2018 DOTTY
Downtown's Our Town Thanks You
AWARDS

Abby Brody
Wellington Z. Chen
Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein
Wendy Gonzalez
Robert Hammond

Catherine McVay Hughes
Shari C. Hyman
Martin Kagan
Daniel Quintero
Donnette Truss

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SHAPING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

As a leader at Avenues: The World School in Chelsea, Abby Brody is helping students expand their horizons in more ways than one.

BY ALIZAH SALARIO

For Abby Brody, the most effective classrooms are the streets of Manhattan. “Most schools serve a community as the center of a town, and everything revolves around the school. In New York, you’re just so small, and that’s really empowering. All of a sudden, the world becomes your community,” says Brody, Division Head of the Lower School at Avenues: The World School in Chelsea.

Brody, a veteran educator, plays an instrumental role in taking education beyond classroom walls. Avenues students have studied biodiversity on the High Line and taken walking tours of the surrounding gallery district. Even first graders have internships at local businesses, where they learn about working together for a common cause. One classroom studying Chinese culture partnered with a Mandarin-speaking senior citizen, where burgeoning Mandarin speakers could communicate with residents in their native tongue. And of course, when students study ancient Egypt, they visit one of the world’s largest museums. And of course, when students study ancient Egypt, they visit one of the world’s largest Egypt exhibits at The Met.

“I’m a constructivist [teacher,]” says Brody. “Learning is seeing and doing, experiencing and believing. It’s not a teacher telling you something.”

At a school that counts shaping global leaders among its ambitious goals, Brody has the vision, passion and expertise to uphold Avenues’s lofty mission. It’s a goal she does not take lightly.

“The most research I do is on 21st century skill sets, and thinking about what is the future they’re [students] going to inherit and the problems they’re going to solve,” says Brody. She notes that critical thinking and empathy, skills that help foster a global mindset, are essential for the next generation’s success.

Brody received a master’s of elementary special education from Bank Street College, where she focused on language disorders. Prior to becoming lower school head at Avenues, she taught at the Allen-Stevenson School for nine years and spent time with the Shipboard Institute of Education, where she wrote curriculum for geography, culture and immigration while circumnavigating the globe.

Today, her focus is both local and global. In Manhattan’s grid system she sees both a math lesson and an intricate map; lessons about different cultures present themselves just walking down the street.

“I just think of myself as every day trying to make an impact on one child, she says.

Brody, who moved to New York City from Minnesota at age 10, has long seen endless educational opportunities everywhere in our multifaceted city. Though teaching was always her ambition — Brody says she remembers lining up her dolls and playing teacher as young girl — her arrival in New York at an impressionable age seems to have shaped her focus on the skills that tomorrow’s global leaders will need to thrive.

“I think there’s no better place to raise your children,” says Brody, who has two kids of her own. “They have the opportunity to live beyond their borders with so many different cultures on one small little island.”

SOLVING URBAN ‘RIDDLES’

Wellington Chen of the Chinatown Partnership focuses on the challenges facing his community.

BY ANNE KRISTOFF

Wellington Chen sits on the Board of Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He’s the recipient of the New York Post’s Liberty Medal for Freedom. And he has worked with revered architect I.M. Pei. So you may be surprised at what he feels is his biggest accomplishment as Executive Director of the Chinatown Partnership, a position he’s held for the past decade.

“Believe it or not, it’s something very small,” he said. “During one of our Weekend Walks — you take away the cars for a few hours, you put carpeting, chairs, tables, tents, and you hand out goodies, you have raffle prizes, showcases — a little girl from Chinatown learned to ride a bike. So, little things like that. That girl will never forget that she learned to ride a bike in an alley of Chinatown.”

Chinatown Partnership was created by the 9/11 Fund and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation to help have accountability and transparency in making sure the funds meant for Chinatown are properly spent. Chen was the first employee and help build it from the ground up using a combination of education, information outreach, and relationship-building with everyone from the American Legion to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and its “unofficial mayor of Chinatown” and non-Asian members of the community. The Chinatown Partnership handles issues including clean streets, graffiti removal and infrastructure.

Chen specializes in rescuing or resuscitating troubled towns or centers. Solving the riddle of how to fix things is his passion. “It’s like the Egyptian Sphinx,” he said. “There’s a riddle in front of you. To get past me you have to solve the riddle. If not, you die. So, I hope before I die I will solve the riddle.”

