

**Matthew Fishbein joins Brooklyn A's Board**

Brooklyn A is pleased to welcome Matthew Fishbein to its Board of Directors. Fishbein, a former member of our Advisory Committee, is a litigation partner at Debevoise & Plimpton LLC whose practice focuses on white-collar criminal defense, internal investigations and complex commercial litigation. Fishbein previously served in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern and Southern Districts of New York, where he twice earned the Director's Award for Superior Performance.



**Matthew Fishbein: 'In an age when the resources available to public service institutions are becoming scarcer and scarcer, it is an inspiration to see how much has been accomplished by the dedicated and tireless staff at Brooklyn A. I am excited about the opportunity to make my small contribution to Brooklyn A's continued success.'**

*continued on page 7*

**Community Mobilizes to Save Homes**

BROOKLYN A AND PARTNERS FIGHT DISPLACEMENT



Tenants and supporters rally outside Williamsburg building just hours before Brooklyn A confronted the landlord in court.

By Seth Cohen

The Brooklyn waterfront's familiar industrial skyline will soon be lined with sleek, high-rise condos, hastening the transformation of the Williamsburg and Greenpoint communities into New York City's latest "gold coast." This red-hot real estate market, prized by well-off hipsters, is increasingly the scene of harassment, eviction, and displacement of low-income, long-time residents. But a unique coalition of community organizations is mounting a concerted drive to protect the dwindling supply of affordable housing and prevent the large-scale displacement of vulnerable tenants.

This Mobilization Against Displacement unites Brooklyn A and our longstanding community

partners in a formidable movement to ensure that, as gentrification unfolds, Williamsburg and Greenpoint remain diverse, vibrant communities that are home to many poor and working-class families. The Mobilization is remarkable in bringing together all of the area's community-based organizations and Catholic churches in a dynamic, collaborative initiative. The coalition includes North Brooklyn Development Corporation, Churches United for Fair Housing, Neighbors Allied for Good Growth (NAG), The People's Firehouse Inc., Southside United Development Corp. (Los Sures) and St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation, as well as Brooklyn A.

Brooklyn A has partnered with these organizations for over 20 years to prevent some 12,000

*continued on page 6*

**Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A**, providing high-quality neighborhood-based civil legal services to low-income individuals and groups in North and East Brooklyn since 1968.

**Project Director & Chief Counsel**  
Martin S. Needelman

**General Counsel**  
Paul J. Acinapura

**Director of Development & Communications**  
Karen Gellen

**Development Consultant**  
Denise R. Berger

**Newsletter Staff**  
Lee Levin

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## Hard Choices in Better Times

It's a new day for New York's legal services community. After years of drastic funding cuts, positive changes at the federal and state levels are generating very significant new resources.

Gov. Eliot Spitzer has doubled support for civil legal services to low-income New Yorkers and will require banks to dramatically increase the interest they pay on special accounts that generate funds for our work. The higher rates will generate up to \$500,000 in increased funding for Brooklyn A next year.

There is also a sea change under way in Congress, which retroactively increased federal support for legal services in last year's budget. And the 2008 congressional allocation is expected to be 8 percent to 12 percent over the current year.

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**The significant increases in government support will only get us back to where we were when the massive funding cuts began.**

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Although these projected increases are very significant and a huge relief, they will only get us back to where we were when the massive funding cuts began. At the best of times, legal services was able to meet barely 20 percent of the need for assistance in low-income communities. And now, in the communities Brooklyn A serves, that need is the deepest and most urgent we've seen since we opened our doors in 1968.

The gigantic pressure to displace low-income residents in these gentrifying areas and the long term impact of "welfare reform" has intensified both hardship and intimidation. Only our constant legal intervention is preventing wide-scale eviction of the most vulnerable tenants. Brooklyn A attorneys have an overwhelming workload in addressing the horrendous collateral consequences of these economic and social conditions.

So we must make extremely difficult decisions about how to spend the new money. To improve services we need to restore essential staff after

years of operating with skeletal levels of intake and paralegal support. We also must choose between expanding existing programs or taking on other critical issues confronting our clients.

Amid a severe housing crisis, should we increase our representation of tenants associations, senior citizens and families with minor children, or begin to restore services to at-risk families without minor children and/or those living in public housing?

