

# CIVITAS NEWS

A Union of Citizens for the Upper East Side and East Harlem



## PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REVIEW ACTION ON CURRENT INITIATIVES

It's been a year since Genie Rice passed the baton to the new CIVITAS team of Executive Vice-President Carolyn Greenberg and myself as President. The good news - and it's all good news - is that CIVITAS has maintained the momentum of its past successes and is making its mark with these continuing and new initiatives.

**Trees on East 86th Street** — Janis Eltz, chair of the Streetscape Committee, has brought this important project to a highly visible conclusion. This April, the last of 51 new tree guards, many of them surrounding new or expanded tree pits, was sunk into the ground. The uniform pattern of sturdy, but elegant, black railings has brought a sense of order and rhythm to this busy stretch of East 86th Street from Lexington to First Avenue.

**East Harlem Pedestrian Bridge** — The exciting CIVITAS version for a pedestrian bridge at East 124th Street that would open up to East Harlem residents, both the promenade along the East River (now cut off by the FDR Drive), and the sporting fields of Randalls Island has won admirers and, just as important, funders, that will allow the project to move to the next level - an engineering study to test its feasibility. The Manhattan Borough President's Office has assumed operational responsibility for supervision of the engineering study and substantial funding has been secured from three foundations.

**Community Facilities** — On November 18, 2003, CIVITAS sponsored a well-attended public forum on the subject of zoning rules for community facilities. This little understood area of zoning regulation has assumed increasing importance as large institutions - hospitals, universities, schools and houses of worship - have spread out into densely populated residential districts. CIVITAS has lent its support to proposed changes to the existing community facilities regulations, recognizing that they are a modest first step. According to Carolyn Greenberg the new rules will preclude offices of doctors, therapists and other professionals from extending into and occupying the 30 foot back yard of residential buildings on the side streets. CIVITAS has its sights trained not only on such rear yard incursions, but also on the elimination of unjustified additional floor area ratio - an extra 1.1 FAR - to community facilities in R8-B contextual districts within Community Board 8 of Manhattan.

**East Harlem Zoning** — The rezoning of about 52 square blocks of East Harlem - an unusually large remapping effort - went into effect early last July. But the pot still boils in this quarter of Manhattan. Genie Rice, along with board members Cora Shelton, Raymond Plumey, Janis Eltz and Danny Perez, has been representing CIVITAS as part of the public outreach effort by the Department of City Planning for the comprehensive 125th Street River-to-River Study. Early in June, Zoning Chair Raymond Plumey and other CIVITAS board members spoke out at the ULURP hearing held by Community Board 11 against the grant of a zoning variance that would allow for construction of a 42-story tower at 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Park Avenue. CIVITAS criticized the ungainly tower for its abrupt departure from

the building context in an area well regarded for its abundant light and air.

**Bus Rapid Transit** — In January of this year, CIVITAS unveiled its 8-page report, outlining the need for radically improved bus transportation on the East Side of Manhattan. The report highlighted an opportunity for bringing the concept of bus rapid transit (BRT) to the slow moving M15 route along First and Second Avenues. The BRT report was widely circulated among elected and appointed officials, the MTA and the media. Jim Tripp and I took the issue directly to the four community boards whose residents would benefit most from a revitalized M15 BRT service and obtained resolutions of support from each of them.

**Solid Waste Management** — New York City and Manhattan, in particular, confront a solid waste - garbage - problem of mammoth proportions. With the closing of the Fresh Kills disposal site in Staten Island, the City instituted an expensive program of trucking its garbage out of state. The trucking causes air pollution and traffic congestion. The Bloomberg administration has made finding a solution to this problem a priority second only to education. The proposed solution is to implement a comprehensive system of marine transfer stations in each of the five boroughs to receive, compact and ship the garbage out to other sites for disposal. In the fall, Jim Tripp and Ramon Cruz of Environmental Defense presented to the Board an outline of the extent of the problem and the limited options for dealing with the massive streams of residential and commercial waste generated in Manhattan. In the spring, we heard an analysis of the damaging impact that reopening of the East 91st Street ma-

## Pleasant Village: East Harlem's First Historic District?

The Museum of the City of New York and the East Harlem Historical Organization have joined together in an application to the Landmarks Preservation Commission for what would become East Harlem's first historic district, to be known as Pleasant Village. The name Pleasant Village goes back to the 1980's, when the Pleasant Village Block Association was created to monitor development and quality of life issues in the immediate neighborhood adjacent to a street called Pleasant Avenue. The boundaries of the proposed historic district would be from East 120<sup>th</sup> Street on the north, East 114<sup>th</sup> Street on the south, the East River on the east and First Avenue on the west. An additional spur would continue along both sides of East 116<sup>th</sup> Street to Lexington Avenue to include *Lucky's Corner* and the former political offices of former Congressman and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and former Congressman Vito Marcantonio. *Lucky's Corner*, at the intersection of East 116<sup>th</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue was a rallying point for politicians and those seeking political office and included visits by Eleanor Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy.