The riddle of Flushing is what first got his attention. During his last year of architecture school his neighborhood started sputtering (homelessness, panhandling, methadone clinics, prostitution, high vacancy). So he got involved and helped create the Flushing BID.

Manhattan’s Chinatown hardly seems to be struggling, but the community is vulnerable and faces the same problems as the 16 other Chinatowns across the country — aging population, less relevance, the need to adapt to change and the question of how to get children to return.

“It’s not a failure story,” Chen said. “No one thinks that after you get your college degree you’re coming back to take over the pasta store or the noodle shop. That has never been the gold bar standard.”

So all of those challenges make up the riddle. The answer lies in adaptability and inclusion. Chen is grateful to neighboring ethnic groups — like the Little Italy Restoration Association, which went through similar struggles — that generously share insights and information.

“There is no better place to raise your children. They have the opportunity to live beyond their borders with so many different cultures on one small little island.”

Abby Brody

“I think there’s no better place to raise your children,” says Brody, who has two kids of her own. “They have the opportunity to live beyond their borders with so many different cultures on one small little island.”
At the 14th Street Y, Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein creates programs “for New Yorkers of every background.”

BY CHARMAINE P. RICE

As executive director of the 14th Street Y located on East 14th Street and First Avenue, Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein oversees a diverse community, serving New Yorkers from all walks of life, from toddlers to senior citizens. Rabbi Epstein joined the Y in 2013 and loves getting to know the members, staff and business owners in the community. “As a rabbi who runs a historically Jewish community center, in one of the most creative and vibrant places in the world, I love that we are able to use our cultural inheritance and creativity to create real and supportive community for New Yorkers of every background, race, ethnicity and religion,” says Epstein.

Among the wide range of programs offered, the 14th Street Y coordinates Downtown Jewish Life a network of 30 synagogues, museums, and Jewish organizations in Downtown Manhattan.

In addition to its robust cultural offerings, the 14th Street Y offers programming that appeals to a wide variety of interests and needs of the community. “We work to serve as a center that can serve as a supportive community for people of every age, stage, background and socioeconomic status, supporting their social, recreational, spiritual, wellness and educational needs,” explains Epstein. “So, for some people, this is their pool or their fitness center or home basketball court. For others, it is their preschool, their parenting support network, their child’s after-school activity. For many, we are the place for their cultural engagement, for adult education classes, or for their social outlet either after the workday or during the fulfilling days of retirement.”

The 14th Street Y is a part of the city’s Educational Alliance, a social institution that has served Lower Manhattan since 1889. Originally established as a settlement house for East European Jewish immigrants emigrating to New York City, the Alliance eventually grew and evolved into an organization that offered social service programs, and was one of the first organizations to offer Head Start for early childhood education.

“Everyone wants to live meaningful, healthy, and interesting lives, connected in real ways with others — and I see that happening here every day,” says Epstein. “Whether it is in our theater, our pool, our preschool, on the basketball court, or in the fitness center, I get to see people of all ages and backgrounds playing, learning, and growing together, making a real village of neighbors here in the East Village.”

For some people, this is their pool or their fitness center or home basketball court ... For many, we are the place for their cultural engagement, for adult education classes, or for their social outlet.”

Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein
HAMMOND ON THE HIGH LINE

His foresight and imagination transformed a forsaken railroad into a pioneering public urban space

By Michael Garofalo

When Robert Hammond started Friends of the High Line with Joshua David in 1999, the group's plan to fashion an elevated public greenway on the abandoned West Side rail tracks was regarded by many as a pipe dream.

Their vision for the derelict railway, which at the time was overgrown with vegetation and targeted for demolition, was practically ridiculed in some quarters.

“There are significant financial, maintenance, operation and liability issues,” Joseph B. Rose, Mayor Rudy Giuliani’s Planning Commission chair, said in The New York Times, adding, “to the extent that the romantic vision is a stalking horse to preclude this area of town from continuing to evolve, that’s problematic.”

Nineteen years later, with the High Line the centerpiece of a West Side hub for art, architecture, food and tourism, the notion it could have been an obstacle to the neighborhood’s evolution is all but inconceivable.

The High Line’s success as a park, gathering place, performance venue, arts center and all-purpose transformative project is so well documented that it’s become easy to take for granted as an inexorable part of the Manhattan cityscape — it welcomes 7 million people each year, as many as the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

But Hammond isn’t focused on past accomplishments — as the Friends’ executive director, he’s charting the course for the High Line’s future.