It is agonizing to weigh the needs of people affected by HIV/AIDS and survivors of domestic violence against those of parents struggling to keep their families together or extremely vulnerable people denied critical SSI and unemployment benefits. And what about providing more legal support for community organizations building truly affordable housing and creating senior citizens centers, neighborhood-based health facilities and child care centers?

Other clients also desperately need our support: immigrants and workers aiming to re-enter the workforce after incarceration, long-term "welfare dependency," or economic dependence on a batterer.

We are optimistic that the tide will continue to turn. We're encouraged by increased advocacy by the private bar. City Bar President Barry Kamins has made a powerful case that "the organized bar and individual lawyers take steps to ensure that all levels of our government substantially increase funding for civil legal services." Kamins urged the private bar to increase its financial support for legal services.

Meanwhile, Brooklyn A will continue to make very difficult choices. But we're celebrating our increased government support and the opportunities it brings. So much more is needed, but we're finally moving in the right direction.

— Marty Needelman

Brooklyn A's Project Director & Chief Counsel

### Congratulations to Bob MacCrate!

The New York Bar Foundation will honor its former president Robert MacCrate with its inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award on Feb. 1, 2008. In addition to his outstanding professional achievements, MacCrate is being recognized for "bringing significant recognition and acclaim to the Bar Foundation." Brooklyn A congratulates him on this award; we are so proud and honored that his name graces our Williamsburg office, the Shriver Tyler MacCrate Center for Justice.

## FORECLOSURE WAVE SWEEPS BROOKLYN

**Brooklyn A Taking Predators to Court**

*Imagine that you've finally bought your own home, after years of planning, working, and saving. You're making payments and improvements, and building up some equity. But you fall behind in your mortgage payments and the bank threatens to foreclose. Then someone knocks on your door and offers to help you out. The lifeline is a refinancing that will lower your payments and save your home. You sign the papers aided by a lawyer recommended by your new friend. Several months later, you again fall behind in your house payments and get hit with an eviction notice from your landlord. You're panicked and bewildered: How can you have a landlord when you're a homeowner? And how can that landlord throw you out into the street?*

Every week, desperate families from North and East Brooklyn come to Brooklyn A with that same terrible story. Not only has their deed been stolen, but the thieves have already stripped all of the equity out of their property. While predatory lenders are saddling low-income people with unsustainable mortgages on faulty homes, other crooks offering "foreclosure rescue" are stealing homeowners' deeds and equity.

**'The scams are crimes of economic violence with a destabilizing, corrosive effect on entire neighborhoods.'**

Brooklyn is a "hot zone" rife with predatory lenders, according to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. HUD reports that these lenders particularly target the struggling



Brooklyn A and its local partners are educating the community against consumer fraud. Above: Cypress Hills Local Development Corp. holds a seminar for first-time home-buyers.

communities of East New York, Brownsville, Bushwick, and Bedford-Stuyvesant, areas where Brooklyn A is leading the fight to stop them.

Unchecked predatory lending leads directly to a wave of foreclosures, a situation ripe for phony "foreclosure rescue" schemes. The scams victimize the same low-income families twice, says Rick Wagner, Brooklyn A's Director of Litigation. "These are crimes of economic violence with a destabilizing, corrosive effect on entire neighborhoods. They are aimed at families with the least amount of financial and legal literacy."

Even legitimate mortgage loan documents are "mind-bogglingly complex," the *New York Times* reports, with "nine out of 10 borrowers unable to specify upfront fees or the exact amount of their mortgage loans." Con artists trawl through public notices of impending foreclosure actions and go door-to-door in disadvantaged communities, offering their own lawyers to help debtors navigate the paperwork.

Among Brooklyn A's current clients are two families, from Canarsie and Bushwick, who were bilked by the same group of thieves. In Canarsie, "Joe," who is HIV-positive, lives with his mother in a house she bought in the 1960s. With the onset of Alzheimer's, she forgot to make her mort-

gage payments and the bank filed a public notice of its pending claim against the property. Soon after, a man appeared on their doorstep promising to lend "Joe" and his mother enough money to pay off the mortgage with a year to pay it back. "Joe" unknowingly signed over the deed to his mother's home to a third person he had never met. The con artists then took out two new mortgages on the house and pocketed the money. When the family fell behind in paying back the loan, the new "owners" served them with an eviction notice.