This part of East Harlem, once occupied by the Wiechquaesgeck Native-American Tribe as a fishing village 500 years ago, is also known as Italian Harlem,



*Manhattan Center for Science & Mathematics*

© Raymond Plumey 2003



*Museum of Catholic Art & Mount Carmel R.C. Church*  
© Raymond Plumey 2003

which at one time in the 1930's had the highest concentration of Italian-American immigrants in the country. While Italian-Americans still reside there, Pleasant Village is today a wonderfully diverse community, which includes Latinos and African-Americans. Some of the Italian Harlem features include: Feranga's Funeral Home, Leonard Covello's residence, Vito Marcantonio's residence, Fiorello LaGuardia's and Vito Marcantonio's political headquarters, LaGuardia Memorial House, Ascione's Pharmacy, Marrone's Bakery, Claudio's Barbershop, Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Holy Rosary Roman Catholic Churches, Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics (former Benjamin Franklin High School attended by Daniel Patrick Moynihan), Rao's Restaurant, Sharon Baptist Church, Jefferson Park Methodist Church (former Holy Tabernacle Church), Rex's Ices, Patsy's Pizzeria and the Museum of American Catholic Art.

The type of landmark being proposed is a heritage, cultural and historical district, with good examples of 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture. Some of the building types and urban landscape in Pleasant Village include

wood-frame farmhouses, rowhouses, tenements and cobblestone streets. The design styles include: Federal Style, Second Empire, Italianate Design, Railroad, Old Law and New Tenements, Richardsonian Romanesque and Classical Revival.

Recent losses in Pleasant Village include several rowhouses and the 100-year old Washburn Wire Factory along the East River, once the City's largest employer and largest industrial property constructed in Manhattan. Its owners were descendants of the Washburn Family of Worcester, Massachusetts who founded the American wire industry. The factory was finally demolished in 2002, after many legal hurdles, to make way for a 1-million square foot Home Depot/Costco facility, first proposed in 1998, but now on hold due to a lack of financing.

*Raymond Plumey, AIA, is an architect, preservationist and city planner who resides and has an architectural & planning practice in East Harlem. He is a member of the board of directors of CIVITAS.*

*continued from p 1*

### **ACTION ON CURRENT INITIATIVES —**

rine transfer station would have on that residential neighborhood.

**The ABC of Zoning** — This widely acclaimed primer on land use of zoning put out by CIVITAS in the early 90s is being updated by the team of Lucienne Bloch, Willa Hutner and Raymond Plumey.

**Newsracks** — CIVITAS has been leading the charge to ensure effective implementation of the Newsrack Law, which went into effect in early 2003. During the past years, I testified on three occasions before the City Council against diluting the law in a way that would ease up on standards of cleanliness and maintenance. In addition, CIVITAS has helped to form an effective coalition of like-minded East Side neighborhood groups.

**Website** - On June 22, 2004 the CIVITAS website, [www.civitasnyc.org](http://www.civitasnyc.org), opened for business. Come visit.

*T. Gorman Reilly*



*Yang Frank Lichtensteiger  
NYC, August 1943*

## FRANK LICHTENSTEIGER — A FOUNDING SPIRIT OF CIVITAS — AND STILL AT IT

Frank Lichtensteiger came to New York in 1939. He had been born in Switzerland but raised in London, and was 16 years old when his father, a foreign exchange specialist in London, came to the United States to open a New York office for his bank. Banker Lichtensteiger moved his family into the Waldorf-Astoria and then sent Frank to the Gunnery School in Washington, Connecticut to continue his education. In 1943 Frank read in the New York Sun about an ambulance driver school at 50 Beaver Street. He enrolled, and soon found himself on the Cassino battlefield in Italy as a driver in the American Field Service Ambulance Corps.

After the war, he worked for General Motors in Tarrytown and in other positions. His interest in public service blossomed again in the mid-60s. He worked on John Lindsay's campaign for Mayor of New York City, and was later appointed to work on Equal Opportunity issues in the Lindsay Administration.