“In a lot of ways we’re like a teenager,” Hammond said from his Gansevoort Street office, “and I don’t think we’re going to grow up overnight.”

The park is almost completely built — a spur near 30th Street is scheduled to open next year — and, Hammond said, “the opportunity we have going forward is to really figure out: what is the cultural institution for the 21st century?”

It’s clear, Hammond thinks, that it will look something like the High Line. Free, open to the public and offering a wide range of amenities and opportunities for engagement. “People no longer just want to go to big boxes for their art, for their theater, for their music, for their food,” he said. “They want to have multiple experiences at the same time.”

The High Line fulfills all of these roles and more. “New Yorkers are in charge of how they want to experience it,” Hammond said.

Among the challenges Hammond faces is dealing with what he calls the “interesting problem of over-success.”

“Just because something is free and open to the public doesn’t mean that everyone feels welcome,” he said. Programming designed by and for New Yorkers, including job and internship programs for local youth, has helped make the High Line’s visitorship as diverse as the neighborhood it runs through.

As the High Line’s success helped spur a wider urban movement to repurpose outdated infrastructure as public space, the Friends created the High Line Network to share knowledge from peer projects around the world.

“How do you make sure these public spaces benefit everyone?” Hammond said of the network’s mission. “We’re proof of concept, and we’re learning from each other rather than us teaching them how to do it.”

“We were in the right place at the right time, but one of the things that was really helpful is actually Josh and I didn’t have any experience in this,” Hammond said. “Our talent was for listening to smart people.”

“Their crazy dreams can come true,” he said.
The catastrophic terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 obliterated 2,000-plus lives, wiped out 65,000 jobs, displaced 20,000 residents, destroyed 14 million square feet of office space and crippled America’s fourth-largest business district.

A great rebuilding, rebranding and reinvention followed the calamity. And Catherine McVay Hughes — then a member of Community Board 1 and chair of its World Trade Center Redevelopment Committee from 2005 to 2012 — was one of its leading architects.

Then another cataclysm struck Lower Manhattan on October 29, 2012, Superstorm Sandy, a meteorological monstrosity propelling once-in-a-lifetime storm surges that burst two river-banks and flooded buildings, tunnels and infrastructure.

Soon, a second recovery campaign began. Once again, Hughes — who had become chair of CBI in July 2012 and joined the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. board that same year — played a supportive but central role in the reconstruction of Downtown.

Bottom line: Due in part to her advocacy, the area got back on its feet, mega-businesses and boutique shops gravitated to its commercial hub, it became greener, livable, more sustainable, and now, no residential neighborhood in the city is growing faster than CBI.

“On September 10, 2001, there were 20,000 residents living in the area, and half of them moved out after 9/11,” Hughes said. “Today, CBI has a population of roughly 70,000.

Nothing happens alone, she stressed. Partnerships, coalitions, elected officials, responsible developers, on-the-ball government agencies, all made the effort possible. “Everything is a team effort,” she said. “You can’t just wave a magic wand.” Yet community activism is paramount.

“The takeaway message is that it’s important to actively engage in the public process, and that through public participation, you can actually make a difference, and see very real, very positive changes,” Hughes added.

A 1982 graduate of Princeton University with a degree in engineering, Hughes, who got her MBA from the Wharton School in 1987, became a community activist and startup entrepreneur. She joined the community board in 1997, and four years later, the area was reduced to ashes and concrete dust. The recovery wasn’t swift, but over time, it proved phoenix-like. Her tireless advocacy was one of the reasons the phrase “Ground Zero” slowly dropped out of the lexicon.

Examples abound: Officials wanted to turn Zuccotti Park into a staging ground for construction. “We said ‘No! Let’s get our open space back,’” Hughes recalls. Sure enough, the zone of construction was shrunk. They wanted to turn off the waterfalls at the 9/11 Memorial in the winter. “We said, ‘No! They should be on 12 months a year,’” she said. And so they are.

Hughes helped to pass the James Zadroga Act, providing health-care monitoring to first responders and survivors; advocated to expand the Victim’s Compensation Fund boundary north to Canal Street; battled to mitigate construction noise and bolster safety standards; and played a key role for 15 years in WTC environmental health issues.

When Sandy struck, its water walls penetrating buildings, she found a new mission: “Helping re-build my neighborhood a second time,” she said.