"Joe" retained Brooklyn A, which brought an action against the parties who had conspired to steal the house and strip hundreds of thousands of dollars of equity from the property. Brooklyn A obtained a preliminary injunction against any attempt by the defendants to sell, further mortgage the home, or evict "Joe" and his mother. The judge then encouraged Brooklyn A to make a summary judgment motion to get the deed back.

Wagner expects "Joe's" deed to be returned. But increasing numbers of low-income Brooklyn families are still being bilked. "Victims like 'Joe' are often frightened and isolated, and don't know there are legal remedies to save their homes," he says. "Without a lawyer at their side, it's impossible for them to obtain justice."

# HONOREES BROOKLYN A'S PARTNERSHIP A

**SAVE THE DATE, WED., NOV. 14, 2007**, for *Brooklyn A's* gala Annual Dinner! We are planning entertainment to benefit our unique, community-based legal services program. We're proud to recognize our Honorees with wine, great stories, music, dancing, and terrific conversation. Please see our ad on page 8 for details. We look forward to seeing you there!

## Brendan J. Dugan

CHAIRMAN & CEO  
SOVEREIGN BANK  
METRO NY/NJ DIVISION

The Franciscans at Brooklyn's St. Francis College instilled the values of freedom, tolerance, and respect for others in a young Brendan J. Dugan. He has kept these values and put them into practice throughout his career as a successful commercial banker and East Side community leader.

Dugan gives back to the Brooklyn community in many ways. He is Chairman of the Board of St. Francis College. When his sister, Assemblywoman Eileen Dugan, died of cancer in 1996, he established a scholarship in her name that supports students in need at his alma mater. He serves on the Board of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Regional Plan Association, Partnership for New York City, and on the Finance Council of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn.



**'While achieving great heights in the world of business and banking, Brendan has never forgotten his roots in Brooklyn.'**

A 38-year veteran of commercial banking in the metropolitan New York market, Dugan is Chairman & CEO of Sovereign Bank's metro NY/NJ Division, which recently acquired Independence Community Bank. Prior to joining Independence in 2003, Dugan served as Chief Operating Officer of Citibank Commercial Markets and President of European American Bank. While at each of these institutions, he helped develop and manage the implementation of growth strategies in the areas of Commercial and Retail Banking, Leasing and Real Estate Lending.

"While achieving great heights in the world of business and banking, Brendan has never forgotten his roots in Brooklyn," says Marilyn Gelber, Executive Director of the Independence Community Foundation. "He and his family embody the values of public service, philanthropy, and civic leadership. We are fortunate to have him at the helm of an important banking institution in Brooklyn; our communities can only benefit from his high ethical standards and concern for their well-being."

## Paul J. Curran

PARTNER  
KAYE SCHOLER LLP

Paul J. Curran, Special Counsel for Litigation at Kaye Scholer LLP, is a successful, distinguished attorney with a lifelong commitment to public service. He served three terms as a member of the New York State Assembly, representing Manhattan's Lower East Side community, and has throughout his career answered the call of officials in need of his expertise in conducting investigations and developing policy. He was Special Counsel to the U.S. Department of Justice and Chair of the New York State Commission on Investigations.

Curran investigated the 1977 blackout, supervised a statewide investigation into the use of force in the criminal justice system, and targeted corruption in the New York City school system. He has served as United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and is currently Chair of the Appellate Division's First Department Disciplinary Committee.



**'Paul's commitment and dedication to public service and charitable activities is remarkable and an inspiration to us all.'**

As longtime Chair of the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York (PLSNY), Curran has a strong commitment to making civil legal services available to low-income inmates in New York State correctional facilities. The State Legislature created PLSNY in 1976 to provide high-quality, effective legal representation and enable prisoners to secure their civil and human rights, as well as advocate for reforms in prison and criminal justice systems. PLSNY attorneys have enabled prisoners to access improved medical care and translation services in administrative and court proceedings. They have represented women prisoners who were sexually abused by guards, and worked to reverse improperly conducted disciplinary hearings.

Curran has devoted tremendous energy to ensuring the organization's mission and future. A colleague at Kaye Scholer, Gregory Wallance, says that "Paul's commitment and dedication to public service and charitable activities is remarkable and an inspiration to us all."

# WARDS BENEFIT 2007

ing another wonderful evening of inspiration and  
crees and delighted to offer you a delicious buffet, fine  
board to seeing you!

