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## Neighbor to Neighbor: Queens Civic Congress holds annual luncheon

By Barbara Morris  
04/17/2008

April is a special month. Spring continues filling our areas with beautiful flowers and trees, breathing new life into the air. Heaven and earth seem trying to be in accord, and we mortals are likewise trying to do our part. On Friday, April 4, New York state Sen. Malcolm Smith (D-St. Albans) invited a large part of his constituency to join him for a fund-raiser at Antun's in Queens Village. It was huge and successful.

On April 6, it was back to Antun's to help celebrate the Sixth Biennial Luncheon of the Queens Civic Congress, sponsored by the Queens Civic Congress Foundation. The attendance was overwhelming. There were terrific, hard-working folks everywhere, giving of themselves without recompense or, sometimes, recognition.

Many of these good folk were friends we don't often see. Applause to each officer of the Queens Civic Congress: President Corey Bearak; Executive Vice President Patricia Dolan; Vice Presidents Tyler Cassell, Richard Hellenbrecht, Paul Kerzner, David Kulick, Barbara Larkin, Audrey Lucas, Kathy Masi, Nagassar Ramgarib, Harbachan Singh, Edwin Westley and Dorothy Woo; Secretary Seymour Schwartz; Treasurer James Trent; and co-founders Albert Greenblatt and Robert Harris.

Particular thanks to the Luncheon Committee: Chair James Trent (who always does a super job) with arrangements by Bearak (who always has a twinkle in his eye), Kerzner (who also led us in the Pledge of Allegiance and singing the fourth verse of "The Star-Spangled Banner") and Queens Civic President Emeritus Sean Walsh (regarded highly for his long service to Queens and as president of the congress).

Queens Civic Congress Foundation officers include Walsh, Bearak, Trent, Secretary Robert Bishop and board members Kerzner, Jerry Iannece and Claire Shulman.

Bearak, of the North Bellerose Civic Association, welcomed all present on behalf of the Queens Civic Congress and acknowledged honored guests. Walsh followed with a welcome from the Congress Foundation.

As Bearak called out the names of legislators who planned to attend or were present, he laughed and said it almost looked as if the luncheon was held for the politicians running for office. It was refreshing to see, and sometimes hear and speak to, some of our elected officials: City Council members James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows), Eric Gioia (D-Sunnyside), Melinda Katz (D-Forest Hills), John Liu (D-Flushing), Helen Sears (D-Jackson Heights), Peter Vallone Jr. (D-Astoria) and David Weprin (D-Hollis); former City Councilwoman Karen Koslowitz; Queens Borough President Helen Marshall; state Sens. Frank Padavan (R-Bellerose) and John Sabini (D-Jackson Heights); Ron Kim, representing Gov. David Paterson; state Assembly members Audrey Pheffer (D-Rockaway Beach) and Mark Weprin (D-Little Neck), who was absent due to his daughter's birth; former Queens Borough President Claire Shulman; and U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), who left to catch a flight to his daughter's birthday party after a speech about how some homeowners are being scammed out of their homes. Other surprise visitors were Borough Presidents Marty Markowitz of Brooklyn and Scott Stringer of Manhattan.

Many speakers spoke against congestion pricing. Marshall was the keynote speaker and told us about the progress Queens is making on many fronts, especially in going green and volunteering. Like all present, she praised Walsh, the congress president emeritus, who received the Queens Civic Award for Outstanding Community Service in the presence of his entire family. His wife received a beautiful bouquet and applause for her patience while her husband spent much time doing community business.

The Queens Civic Achievement Award in Preservation was awarded to the Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance. Herbert Reynolds, the alliance's president, said it was a long, hard fight that required everyone in his group to persevere to preserve their community.

The Queens Civic Environmental Improvement Award went to the Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces, whose president, Frederick Kress, accepted and mentioned his organization has some 400 member groups. One of the organization's aims is encouraging training of tree pruners through advocacy group Trees New York's courses. The course's costs are covered by the coalition for those Queens volunteers who will seriously attend and become city tree pruners. Although all boroughs have approved tree pruners, Queens - through the coalition - is the only borough with a tree pruner's alumni association.

More terrific April events: World Health Day, April 7; Pope Benedict XVI leaves Rome April 15 and stays in the United States until April 20, during Passover; Earth Day is April 22; and Arbor Day is April 25. We should all celebrate by planting, or at least appreciating, trees and our other blessings.