She’s been doing that ever since, first, at the helm of CB 1 from 2012 to 2016, then, as a member until 2017. Now, Hughes serves on a resiliency task force and a storm-surge working group, and she’s on the board of the South Street Seaport Museum, the Battery Park City Authority and the advisory board of the Earth Institute.

Her activism paid off. After fighting for comprehensive resiliency planning for Downtown, she helped lock up funding for the planning and implementation of an engineering study for the tip of Manhattan.

“Her background as an engineer and an environmental activist helped make two recoveries possible, from the World Trade Center attacks and from Sandy,” said Assembly Member Deyobrah Glick. “And her work regarding resilience continues to this day.”

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2018 DOTTY WINNER

LEADING THE WAY FOR DOWNTOWN’S REBIRTH

An urban pioneer who’s lived a block from the WTC for three decades, Catherine McVay Hughes didn’t just help to rebuild her neighborhood once, she worked to rebuild it twice.

BY DOUGLAS FEIDEN

2018 DOTTY WINNER

BATTERY BOOSTER REVVS UP RETAIL AT WTC

After a quarter-century in the public sector, Shari Hyman crosses to the private sector to helm the most expansive shopping destination built in Lower Manhattan since 9/11.

When Shari Hyman stepped down after four years as president and chief operating officer of the Battery Park City Authority in September 2017, she bid farewell to a booming 92-acre enclave she affectionately dubbed the “best small town in New York City.”

Many of its residents, workers, diners, shoppers, students, mariners, anglers, ballplayers, dog-walkers, film-watchers, concert-goers, hotel guests and chess players will tell you that their little river town got even greener, livelier and friendlier on her watch.

The secret of her success? The accomplishment she’s most proud of? Programming. Suddenly, the parks, the marina and the promenade were pulsating with new and reinvigorated activities.

“I managed to increase free public programming by $1 million — while keeping the budget of the authority intact,” Hyman said.

How? She redirected resources and streamlined costs to double down on community needs. The bottom line: In her last year at Battery Park City, 50,000 people attended field days, movie nights and happenings like Dock-appella, River & Blues, Strings-on-the-Hudson, even a Swedish Midsummer Festival.

It’s all about serving the community, she argues. Since then, Hyman has left the public sector. Changed jobs. Shifted to the private sector. Yet much has remained the same. Geographically at least, she couldn’t be much closer to her old job. She simply moved a couple of blocks, from the west side of West Street to the east side.

Hyman is now vice president and general manager of Westfield World Trade Center Property Group, a position she’s held for the past seven months, and her charge is to run the company’s sprawling retail operations at the WTC, with 85 shops, and Fulton Center, with 16.

The shopping magnet — located in the Oculus, or main hall, of the WTC Transportation Hub, and on Fulton Street in a second transit center — is the most ambitious retail destination built in the area since 9/11. Replacing the original WTC mall that was obliterated that day.

“My chief responsibility is getting the retailers the services they need and the sales they need to be successful,” Hyman said.

She’s being modest. Most malls have outdoor signage to lure customers and swift routes for deliveries. Westfield WTC has neither.

Santiago Calatrava’s vast steel-ribbed Transportation Hub, its exterior resembling the spreading wings of a dove taking flight, doesn’t post retail signs. All its deliveries proceed under-ground, entering via the WTC’s Vehicle Security Center for screening. “Security can never be compromised,” Hyman said.

So marketing has to target residents, workers, commuters and tourists to make sure they’re aware of the below-grade retail, and she’s constantly interacting with public entities like the Port Authority and the MTA to foster deliveries and address security concerns.

“They are our customers, and they’ve been great partners in making this a beneficial, customer-oriented experience,” Hyman said. “The whole idea is to balance everybody’s interests in a communal space.”

A 1988 Columbia University graduate, Hyman got her law degree in 1991 from Northwestern University and worked as a prosecutor for Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau through the 1990s.

Starting in 2006, she served as ex-Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s director of the Mayor’s Office of Special Enforcement, and in 2011, became chair of the city’s Business Integrity Commission, which shields the trade-waste industry from mob influence, a post she held until moving to Battery Park City Authority in 2014.

“She’s an absolute legend within the downtown community and around the entire WTC campus,” said Rachel Kraus, Westfield WTC’s vice president of marketing.

