

BROOKLYN LEGAL SERVICES
CORPORATION A

**PARTNERSHIP FUND
FOR COMMUNITY
& ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
REPORT**

2000



THE PARTNERSHIP FUND FOR COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

was formed in 1997 as part of a unique collaborative effort between twelve corporate law firms and one neighborhood-based legal services organization. It was established by means of a shared vision to provide Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A (Brooklyn A) with the resources needed to expand its work in community and economic development. The twelve corporate firms that have contributed their support to the Partnership Fund include: Cahill Gordon & Reindel; Davis Polk & Wardwell; Kelley Drye & Warren, LLP with Darby & Darby; Kramer Dillof Tessel Duffy & Moore; Milberg Weiss Bershad Hynes & Lerach LLP; Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler; Richards & O'Neil, LLP; Schneider Kleinick Weitz Damashek & Shoot; Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom, LLP; Sidley & Austin; and Thacher Proffitt & Wood.

Brooklyn A's work in community and economic development began in 1974, when the organization joined forces with local groups working to improve the lives of community residents. Over the years, its efforts have grown impressively and have led to the creation of a formal Community & Economic Development Unit which helps to build new housing, empower tenants, rehabilitate old buildings, expand health care and childcare services, develop community centers and nursing homes, create jobs and establish minority and community-owned businesses. Today, the Unit has more than 100 community partners and is recognized as a local and national beacon of success in the building of self-sustaining neighborhoods. Its clients span the neighborhoods of Oceanhill-Brownsville, East New York, Cypress Hills, Williamsburg, Bushwick, and Greenpoint.

Through the support of the twelve Partnership firms, Brooklyn A has been able to expand its work in community and economic development even further. By providing funding for an additional senior staff attorney, Rafael Martinez, the Partnership Fund has enabled Brooklyn A to respond more effectively to its communities' needs. As a result, new commercial centers are being born, affordable apartments are being built, dilapidated houses are being rehabilitated, and new jobs are being created. Brooklyn A is thrilled to have Rafael on board.



Participants in Brooklyn A's Partnership Fund for Community and Economic Development: (l. to r.) Vincent F. Pitta, Richards & O'Neil, LLP; Rev. Peter A. Mahoney, Brooklyn A Board Chair; Fernando Ferrer, Bronx Borough President; Paul J. Acinapura, Brooklyn A; John M. Imperiale, The Chase Manhattan Bank; Omer S.J. Williams, Thacher Proffitt & Wood; Ronald Tabak, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, LLP; John J. Kuster, Sidley & Austin; Eugene E. Mulhern, Kelley Drye & Warren, LLP; Howard Golden, Brooklyn Borough President; Charles J. Hynes, District Attorney, Kings County; Robert E. Crotty, Kelley Drye & Warren, LLP; Gail Flesher, Davis Polk & Wardwell; Jerome M. Congress, Milberg Weiss Bershad Hynes & Lerach, LLP; Ogden N. Lewis, Davis, Polk & Wardwell; Antonia M. Grumbach, Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler, LLP; Stephen W. Schwarz, Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler, LLP; Alexander D. Forger, Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy; Matthew M. Gaier, Kramer, Dillof, Tessel, Duffy & Moore; and Martin S. Needelman, Brooklyn A.

RAFAEL MARTINEZ

Rafael Martinez is a dedicated activist and experienced attorney with a long history of commitment to the low-income neighborhoods of New York City. He joined Brooklyn A's Community and Economic Development Unit in January 1998, after an impressive career with such organizations as the New York City Planning Commission (where he served as commissioner), the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, the NYS Urban Development Corporation, the New York State Attorney General, and the South Bronx Community Housing Project. Since joining Brooklyn A in January, 1998, he has already managed to carve out a place within the community.

Rafael was born in Puerto Rico and came to New York City as a child. After graduating from Hunter College with a degree in physics, he made the unexpected decision to forgo science and pursue a career in law, as "an attorney working for the public good." Today, he lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Carmen, and their two sons, Rafael and Roberto. In his spare moments, he spends his time reading English mystery novels, working with computers, and doing photography. He was attracted to Brooklyn A for its long-standing role as a "constructive organization that provides help to the community."

Since joining the staff of the East Brooklyn office, Rafael has made a profound contribution to the work of the Community and Economic Development Unit. Working closely with community partners, local residents, and the Unit's other lawyers—or, as he describes them, "people with vision"—Rafael has helped bring new projects to light and old ones to fruition. The following is a sample of some of these projects. Without his work, and the generous support of the Partnership Fund, they could not be accomplished!



Photo by Denis R. Berger

CYPRESS HILLS-FULTON STREET RETAIL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Cypress Hills is a largely residential neighborhood with an expanding multi-ethnic population that is sixty-three percent Hispanic, twenty-percent African-American, eleven-percent European American, and six-percent Asian. Since the 1970s, the community has witnessed both a massive inflow of new residents and a frightening outflow of commercial investment and governmental resources. The combination has left the neighborhood with a pressing need for basic social, housing, and retail services.

