recent accomplishments and the agency’s mission to end homelessness in Brooklyn. Board Members mingled with new donors and friends, sharing their enthusiasm for BCHS’ work and encouraging those interested to become more involved with BCHS.

Many thanks to Ben and Susan Baxt for welcoming everybody into their beautiful historic home in Brooklyn’s Cobble Hill neighborhood. Thanks also to Paradis to Go for the night’s delicious catering.

Above left: Mary Dixie Carter and Eliot Merrill
Directly left: Board Member Alexandra Bowie and Steve Kempf
Below left: Nick Covino, Board Member Jens Peter Hansen, James Vota and Albert Vota;
Below right: Susan Baxt, Board Member Anthony Trani and Laura Trani
2014 Begins with a Flourish of Activities at BCHS

Throughout the first half of 2014, BCHS offered residents a full schedule of entertaining and educational activities to celebrate holidays, observe historic recognition events and enjoy socializing with fellow residents and BCHS staff members.

• In February, BCHS honored Black History Month at the Navy Green SRO with “Famous Firsts,” a game show-style party showcasing the important achievements of African-Americans throughout the country’s history.

• A few weeks later, in March, Navy Green hosted a Women’s History Month celebration featuring a tea party, hors d’oeuvres, and presentations about women’s empowerment and the history of the Suffragette movement.

• For Mother’s Day, the women of Arbor Inn gathered in the Brooklyn Gardens community room for a lunch buffet. While the mothers were together, the BCHS activities team facilitated a discussion about the challenges of motherhood for the formerly homeless residents, and the women shared stories and celebrated their strengths.

• When Father’s Day came around in June, BCHS’ dads enjoyed free haircuts and shaves provided by a local barber from the Fort Greene neighborhood. BCHS staff, along with Board Member Ambriel Floyd Bostic, served chicken and waffles to the residents.

• The Memorial Day Barbecue at Brooklyn Gardens was one of the highlights of the year, boosted by beautiful spring weather and delicious food. After eating, residents and staff socialized and danced in the warm and shaded courtyard.

Left: Sam, a resident at Oak Hall, relaxes with a free Father’s Day haircut by a volunteer barber from the Fort Greene neighborhood.

Right: Arbor Inn Housing Specialist Laron Greene, Activities Coordinator Tamara Ramsey and Navy Green SRO Case Manager Elba Rosado at the Black History Month Event.

Far left: Navy Green SRO Case Manager Wilbete Solon dons a festive Springtime hat during the Mother’s Day Luncheon.

Left: Board Member Ambriel Floyd Bostic and Activities Specialist Ajanae Lewis prepare waffles at the Father’s Day Brunch.

Above: Residents Bella, Lisa and Matthew enjoy the Memorial Day Barbecue in the courtyard at Brooklyn Gardens.

Above: Oak Hall/Ivy House Program Director Aurora Evans prepares a plate of chicken and waffles at the Father’s Day Brunch.
Once again, the Talented Brooklyn Gala featured an extensive exhibit of beautiful and creative artwork by BCHS residents.

In addition, Brooklyn filmmaker and photographer Liz Giamatti shared her new series of vibrant photos celebrating the women who live and work at BCHS.

We thank all our talented resident artists for sharing their wonderful artwork at Talented Brooklyn.

Special thanks to Liz Giamatti for generously sharing her time, talent and photographs with our residents and guests at Talented Brooklyn.
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Deborah Hallen and Paul Zelinsky
We're committed to ending homelessness in Brooklyn. Each year, BCHS provides safe and clean supportive housing for more than 1,000 formerly homeless women, children and men. We help them learn how to live productively and independently, with dignity and with hope.
Volunteers Help Beautify Brooklyn Gardens

On May 17th, a group of volunteers from Goldman Sachs Community TeamWorks spent a picturesque, sunny day helping beautify the Brooklyn Gardens grounds. The volunteers donated their time planting flower beds, mulching and revitalizing the gardens at the BCHS property.

For the eighth year, Goldman Sachs participated in BCHS’ Gardening Day, working alongside BCHS residents and Board Members. BCHS Director of Contracts Nelson Zuniga (pictured right) organized the day’s gardening tasks, such as planting new flowers, cleaning up the paths and pruning bushes and trees.