“There’s been a dynamic shift since she came in, it’s more friendly, open, customer-centric, engaging, and it’s creating great memories for residents, tourists, commuters and business travelers,” Kraus added.
You might not know the name Martin Kagan, but you’re probably familiar with the performing artists he brings to the stage. “I’ve always felt a kindred spirit to what I see onstage,” says Kagan, the Assistant Vice President of Cultural Affairs at the Schimmel Center for the Arts. “Not being an artist, where I get true satisfaction is knowing that when I sit in the audience — and I see every performance — I’ve been responsible to make that happen.”

This year, Kagan has a lot to take pride in. He’s the driving force behind bringing internationally acclaimed artists to the Schimmel Center, an intimate performing arts venue at Pace University. Upcoming highlights this spring include a performance by Kayhan Kalhor and Erdal Erzincan, Persian and Turkish improvisationalists with devoted fans across the globe, and a new musical about confronting gun violence in America performed by the acclaimed Knickerbocker Chamber Orchestra.

Manhattan’s cultural offerings are an embarrassment of riches any given night of the week, and Kagan’s vision has helped position the Schimmel Center and Pace University, where Kagan teaches a class in arts and entertainment management, as a growing cultural force in Lower Manhattan. But ultimately, says Kagan, his job is not about him. “Our goal is to make the artists look the best possible they can. It’s all about the artist,” he says.

From dance, cabaret and music to lectures and comedy, Kagan approaches the process of creating the perfect performing arts season with precision and insight. He begins planning over a year out, and sees artists live or on YouTube before making any decisions. “I try to find attractions that are unique each season, ones that have artistic integrity,” says Kagan. “You feel very close to the artists [at the Schimmel] and it’s one of the things that both the audience and the artists love about the space. It’s warm, it’s welcoming, it’s intimate.”

Martin Kagan

“The most important part of the job? Building trust with the audience. “I’ve had many years working in different venues, but that has been key. Not only that I provide an environment for the artist, but that I also provide an audience to feel comfortable, and to want to come back and have the confidence to see things they may not be interested in because I’m presenting,” he says.

Kagan finds excitement in the diversity of experiences his position offers, and it’s a path he encourages others to follow. Says Kagan, “It’s a full life. No day is ever the same.”
Daniel Quintero has been empowering kids across the city for over three decades. Quintero is the Executive Director of the Kips Bay Boys & Girls Club for the past 21 years and has been a part of the organization for 35 years. As a youngster, he joined the Kips Bay Boys Club at the age of 10 and leveraged the Club’s programs to home burgeoning leadership skills. He eventually became president of the Junior Leaders, coached baseball, and was crowned “Athlete of the Year” in 1976. Quintero returned to the Boys & Girls Club movement in a professional capacity in 1984 and has remained with the organization ever since.

“What I find most fulfilling about my role is that I’m helping to create the necessary resources so that thousands of children can take advantage of our educational, recreational, and empowerment programs.”

Kips Bay Boys & Girls Club is a youth development organization that provides programming geared to youngsters ages 6-18 at nine locations throughout the Bronx, along with a camp in Harrison, New York. A wide range of programs is offered, covering literacy, drug prevention, job-readiness training, pregnancy prevention, the digital arts, and more.

Quintero manages over 250 staff members, serving more than 10,000 children across nine Bronx locations. Fund-raising plays a key part in ensuring the continuity of the programs.

“A challenging part of my job is keeping all our programs funded, and that means raising about $9 million annually. We do this through hosting special events including The Show House, [a popular annual event where high-profile interior designers transform a Manhattan home into a stunning showcase of the latest design trends and art] and partnerships with foundations and corporations,” explained Quintero.

“At the end of the day,” he added, “we are building self-esteem and self-worth so that these young people are equipped to become future leaders. Our programs will enable kids and young adults to compete and be prepared for the complex society and the world we live in.”

Donnette Truss didn’t plan on going into the health-care industry. But her chance decision to accept a job managing billing at a dialysis center led her to a fulfilling, extended career in human resources.

“I took advantage of opportunities presented to me,” Truss said. “And over time, there was no place else I’d rather be.”

Almost 15 years later, Truss has served as the president of the Association of Healthcare Human Resources Administrators of Greater New York and was a 2017 recipient of the Gary Willis Leadership award for her work in human resources management and her leadership in implementing an electronic timekeeping system, a project that affected more than 5,000 hospital employees. Today, Truss’s role at the Mount Sinai Beth Israel Hospital as a business partner has solidified her as an irreplaceable and trustworthy leader at Mount Sinai. “She has earned the trust and respect of the staff across the hospital and health system,” said Christopher Berner, vice president of human resources for Mount Sinai Beth Israel. “She has taught me a great deal, and serves as an aspirational role model for maintaining composure and calm in moments of stress.”

