

Neighborhood Preservation Program.....The Key to our Successes.....We seek your support

Ms. Pat Singer, Founder and Executive Director, Brighton Neighborhood Association, Inc.

1002 Brighton Beach Ave. Brooklyn, NY 11235 718 891-0800

In 1977, a grassroots movement was born in Brighton Beach, a community which had fallen victim to neighborhood deterioration, and after talking to hundreds of residents and holding rallies, one in the street, the other in a local school, the **Brighton Neighborhood Association (BNA)** was formed. BNA operated out of an apartment occupied by the leader of the movement, Ms. Pat Singer. With the help of former **Assemblyman Chuck Schumer** and the late **State Senator Donald Halperin**, BNA became a recipient of the **Neighborhood Preservation Program**. BNA opened an office on Brighton Beach Avenue, hired staff and began its fight to turn this deteriorate seaside community around.

Over the next 4 decades BNA brought in millions of dollars in reinvestment through low cost government programs, counselled an average of 2,000 walk-ins annually, educating them to their tenant's rights as well as responsibility. BNA spearheaded the assimilation of over 50,000 Russian emigres who were allowed out of the USSR in the 1970s after the lifting of the "Iron Curtain".

BNA with the help of **Steven Cymbrowitz** who later became **Assemblyman**, developed a proposal for the **revitalization of Brighton Beach Avenue** which resulted in **millions of dollars** being assigned in 1985 to upgrade the infrastructure; water, sewer, utilities lines under Brighton Beach Avenue, literally moving the community closer to the 21st Century.

BNA working closely with the Human Rights Commission, coordinated the installation of ramps to help the physically challenged to navigate in and out of their pre-World War II apartment buildings. We estimate that at **least 40 ramps** are in existence today because of BNA's intervention. One was put in recently at 711 Brightwater Ave.

BNA working closely with the 60th Police Precinct went after the growing drug and prostitution problems that permeated every corner of the community. Owners of the small private homes were encouraged to become block watchers and to lend intelligence on criminal activity through BNA. BNA also worked closely with the various drug enforcement units, **supplying intelligence** so that they could close properties where drug dealers conducted business. We continue to work closely with the 60th to keep a lid on this issue.

In the 1990s BNA borrowed and raised funds to take over 3 SROs on Brighton 6th Street which was the worse block with drugs rampant. These 3 SROs were converted to 3 family homes and sold to families who committed to living in the property while renting the other two units out thus bringing stability to this troubled block. These new homes acted as a domino bringing in **more investment** by outside investors. A million dollar medical facility was built on the block and a 4th SRO was purchased and turned into a 3 family home. BNA sold their properties at cost to keep the price affordable.

As an NPC, BNA spearheaded the recovery of Brighton Beach **after Hurricane SANDY** washed over our beachfront community. Initially, we lost our office, but were able to re-establish ourselves back in the apartment where we had begun. We helped 100s of homeowners and renters to apply for the NYC Build It Back Program. 118 houses with the help of BNA received Mold resolution. Five apartment

houses signed up for NYC Build it Back. BNA negotiated with Con Edison to reduce the bill to thousands of residents who were not only without electricity immediately after SANDY, but would face a large bill because they had no meters for almost a year and Con Edison could not properly bill. Con Edison waived three months of billing. We helped landlords to reach utility companies as well as bring their plight to the attention of city agencies. HPD had BNA inspect 16 buildings to ascertain the status in the days after SANDY. Residents reached out to us through the computer to ask for help. BNA was receiving calls from Sheepshead Bay. We were able to get back in to our Bank office two months after SANDY.

BNA put together a Community Holiday Party in December of that year and 500 people attended. Residents were supplied with light refreshment, clothing, music, toys for the children and in general "Hope". The residents were a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic cross section of the community and for that one night the hyphen disappeared and we were one voice working together to rebuild.

BNA is outreaching to our newest neighbors; our growing Hispanic and Middle Eastern populations. After SANDY, we joined with another agency COJO (Council of Jewish Organizations) to supply bedding to Hispanic families who were flooded by SANDY. Most of these residents lived in ground floor units in private homes in Brighton Beach and lost everything. The Russian population has grown since the 1970s evolving into an aging population of seniors. We are helping thousands of these "new Americans" to make their homes affordable through Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption, Food Stamps (SNAP) as well as assisting them to recertify for Section 8. We have on staff both Russian and Spanish speaking Advocates.

Neighborhood deterioration costs this city millions. BNA with the help of the Neighborhood Preservation Program has **stabilized** this seaside community **twice** and has put the brakes on keeping our Community from becoming a victim of neighborhood deterioration. Our walk-in traffic is still numbering close to **300 a month**. We are working on additional fronts as the need arises, i.e., job placement. Our office is located still on Brighton Beach Avenue and is handicapped accessible. We are also located near Bus stops and a Subway station. We are the **voice** of the poor and working class and we are in the frontlines fighting to keep our housing **affordable**.

History has a way of repeating itself. We are an **anchor to the future**. BNA is a continuous **constant** in community life. If something would happen tomorrow, BNA is ready to step up to the plate. The **Neighborhood Preservation funds is our life blood** that keeps our heart pumping and it is this heart that has the **pulse of the community**. BNA has already built a bridge of communication with the thousands of "new Americans" who have settled here since the 1970s. They trust BNA and they turn to BNA in any given day for advice, counselling and referrals.

In a tribute to the Brighton Neighborhood Association in the Congressional Record some years ago, it was stated "Contrary to popular belief, great neighborhoods don't just happen. They are most often the product of hard work and dedication on the part of community organizations and their leadership. In Brighton Beach such leadership and vision has been amply provided by the Brighton Neighborhood Association." It should be added "**with the support of the Neighborhood Preservation Program**" which has made our work possible allowing us to impact positively on the residents and the community.