For nearly fifteen years, the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (CHLDC) has been working to reverse this situation and meet the needs of the growing population. In its effort to provide services to all segments of the population, it has become a renaissance organization whose work ranges from developing buildings to running an alternative community school. The emergence of new low-income housing, child care centers, counseling programs, family and youth services, and small local businesses are all testament to its extraordinary success.

Among CHLDC's most exciting new projects is the commercial development of approximately 20,000 square feet of City-owned vacant land along the south side of Fulton Street. While this area was once the center of a vital commercial strip, a wave of arson and disinvestment in the 1970s left it empty and deteriorated, and by 1985 some 102 stores sat vacant. By launching plans for a new drug store/pharmacy, meat and fish market, health and beauty store, bakery, and restaurant, among other things, CHLDC hopes to revitalize this strip: to bring jobs, basic resources, and quality, affordable goods back to a neighborhood that was once left for dead.

Since joining Brooklyn A, Rafael has been working actively with CHLDC to transform the Fulton Street Redevelopment Project into a reality. During 1999, CHLDC obtained approximately \$695,000 in grant funds from various governmental agencies and private sector entities to further the development of this Project, and obtained a commitment from Republic National Bank to finance the construction.

Recently Rafael has negotiated and prepared the architect and broker agreements for this project. Rafael is assisting CHLDC in acquiring the Project site, negotiating and preparing long term leases for commercial tenants, and negotiating and preparing various construction documents. CHLDC expects to break ground on the Fulton Street Retail Development Project in 2001.

THE CYPRESS HILLS NEIGHBORHOOD HOMES PROJECT

This project involves providing home ownership for low-income families through the rehabilitation of small, substandard, City-owned premises. These premises are scattered throughout the Cypress Hills community and consist of twelve one- and two-family houses. Recently, Rafael prepared the contract of sale form that is used in selling the houses and will assist in closing these transactions.

OCEANHILL-BROWNSVILLE TENANTS ASSOCIATION

The Oceanhill-Brownsville Tenants Association (OHBT) is a multi-service community development corporation that is dedicated, in the words of its director Abdur Rahman Farrakhan, to "taking our own sweat and our own blood, and rebuilding our community with our own two hands." Since it was founded as a tenants association more than 25 years ago, its members have worked tirelessly to transform Oceanhill-Brownsville into a self-sustaining community where residents have access to a full range of quality services and opportunities. Among its many achievements are more than 2,000 units of low-income housing, an alternative school (through grade 6), a GED/high school equivalency program, an employment center, a construction company, a management and maintenance company, and a security company.

Brooklyn A has collaborated closely with OHBT for many years. Working together "like hand and glove," they have sought to realize their shared vision of economic development and community revitalization. Rafael is an integral part of this relationship. As a senior staff attorney in Brooklyn A's Community and Economic Development Unit Rafael is currently providing legal representation in the development of a computer training center, Montessori community life center, restaurant, hardware store, and fruit and vegetable market, to name a few.

NOBLE DREW ALI PLAZA

Until recently, Noble Drew Ali Plaza, a 393-unit federally-subsidized housing development in Brownsville, Brooklyn, was ranked among the most distressed housing projects in all of New York City. Neglected by its owners, the project was the site of numerous code violations and untold hazards. Serious accidents, raw sewage, rats, and complaints piled up while the landlord looked the other way and the tenants—mostly working poor on fixed incomes like social security and public assistance—suffered and began to organize for change.

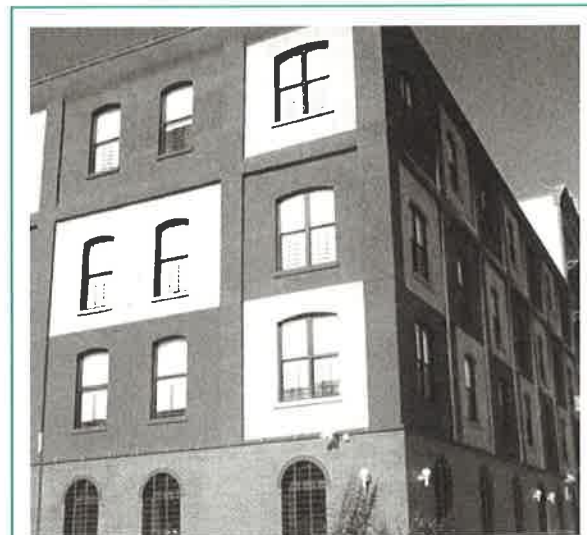
On February 28, 1996, this change was at long last won, when Brooklyn A achieved the ouster of the project's landlord in Brooklyn Federal Court. After hearing of the conditions in which tenants were forced to live, Judge Reena Raggi, immediately appointed a receiver to manage the properties and ordered the owner to turn over more than one million dollars that had been taken from the project account.

