

## VRC 25th Anniversary Gala Celebration



### Letter from the President

What a banner year it was for the Volunteer Referral Center. We added more programming, (Volunteering in the Arts), we produced our first-ever Gala (more on that later), and we thanked our agency partners, volunteers and staff by hosting our second annual boat cruise and holiday party—all while continuing to provide expert placement and personal service to our increasing client base.

Having come on board as the Volunteer Referral Center's newly elected President in February 2014, our 25th Anniversary Gala Committee, spearheaded by the indomitable Nancy Carr, was already in full swing. Nancy and her committee tapped on expertise in every aspect of putting together an amazing evening attended by new and old friends, members, patrons, and family.

As I noted in my welcoming remarks, the VRC has a long and rich history of providing interesting and fun benefits, but the Herculean task of producing our first-ever gala at the Central Park Boathouse resulted in a smashing success. Kudos, congratulatory remarks and lovely feedback has validated not only the hardworking team efforts, but the greatly appreciated support from YOU!

The highlight of the evening was when special honorees were acknowledged and thanked for their tireless contributions towards leadership in volunteering. VRC founding members: Arline Brown, Nancy Carr, Denise Cruickshank, Evan Donaldson, Alice Greif, Roberta Hodgson, Mary Lambert, Joan Metcalf, Kenneth Noble, MD. Patricia Olshan, Kathy Pershan, Mary Schachne. In addition, Gabrielle Kurlander, President and Chief Executive Officer of the All Stars Project was cited as the first recipient of the VRC's Leader in Non-Profit Volunteering award. She has led the building of incredible partnerships with business, cultural and artistic leaders. Gabrielle is an inspiring, strategic visionary whose community-minded accomplishments are based on integrity and trust. She is always imagining possibilities for improving the world.

VRC continues to extend our outreach and visibility in the community, expand our services, and forge new relationships with additional agencies. Please enjoy this issue's feature articles where we highlight special collaborations of interest. A Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year to you all!

Onward & Cheers!  
Robert Price

## SPOTLIGHT: OATS AND THE SENIOR PLANET EXPLORATION CENTER

Thanks to the efforts of Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) and its Senior Planet Exploration Center, senior New Yorkers are learning digital literacy skills that are improving their quality of life.

Since early 2013 when OATS opened the Center in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan at 127 West 25<sup>th</sup> Street, thousands of New Yorkers ages 60 and over have been provided with a range of training and resources.

From multi-session classes in software programs and hardware, to open access labs, to special events such as lectures, films, discussion and support groups, the Center is an unmatched, free, technology resource in both breadth and depth. The only technology center of its kind in the U.S., its mission is: “Harness the power of technology to change the way we age.”

The Center’s online presence, SeniorPlanet.org, is formidable as well, attracting more than 60,000 unique users each month. Created and hosted by OATS, the website brands itself “Aging with Attitude” and offers news, features and an activities calendar, the only one curated for seniors. It is a significant outlet for making known the Center’s classes and events, as well as free and low-cost events around the City that are of interest to older New Yorkers.

The facility serves an average of 75 men and women each day, depending on the number of activities scheduled. Ranging in age from 60 to 104 with a median age of 71, these older, adult learners come from all sections of the City; one-third is from the outer boroughs. Data from the Center’s surveys indicate that 46 percent of attendees have annual household incomes under \$15,000, 54 percent live alone and 43 percent report a significant disability.

The goal is to have clients go through a sequence of classes to the point where they are proficient and comfortable enough to begin to learn on their own using the open access labs or their own computers. Volunteers are an integral part of the Center’s operations. They help welcome visitors and clients to the Center, assist with data entry and clerical tasks, host tech talks and assist class instructors. The dynamic of this Center is synergistic--volunteers become clients and clients become volunteers. Volunteers, who demonstrate a passion for helping others, have customer service experience and commitment to the Center’s work are highly valued.



Clients give the Center high marks. Surveys show that their satisfaction level with the course instructors and the usefulness of the courses is in the upper 90 percentile, and they report improvement in their quality of life such as feeling more connected to friends, family, and community; feeling confident in their ability to live independently; having greater access to health information, and, among job seekers, feeling more prepared for work.

Becoming digitally literate also opens up new worlds and opportunities for clients. One of them, a cancer survivor, was a skilled craftswoman and artist, but her illness had left her with very little income. As a result of attending Center classes, she not only became computer literate, but she also learned about online resources for marketing her work. She began selling her crafts and, with the Center’s help, set up a website. She went on to lead a group at the Center to help others start their own businesses.

The most recent of several programs of Older Adults Technology Services (OATS), the Center is funded in part by a multi-year Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant administered through the New York City Department of Aging and the Department of Information, Technology and Telecommunications. OATS also is a partner in New York City’s Connected Communities Project, for which it expands, upgrades and maintains computer labs at 23 senior centers in New York City.

Going forward, OATS hopes to expand existing offerings and to explore ways in which the Center can become an even greater community resource for videoconferencing, telemedicine, online banking and job search, as social media tools become even more prevalent. Technology is always changing. It can be a struggle to keep current. But, as evidenced by what happens here, no one is too old to learn and benefit from it.