Frank was also concerned about preserving city spaces and buildings. When Gimbel's proposed a full scale department store on 86<sup>th</sup> Street, he demanded to know what they could offer the Yorkville neighborhood. He took a petition with 8,000 signatures to Community Board 8 and is proud that they won a new subway entrance in the store. He joined forces with John Boogaerts, an architect, who was trying to preserve the picturesque four-face clock, which sat atop a construction of beer

barrels, at the Ruppert Brewery site. That cause was lost at a City Planning hearing, but it led him to further efforts to save old clocks in the city, including the Reimann & Bresse Furniture Store clock on Third Avenue, which stands to this day.

The Ruppert Development — a residential complex planned for the Brewery site bordered by Second and Third Avenues and 93<sup>rd</sup> and 94<sup>th</sup> Streets, was presented for neighborhood approval in 1981. Neighbors from the Hellgate Hill Householders Association, just uphill on 94<sup>th</sup> street, launched a protest. August Heckscher, president of HHHHA, led the formation of a broader organization which became CIVITAS, a name suggested by Citizen Lichtensteiger and enthusiastically accepted after Claude Heckscher, Augie's wife, carefully checked its origins in her French-Latin dictionary. Frank took to the streets on his bicycle, posting leaflets that hailed the new organization on just about every building in sight. Some residents assumed that CIVITAS was a new construction outfit. Frank became a founding member of CIVITAS. He has been on the Board of Directors for twenty-three years.

Asked about his satisfying experiences on the Board of CIVITAS, he praises the diversity of the Board and its congeniality. "It is remarkable," he says, "Augie and Genie Rice brought together people who got along together beautifully. People began to recognize things needed to change. Genie Rice and Marcia Fowle worked closely together. CIVITAS was completely responsible for removing the twelve illegal stories at 108 East 96<sup>th</sup> Street and that opened the door to fighting for zoning." Frank also points out the close collaboration with Community Board 11 as a wonderful development, which led to contextual rezoning of 52 blocks in East Harlem in 2003.



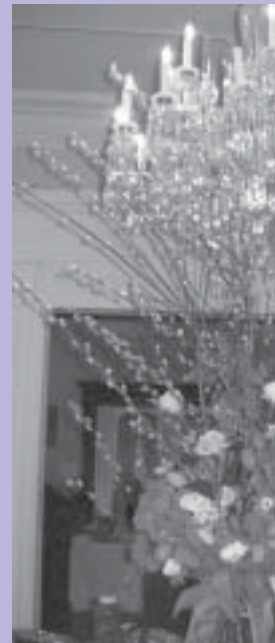
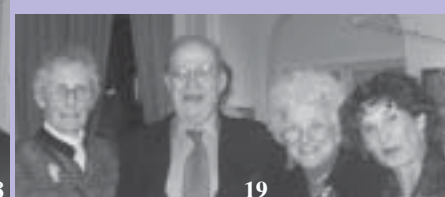
*World War II, Cassino battlefield, Italy, April 1944  
Frank Lichtensteiger (getting out of ambulance)*

Are there issues CIVITAS should have gotten involved in but didn't? Frank's quick response is the building at Madison Avenue and 91<sup>st</sup> Street. "I think it is terrible that they put up a tall building to house 9 wealthy families in the middle of a block with all those little houses that John Winkleman draws for CIVITAS. We should have fought harder for that."

As for issues which should be at the top of CIVITAS' agenda today, Frank is concerned about the effect a Second Avenue Subway will have on the neighborhood. He worries about overdevelopment with high rise buildings, creating more shadow and removing the small shops and businesses that give the neighborhood character. "These are problems I don't know how to resolve. How can you build green buildings with solar panels which provide energy when you don't have light from the sun?" Another priority is Transportation.

"It is sad not to have answers for the future. I'm not happy about Christo's putting flags in Central Park."