## Maria Contreras-Collier

DIRECTOR  
CYPRESS HILLS CHILD CARE  
CORPORATION



Maria Contreras-Collier's love for children led her to the Cypress Hills Child Care Corporation. Since 2001, she has dramatically improved the quality of children's services at the corporation, which is operated by Brooklyn A's long-time partner organization, the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (CHLDC). She has brought stability, harmony and vision to the organization in its three major divisions: the Family Day Care Network, Head Start Program, and Child Care Center.

Contreras-Collier's work led to funding for Universal Pre-Kindergarten at the Center, a Head Start mentoring program and a new healthy eating, nutrition and exercise component called *Comer Para Vivir*, which grew into the *Salsa, Salud, and Sabor* program. She retained Brooklyn A in the 1990s in a protracted fight for New York City funding of day care at Cypress Hills. It was a victory that resulted in the first city funding of new day care slots in nearly a decade.

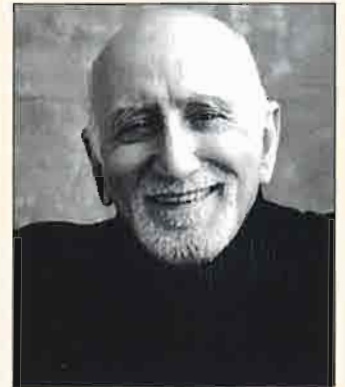
**'Maria is loving, kind, and has accomplished truly amazing things in providing childcare and empowering women here in Cypress Hills.'**

After moving her young family to Cypress Hills, Contreras-Collier became a community activist and President of the Nichols Avenue Block Association. She came to know CHLDC as the first applicant for its home improvement loan program. Within a year, she was working as the organization's Assistant Director, where she ran its First Time Home Buyer Club, marketed and leased several affordable housing projects, and supervised the housing, community organizing and economic development departments.

She also established an annual Toy Drive for Needy Children that is now in its 15th year of raising donations of cash, new toys, food, clothing, eyeglasses, and dental care. Contreras-Collier and her colleagues deliver the gifts to the community's neediest families each Christmas Eve. "Maria is incredibly loving and kind, she's accomplished amazing things in providing childcare and empowering women here in Cypress Hills," says CHLDC's Executive Director Michelle Neugebauer. "We're thrilled that Brooklyn A is honoring her this year!"

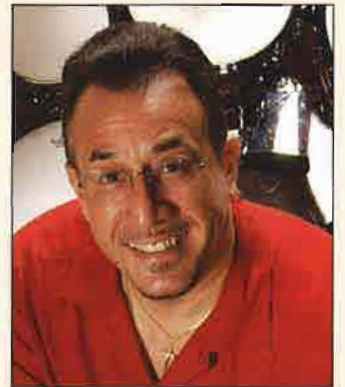
## Sopranos' 'Uncle Jr.' to Emcee Festivities

Dominic Chianese, whose career in music, film, stage and television spans five decades, is currently best known for his Emmy-nominated role as Corrado "Uncle Junior" Soprano on the HBO hit series *"The Sopranos."* He made his acting debut in 1952 and has appeared in dramas and musicals on Broadway and in the NY Shakespeare Festival. Chianese began his film career in 1971 and appeared in *"The Godfather, Part II,"* three major Sidney Lumet films, and numerous other roles. His television credits include *"Law & Order," "Kojak,"* and *"Dark Shadows."* Chianese is also a singer/songwriter and has released two CDs, including his latest, *"Ungrateful Heart."*



## Dance to the Rhythms Of Bobby Sanabria

Bobby Sanabria – drummer, percussionist, composer, arranger, recording artist and educator – has performed with such legendary figures as Dizzy Gillespie, Tito Puente, and Paquito D Rivera, as well as with his own critically acclaimed ensembles.



*Downbeat* magazine called Sanabria "one of the most informed, astute, and passionate champions of Afro-Cuban music on the scene today." The son of Puerto Rican parents, he was born and raised in the "Fort Apache" section of the South Bronx. He graduated from Boston's Berklee College of Music, has been featured on numerous Grammy-nominated albums, and his CDs have drawn critical acclaim.