In perhaps the most stressful situation in her career at Mount Sinai Beth Israel — the current internal and external transformation of the hospital — Truss has proven her ability to lead compassionately with a steady vision.

Until a few years ago, Mount Sinai Beth Israel used to be known as the Beth Israel Medical Center. As part of the process to revitalize Mount Sinai Beth Israel, the decision was made to shrink inpatient services, expand ambulatory service and transfer to a smaller facility. Such changes plunged the hospital into a multi-staged process that required employees to transfer to various institutions to prevent any layoffs of union staff.

“It’s a huge change that impacts people’s personal lives,” said Truss, who meets personally with every employee who is going through the process. “It can be an extremely emotional issue for the folks who are transitioning through it.”

In addition to the firm qualities required for overseeing placement decisions, empathy and compassion are essential for dealing with a project of such a personal nature.

“It’s not easy,” Truss said. “But to many who know her, Truss has perfected the balance between assertiveness and a kind presence, making her a dependable source of comfort for the hundreds of employees undergoing this daunting process.

To Truss, hearing about the positive effects of her work is what makes it all worth it. “The moments I relish the most are the unsolicited stories of the impact my work has had on leaders, staff and my colleagues,” she said.

But in addition to her achievements in the professional world, Truss’s greatest accomplishment to date is her children, two daughters aged almost 25 and 22. “They are fearless and have such a lust for life,” said Truss. “To have a ringside seat to their lives as adults brings me joy.”
Paul Steely White has pushed New York to build safe and sustainable transportation networks

BY MICHAEL GAROFALO

Transportation Alternatives’ goal to “reclaim New York City’s streets from the automobile and advocate for better bicycling, walking and public transit” hasn’t always been met with open arms. “For the better part of our history, that has been a very controversial mission,” said Paul Steely White, the group’s executive director.

Since the nonprofit was founded in 1973, detractors have called its members car-hating zealots and worse. But in an age in which the city has enthusiastically adopted the Vision Zero road safety initiative and in the last five years added 330 miles of bike lanes to city streets (in the face of, yes, some auto-borne resistance, but also with significant public support) it’s difficult to argue that a tangible corner hasn’t been turned toward a more bike- and pedestrian-friendly future for New York — and Transportation Alternatives has led the charge.

“It’s only really been in the last couple years, I think — and it might sound a little extravagant — that the world has caught up to us,” said White, who joined Transportation Alternatives in 2004. “I think there’s a really widespread realization now that there’s something antithetical about the car and the city. There’s something incompatible with large-scale motor vehicle use in a dense metropolis like New York. There just isn’t enough room.”

The group’s message has become acutely relevant in the face of the city’s subway and congestion woes. In particular, he hopes that the impending shutdown of the L train for tunnel repairs, during which the Department of Transportation plans to close 14th Street to all vehicles except buses during peak hours and install a two-way protected bike lane on 13th Street, will serve as a model for easing pressure on the limited-capacity subway system by “getting more out of our surface transportation network.”

“The silver lining of the L train shutdown is that it forces us, as a city and a state, to forge some new solutions that use the streets in some radically different ways,” he said. “Essentially we’re talking about turning our surface streets into transit corridors so that they are much more efficient and have much more capacity to move people and still leave room for the things that we love.”

White traces his own love of bicycling to his first ride, which came as his parents were in the midst of a difficult divorce. “I had never learned how to ride a bike until I was maybe 7 and my dad took a weekend to teach me how to ride,” he said. “It was a tough time emotionally, but that feeling of flight and freedom when you finally get it felt like such a liberating experience,” White said.

White’s favorite bicycle ride in New York is part of his morning commute from his home in Red Hook to Transportation Alternatives’ offices in the Financial District. “If I have about 10 extra minutes I’ll ride right along the waterfront through Brooklyn Bridge Park,” he said. “It’s such an exhilarating and relaxing way to start my day.”

“What we do now is so much more than just bicycling — it’s tied to traffic safety and healthy transit and the rest — but bicycling is still our heart and soul, and it is for me too,” White said. “It’s really what keeps my batteries charged and keeps me jazzed and juiced to really attack my work.”
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After retiring from the NYPD, Ron Wolfgang was ready for a new challenge at the Alliance for Downtown New York.