The transformation of Noble Drew Ali Plaza under their new tenant-controlled management has been remarkable: code violations have been repaired, sewage has been fixed, rodents have been routed, and a maintenance crew has taken charge of the long-neglected facilities. The struggle, however, is not complete and much still remains to be done. If the transformations are to continue and improvements maintained, the tenants must ensure their continued say in their buildings' management and they must obtain sufficient federal funds for project repairs and rehabilitation.

NORTH EAST BROOKLYN HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The North East Brooklyn Housing Development Corporation (NBHDC) has been a client of Brooklyn A since 1985. It is a community-based organization that is a developer and manager of low-income and special needs housing in the northeast section of Bedford-Stuyvesant. NBHDC is also a catalyst for commercial revitalization in this area.

Rafael provides NBHDC with representation in matters concerning unemployment, workers' compensation and discrimination. Rafael represented the organization in an initial closing with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development for the construction of 65 units of elderly housing, and is currently assisting the organization in post closing matters.



Throop Court, a project of NBHDC, reclaimed a vacant, dilapidated five-building complex on the corner of Lafayette and Throop Avenues and created a new, community-owned housing and social service complex in the heart of Bedford-Stuyvesant.

Rafael is also representing the organization in a Neighborhood Preservation Program that involves the rehabilitation of seven buildings containing 59 units. This \$8.9M project involves the acquisition of a number of buildings from the City of New York, together with the use of Low Income Tax Credits to raise a portion of the monies required for the rehabilitation effort. In July, 2000, Rafael completed the conveyance portion of this transaction and the rehabilitation of the property has commenced. Rafael expects to complete the Tax Credit closing by the end of November, 2000.

URBAN HEALTH PLAN, INC.

For more than twenty years, this community-based organization has provided the South Bronx community with much needed community health services. For the past six years, Brooklyn A has represented Urban Health Plan, Inc. in its efforts to construct a new 34,000 square foot facility that will serve as a new home for its community health center. In 1999 Rafael helped the group incorporate, and obtained 501(c)(3) status for a new corporation that will provide fundraising services for Urban Health Plan, Inc.

Rafael assisted Urban Health Plan, Inc. close on a \$11,000,000 bond financing deal with the NYC Industrial Development Agency for its long-awaited expansion. As a result of this closing, construction on the new community health facility began in July, 1999, and Urban Health Plan, Inc. will soon be able to provide 80,000 medical visits to the to the community.

Rafael is currently assisting the organization with various post-construction matters such as resolving construction contract disputes, and seeking additional funding for the project.

BUSHWICK INFORMATION COORDINATING AND ACTION COMMITTEE

Bushwick Information Coordinating and Action Committee (BICAC) is a multi-service organization that develops low and moderate-income and special-needs housing, sponsors commercial revitalization, and provides social services for youth and citizens in the eastern part of Bushwick.

BICAC is currently involved in the construction of 33 low income rental housing units at a cost of \$4.7 million. Rafael is serving as BICAC's project attorney and currently dealing with various construction contract problems, such as obtaining release of mechanic's liens and settling disputes concerning contract language interpretation.

CONCLUSION

The legal work of Rafael Martinez is creating an enormous impact on the organization and its clients. With his assistance, some of Brooklyn's most under-served communities are finally gaining access to the representation they need and resources they deserve. Specifically, homesteaders are becoming homeowners, blighted strips are becoming vibrant commercial centers, and dilapidated apartments are becoming habitable residences for hundreds of families.

A Year 2000 federally-mandated evaluation of Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A praised the Brooklyn A's Community Economic Unit and called it "the best in the nation". Rafael is a vital member of this outstanding legal development team.

Henry L. King, who is a partner at the law firm of Davis Polk & Wardwell and an admired friend of Brooklyn A, stated that, "the work of Brooklyn A demonstrates the truly creative role that lawyers can play in enabling individuals and communities to control their destiny." Mr. King gives eloquent voice to the mission and hopes of this organization. Notably, law firms can also play a "truly creative role" advancing the goals of social justice and community revitalization. The extraordinary achievements of the Partnership Fund powerfully demonstrates this potential. By providing Brooklyn A with the funds to support the legal work of Rafael Martinez, your law firm plays a vital part in the preservation and growth of Brooklyn's neighborhoods.

Brooklyn A is deeply grateful for your law firm's support and looks forward to working with you in the years ahead.

Brooklyn A's Partnership for Community & Economic Development is a public-private collaboration to expand housing and childcare, health, nursing home, educational and recreational services, and to create neighborhood-based businesses and jobs in Brooklyn.

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MISSION STATEMENT

Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A's purpose and goal is to provide high quality legal assistance to low-income individuals and groups in the North and East Brooklyn communities of Williamsburg, Greenpoint, Bushwick, Oceanhill-Brownsville, East New York, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Cypress Hills, Starrett City, City Line, East Flatbush, Flatlands, and Canarsie.

The Corporation views legal assistance not only as traditional representation but also as a wide range of permissible activities including, but not limited to, group representation and community education. The Board of Directors, management and staff are dedicated to maximizing the Corporation's effectiveness in serving the community via close and mutually supportive relationships with effective local grass roots organizations that have a demonstrated commitment to our common goal of social and economic justice.