## Volunteering at the Bellevue Hospital Center

Bellevue Hospital is very much a part of the Kips Bay community. The bay was named after the Dutch settler Jacobus Hendrickson Kip (1631-1690). Within Kips Bay, the area is dominated by the institutional buildings of New York University, including Tisch Hospital, NYU College of Dentistry, NYU School of Medicine and Bellevue Hospital.

“As the flagship facility of New York City’s Health and Hospitals Corporation Bellevue is open to patients of all backgrounds irrespective of ability to pay. It handles nearly 670,000 non-ER outpatient clinic visits, over 99,000 emergency visits and some 26,000 inpatients each year. More than 80 percent of Bellevue’s patients come from the city’s medically underserved populations.”

Bellevue is a member of the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation. It was established in 1736 as a six-bed infirmary in the New York Alms House on the current site of New York City Hall, and it is America’s first public hospital. New York City Health and Hospital Corporation (HHC) operates the public hospitals and clinics in New York City, with annual revenues of \$6.7 billion. It is the largest municipal healthcare system in the United States serving 1.4 million patients including more than 475,000 uninsured city residents. HHC was created in 1969 by the New York Legislature as a public benefit corporation. It operates 11 acute care hospitals, five nursing homes, six diagnostic and treatment centers, and more than 70 community-based primary care sites. It also manages an extensive volunteer program.

Volunteers will find numerous opportunities to match their interests and skills with the diverse needs of Bellevue Hospital. There is great demand for caring men and women of all ages, backgrounds and careers, from teenagers to senior citizens to assist hospital staff.

Volunteers may serve the hospital in a variety of assignments, which will offer them meaningful experiences and personal satisfaction. Employed men and women may volunteer at times that fit in with their working hours; retired persons may share their skills and free time to provide valuable assistance.

Students who serve as volunteers can broaden their range of experience and become acquainted with various aspects of health care, which may relate to career objectives. Special placements may be arranged as field work for high school, college or graduate students.

Some of the areas where volunteers serve at Bellevue are

- Nursing and medical
- Programs for children
- Non-patient care
- Communications/Interpreter Services
- Special assignments that require completion of a training program, such as chaplaincy, patient advocacy, patient visiting, rape crisis, or Reach Out and Read.

One of the things that makes Bellevue so unique is its volunteer program managed by Ms. Priscilla Daniels, a woman who is highly respected in the volunteer community. She has put together a very special program for volunteers. If you are interested, contact [Priscilla.Daniels@bellevue.nychhc.org](mailto:Priscilla.Daniels@bellevue.nychhc.org).



### Reach Out and Read

This program promotes early literacy in the pediatric outpatient clinic. The children who participate in Reach Out and Read are not hospitalized. They are being seen in the pediatric clinic for “well child”, “specialty clinic” or dental care. The program operates Monday through Friday, between 9:00 am – 3:30 pm.

Reach Out and Read (ROR) is a national literacy organization cofounded by pediatricians Robert Needlman and Barry Zuckerman at Boston City Hospital (now Boston Medical Center) in 1989. It works with pediatric doctors to promote reading during doctors’ visits. Among ROR’s 5000 programs, the one at Bellevue is one of the most comprehensive. It is called the “Children of Bellevue’s Reach Out and Read.” The program is led by Perri Klass, Bellevue’s pediatrician and professor in the department of pediatrics, and its dynamic director, Claudia Aristy, who has worked at the hospital for 14 years and manages over 70 volunteers.

The pediatricians give out 12,000 to 14,000 books annually, printed in 13 languages including Spanish, Bengali, Chinese, and Russian.

The Reach Out and Read program has

- Volunteers reading to children in the clinic waiting room.
- Bilingual educators offering guidance to parents about literacy and language development.
- Doctors counseling families and giving children books to take home.

Individuals interested in volunteering are required to

- Commit to volunteering once a week for 2 hours for a minimum total of 64 hours.
- Submit an application, tour the program, have an informal interview, receive a medical clearance, and participate in a “pre-reading” session.

If you have any questions or would like more information, contact Claudia Aristy at 212-562-2540, or [claudia.aristy@nyumc.org](mailto:claudia.aristy@nyumc.org).

## Doing Good is Good For You Health and Volunteering Study

Highlights of study released by UnitedHealth Group:

### Physical, Mental & Emotional Health

- 76% say that volunteering has made them feel healthier.
- 94% say that volunteering improves their mood.

### Stress Less

- 78% say that volunteering lowers their stress levels.

### Sense of Purpose and Quality of Life

- 95% say they are helping to make their community a better place.
- 96% say that volunteering enriches their sense of purpose in life.

### Engaged With Their Health

- 80% feel they have control over their health.
- About a quarter say that volunteering has helped them to manage a chronic illness.

### Employer Health

- Volunteering develops work skills and builds:
  - o Time Management Skills
  - o Stronger Relationships with Colleagues
  - o People and Teamwork Skills
  - o Professional Job Skills
- 81% of employed volunteers who volunteered through their workplace agreed that volunteering strengthens relationships among colleagues,

*The Study of 3,351 adults 18 or older was conducted by Harris Interactive, Feb. 9 through March 18, 2013, online and by phone.*

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