*Jo Ahern Bressler*

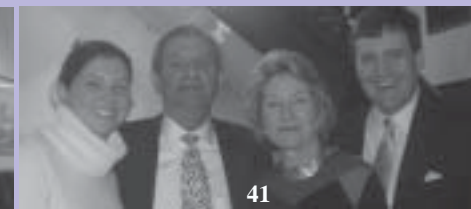
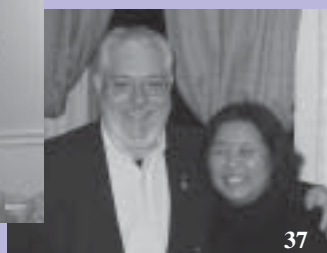
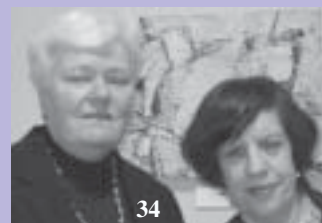
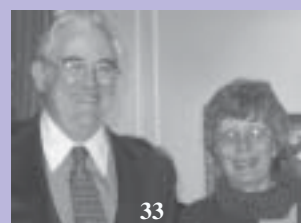
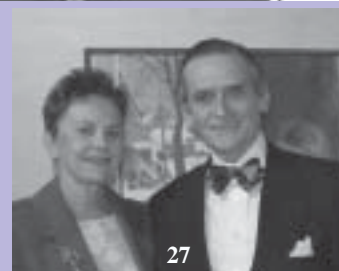
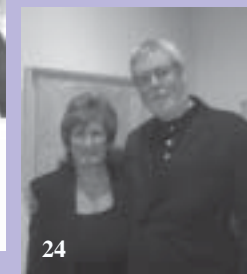


# BENE 2004

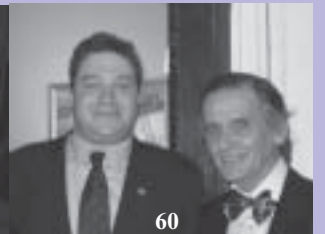
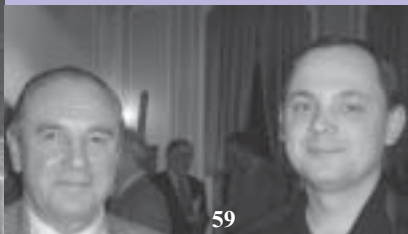
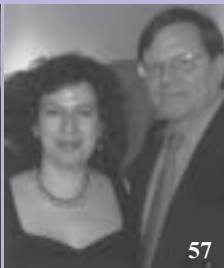
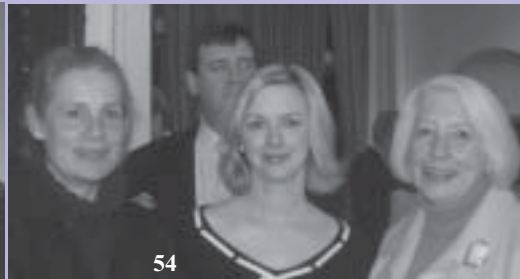
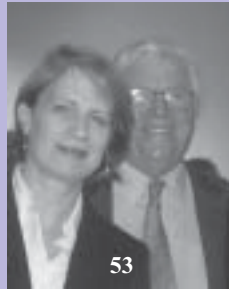
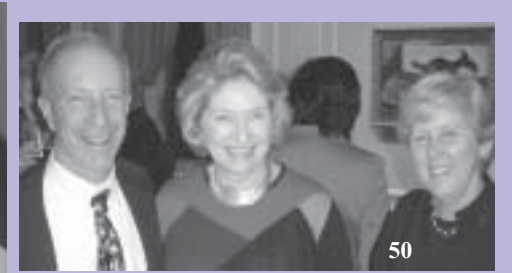
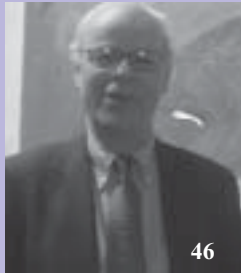
1 Michele Kidwell • Cindy Fields 2 Brooks & Genie Thomas • Mitty Arnold • Nicole Arnold 3 Jamie Gibbs • Lucienne & Dr. Claude Bloch • Dr. Barbara Brenner 4 Bill Brothers & Ray Cornbill 5 Bruce & Marcia Fowle • Donald Rice 6 Edward McAnaney • Robin Withington • Jeanne McAnaney • Roberta Hodgson Frank Lichtensteiger 7 Paco Argiz • Alice Higgins Rice • Jamie Gibbs 8 Genie Rice • Cora Shelton • Hon. Amanda Burden • Gorman Reilly • Carolyn Greenberg 9 Genie & Donald Rice 10 Hon. Amanda Burden • Bruce Fowle • Jim Tripp 11 Judy Fresco enchanting guests 12 Elisabeth Ashby • Mallory Spain • Terri Slater Reita Cash 13 Paul Buckhurst • Cora Shelton 14 Lewis Kwit 15 Robbie Hodgson • Merle Bogin • Tony Morenzi 16 Kathleen Parker • Jamie Gibbs 17 Hon. Liz Krueger 18 Joyce Williams • Paul Rooney 19 Kit Wallace • Cass Canfield • Susan Binger • Abigail Canfield 20 John Winkleman • Walter Hoydysch Joseph Walsh