## DISPLACEMENT *continued from page 1*

housing evictions. The need for community action has accelerated dramatically, however, since the 2005 rezoning of the Brooklyn waterfront, which opened the way for a surge of luxury residential construction and renovation. Formed in 1999, the Mobilization focused most recently on ensuring that the impending rezoning would include a decent proportion of affordable housing, protections against displacement, and accessible parks and recreational facilities. The community fought hard and did wrench some concessions from the city and developers. But the overall impact of the rezoning has been to dramatically decrease the supply of affordable housing and unleash aggressive moves

**‘Now, landlords who harass our tenants understand that these tenants are not going to back down—Brooklyn A is right there with them.’**

to displace existing low-income tenants.

Wealthy newcomers are able and willing to pay far more than current residents of low- or moderate-income housing can afford, both on the waterfront and in the “upland” sections of Williamsburg and Greenpoint. “As more market-rate housing becomes available on the waterfront, upland landlords are looking to maximize their profits by pressuring long-term low-income tenants to move out,” said Martin Needelman, Brooklyn A’s Project Director. “These tactics threaten the viability of the diverse community that has lived here for years.”

“We are currently experiencing direct

and dramatic changes in the upland neighborhood,” said NAC Executive Director Peter Gillespie. “The one policy that really affected the speculative environment of real estate here was allowing the residential conversion of viable manufacturing buildings. Now, big developers are coming in and either buying people out or forcibly pushing people out in order to build large-scale, high-end luxury projects. Some development is a good thing,” he said, “but not at this size, scale or price.”

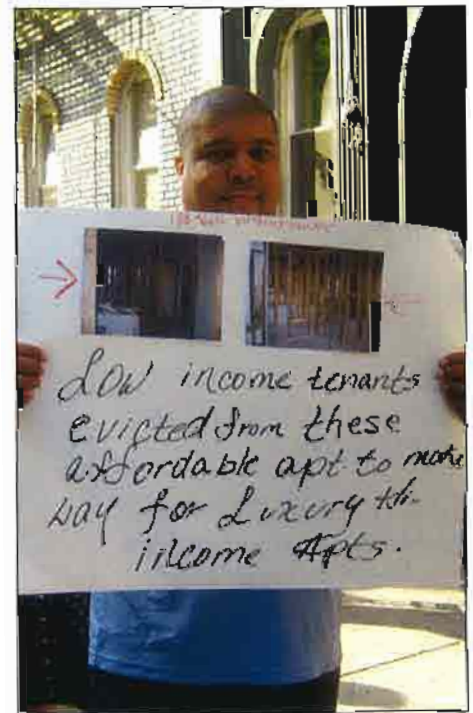
The Mobilization’s success in preserving affordable housing, preventing displacement, and sustaining the low- and moderate-income community stems from its distinct composition and approach: the partner organizations are each deeply rooted in the client communities they serve, and have partnered in the past to tackle other vital community issues.

As the legal arm of the initiative, Brooklyn A provides much more than vigorous representation in the courtroom. “Faced with all the harassment, tenants feel empowered by working with Brooklyn A because they see that there is a formal process in place, with people to help them through this. Knowing what legal options they have gives them courage to confront their landlords,” Gillespie said.

Los Sures organizer Debbie Medina also underscores Brooklyn A’s critical role in the Mobilization: “If it wasn’t for Brooklyn A, none of our successes would have happened. Now, landlords who harass our tenants understand that these tenants are not going—Brooklyn A is right there with them.”

This partnership has defined the long-running struggle at 188 South 3rd Street, a 41-unit rent-stabilized building occupied by low-income Latino tenants that sits just blocks from the waterfront. In April 2005, a long-time tenant came to Los Sures for help because the landlord was trying to evict her. He had also been trying to buy out the other tenants in order to create upscale, high-rent housing and had already paid 11 tenants up to \$25,000 each to move out.

Los Sures began assisting the remaining tenants by organizing a tenants’ association. The association, represented by Brooklyn A attorneys Needelman and Roberto Marrero, obtained a cellar-to-roof inspection and, after several months and numerous court



*Jerry Urbaez, a Los Sures tenant organizer, fights displacement of longtime Williamsburg residents.*

appearances, hundreds of violations were placed on the building, the landlord was forced to complete repairs, and the tenants received a 10-month rent abatement.

The tenants’ initial victory was short-lived, however; the landlord sold the building in August 2006 to a new owner whose displacement tactics proved even more aggressive. The new landlord harassed the tenants with disruptions of heat and hot water, creating loud disturbances and potentially dangerous conditions, including “dust storms” while demolishing vacant apartments. According to Medina, “The poor living conditions were causing tenants to get sick.”