BY ANNE KRISTOFF

Good luck trying to give Ron Wolfgang an award.
“It’s not about me,” he said, of his DOTTY award. “It’s about everybody I work with and the support I get from the boss and everybody else here. Every positive adjective you can think of — hardworking, brilliant, diligent — we have in Operations. It’s about the work that we do collectively.”

Wolfgang is the Senior Vice President of Operations for the Alliance for Downtown New York, an organization founded in 1995 that provides supplemental services (public safety, sanitation, economic development, and more) to businesses and residents in the Financial District.

Wolfgang joined the Downtown Alliance 11 years ago after retiring from the NYPD. The Staten Island native spent the first half of his career in the nearby First Precinct. After retiring, he was ready for a new challenge.

“I like the uniqueness of this position,” he said. “It’s not just security, sanitation, it’s a little bit of everything, so you’re constantly using your knowledge and skills. I like the wide spectrum of disciplines.”

He also loves the location.
“My father was a police officer in the First Precinct too and he always told me ‘Downtown’s great,’” he recalled. “I love Downtown. I love the history. I like to hear the old stories of immigrants who came through and made it.”

One of the biggest changes to the area is also one of its biggest challenges: the sheer number of people that crowd into its old Colonial-era grid. “There are over 60,000 residents now, whereas before there were about 20,000. We’ve at least tripled with that,” he said. “And a lot of tourists. Last year, the number was 13 and a half million, just down here specifically.”

Which means space is at a premium and keeping those spaces clean and safe is one of the Alliance’s main functions. To that end, the Alliance has a veritable army of red suited workers cleaning those spaces clean and safe is one of the Alliance’s main functions. To that end, the Alliance has a veritable army of red suited workers running the circulator bus.

“What I am most proud of is being here every day, caring about what we do. I would like people to say thank you to our folks on the street.”

Ron Wolfgang

The First Responders

Jin Huan Yang and Anthony Fracchiolla, six months on the job, were first EMTs on the scene following Halloween terror attack

On October 31, the deadliest terrorist attack since 9/11 took place along the bike path bordering the Hudson River. There, Sayfullo Saipov, a Paterson, New Jersey, man and ISIS acolyte, drove a rented truck for a mile and wreaked carnage along the Hudson River Greenway, between Houston Street and Chambers Street, slamming into bicyclists and pedestrians, leaving both their bodies and their bikes gnarled on the concrete path. Before Saipov’s rented terror truck smashed into a school bus near Stuyvesant High School on West Street, eight would be fatally injured and scores injured.

Ryan Nash, an NYPD officer from the First Precinct shot and incapacitated Saipov, preventing him from causing more carnage.

Not all heroes were as conspicuous as Nash. City Fire Department emergency medical technicians also played a key role by responding early, likely limiting the number of dead.

“I saw people running in the streets. People were just running in the middle of the highway. I thought to myself, why are people running in the middle of the highway? That’s dangerous,” said Jin Huan Yang, 26, an EMT who together with his partner, Anthony Fracchiolla, were responding to a different call when they drove up on the scene.

Yang and Fracchiolla, 21, responded immediately, going into the midst of chaos to treat the injured. Theirs was the first FDNY unit on the scene.

“Our main objective was to help,” Yang said. Yang is a first-generation Asian American who has been in the United States ever since he could remember. He applied to be an EMT for FDNY on a whim. This was his first serious incident.

Yang was not the only new person on the job. He and his partner, Anthony Fracchiolla, only 21, had joined FDNY as EMTs only six months prior to the attack. Fracchiolla clambered on to the school bus that was hit by the pickup truck and freed a girl stuck at the back. He had, he said, to “try to stay calm, relax and just do the job.”

Although neither Yang nor Fracchiolla had experienced a situation of a similar magnitude, they said they were well prepared through their training. But the extent of the situation truly hit them when they were out in the field. “You see injuries, people crying on the floor. It hits you. People are looking at you,” Fracchiolla said.

Fracchiolla had always tried to help people when he was growing up. When he was younger, he used to help a neighbor shovel snow. Fracchiolla now takes up a career helping people. However, after the attack, he had one regret — “Knowing that I wasn’t able to help all the victims,” he said.

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Anthony Fracchiolla
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