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 27 Janice & Gorman Reilly 28 Alice Barner • Judy Fresco • Sandra Murray 29 Sybille Novack • Selma Shapiro • Jim Silberman 30 Frank Lichtensteiger • Willa Hutner  
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 53 Marcia Bystryn • Richard Ravitch 54 Elise Frick • Hon. Angela Cavaluzzi • Jo Bressler 55 Frank Lichtensteiger • John Bressler 56 Joan Brothers • Willa Hutner • Bill Brothers  
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 60 Hon. Jonathan Bing • Gorman Reilly

# CIVITAS Benefit 2004 —

## A Splendid Evening in an Unrivalled Setting

The Stars were aligned on March 4th as CIVITAS friends gathered at the Ukrainian Institute of America, a grand French Gothic style mansion on Fifth Avenue at 79th Street, overlooking Central Park, for the annual benefit. It was the kind of evening guaranteed to produce a fabulous party.

A stunning exhibition of Ukrainian art was on view in the Institute's elegant reception rooms where banquet tables were decorated with graceful bowls of spring flowers under sparkling chandeliers. The hors d'oeuvres were delicious, freshly whipped up in the kitchens of CIVITAS members or donated by local restaurants and the wines, including vintage Brunello from Tuscany, were mellow.

There was an air of camaraderie. Many of the guests already knew one another having worked together on CIVITAS projects, block associations and community groups. Others were newcomers. Environmentalists, city and state officials, city planners, tree planters, journalists, architects and families of the honorees—both young and old came to support the CIVITAS mission and to have a good time.

The highlight of the evening was the award ceremony honoring the Hon. Amanda M. Burden, Chair of the City Planning commission, for her leadership in working collaboratively with New York communities and CIVITAS Board member Cora Shelton for her lifetime commitment as a citizen activist in East Harlem. Both made compelling acceptance speeches telling of their commitment to volunteer advocacy and its importance to the City's future.

Mr. Walter Hoydysh and his staff at the Institute were

generous hosts whose kindness and support made the evening possible. Board member Jamie Gibbs and his tireless volunteers orchestrated the event, flowers and spectacular repast.

Genie Rice, benefit co-chair reflecting back on the event said, "Because we do not hire party planners, photographers or caterers, our costs are cut to the bone. The generosity of so many in providing food and time is really unique. The funds raised help maintain our office throughout the year."

Preparation begins in January when Nathalie and Marshall Cox provide a dining room table and lunch on three successive days to ensure all invitations are hand addressed and sent out in proper time. The following month, Janis Eltz and Jeanne McAnaney and others line up the promised food donations. Meanwhile, says Genie, Trayco Belopopsky at the CIVITAS office acts as "the field marshall who keeps everyone on track"

Carolyn Greenberg, this year's benefit co-chair, is convinced, "Our volunteers are dedicated and knowledgeable—in an incredibly short period of time, they put together an event that each year seems to elicit the comment "This is the best yet."

*Robbie Hodgson*

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**Join CIVITAS' continuing effort to make an impact on the quality of life in East Harlem and the Upper East Side by introducing a new member and by contributing.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Evening phone \_\_\_\_\_ Day phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_  
Membership dues: \$50 Contribution: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to CIVITAS, 1457 Lexington Avenue, NYC 10128. All contributions are tax deductible.

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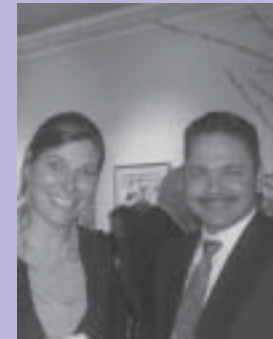
The reception ....



The Department of City Planning gems  
Edith Hsu-Chen, Meenakshi Srinivasan,  
Shampa Chanda & Nicole Ogg



Above: Lew and Starla Cauldwell, Joseph Holland  
& Bill Brothers



Left: Isabel Ames • Mark Alexander



The decor ....



The award ceremony ...



Ronald & Jean Rawitt