With Los Sures and Brooklyn A behind them, the tenants initiated a rent strike and took the landlord to court. A July 2007 court-ordered inspection of the occupied apartments revealed additional new conditions that the landlord has been ordered to repair. The tenants at 188 S. 3rd Street remain united and no more families have been displaced.

The Mobilization is waging building-by-building struggles like this one to prevent the waterfront real estate gold rush from driving low-income families out of the community. This won’t be easy, but the community is determined, and, said Medina, “The lawyers at Brooklyn A are fighters.”

# WELCOME ABOARD continued from page 1

## Advisory Committee gains new members, plans fall event

Two new Co-Chairs will lead Brooklyn A's Advisory Committee: **Peter A. Cross**, Managing Partner at Jacob, Medinger & Finnegan LLP and a former Brooklyn A Board member; and **Nelson Pérez**, Section Manager of Federal Government Relations at Con Edison. They succeed **Thomas Early**, Executive Director of Health Plus, who remains an active Committee member after several years of dedicated service as Chair. The Committee will sponsor a **Bankers' Breakfast on Sept. 18, 2007**. The Committee also welcomes five new members.

**Eileen Berkman** is Senior Vice President and Associate General Counsel at JPMorgan Chase, where she supervises international litigation. She is a member of the city Bar's Committee on Professional Responsibility.

**Robert Crotty** is a partner at Kelley Drye and Warren with 35 years experience representing major corporations in complex commercial litigation. He is also the firm's Pro Bono Coordinator. "I have worked with Brooklyn A for many years and know it to be one of the best providers of pro bono legal services in the city," Mr. Crotty



Caroline Forte

said. "I'm very happy to formalize this relationship by serving on its Advisory Committee."

**Caroline Forte** is Director of Communications for Pfizer Global Manufacturing-U.S./Canada Region. Ms. Forte said, "I'm honored to be a part of strengthening the quality of life in our community. Brooklyn A is an excellent example of how to effectively serve those in need."

**David S. Slackman**, a Williamsburg native, is Commerce Bank's Founding President in New York. A member of the banking community for 35 years, he serves on the Boards of the Queens College Business & Liberal Arts Program, Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce, and Central Park Medical Unit, and was 2007's Queens College Alumnus of the Year.

**William Treanor** is Dean of Fordham University Law School, where he has taught since 1991. He was previously a



David S. Slackman

speechwriter for the U.S. Secretary of Education, clerk to Judge James L. Oakes of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, special assistant to the Chair of the NY State Commission on



Dean William Treanor

Government Integrity, special assistant U.S. Attorney in D.C., and Associate Independent Counsel in the Office of the Iran-Contra Independent Counsel. He is also a leading constitutional historian.

## New directors strengthen Development and Finance



Karen Gellen



Joshua Hoffman

**Karen Gellen**, Director of Development and Communications, brings extensive fundraising experience to Brooklyn A, including work at the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (now Human Rights First) and the Brennan Center for Justice. She also led the Development Departments at the Trickle Up Program and Nontraditional Employment for Women. Ms. Gellen previously worked as a journalist covering international politics for the *Guardian* newsweekly.

**Joshua Hoffman** returns to Brooklyn A as the Director of Finance and Administration after stints as a law student intern and interim Office Manager. Hoffman is a 2006 graduate of the St. John's University School of Law where he received the Pro-Bono Service Award and Public Interest Certificate. He was previously a contract attorney at the New Jersey firm of Sills Cummis Epstein & Gross.



Eileen Berkman



Robert Crotty

## BROOKLYN A OFFICES

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Fax: 718/342-1780

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Chairman & CEO  
Sovereign Bank  
Metro NY/NJ Division

### Paul J. Curran

Partner  
Kaye Scholer LLP

### Maria Contreras-Collier

Director  
Cypress Hills Child Care Corporation

**SPECIAL EMCEE:**  
**DOMINIC GHIANESE**

**NEW YORK MARRIOTT AT THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE**  
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**BOBBY SANABRIA SEXTET**

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(list in formation)

For more information, please contact:  
Karen Gellen, Director of Development & Communications, 718-487-2327 or [kgellen@bka.org](mailto:kgellen@bka.org)



**SAVE THE DATE: WEDNESDAY, NOV. 14, 2007 • 6 PM**