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BLOOMFIELD

Project Hospitality honors those who enrich the borough

Winter Gala lauds folks who make this a better place to live

By Carol Ann Benanti

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In the aftermath of Winter Storm Jonas, what better time than Thursday night to warm the spirits of Staten Islanders — at the 2016 Project Hospitality Winter Gala benefiting the hungry and homeless?

Project Hospitality, an organization aiding families in need, honored individuals and institutions that enrich and support the borough in Nicotra's Ballroom at the Hilton Garden Inn, Bloomfield.

"Having a gala in the midst of winter spotlights the power of the cold," said the Rev. Terry Troia, executive director of Project Hospitality. "It is a power we push back on with every fiber of our being — moving homeless people from the street to shelter; from danger to safety; creating room 'in a time of no room' as Thomas Merton would say."

The Bank of America received the Richard E. Diamond Memorial Award for Exemplary Commitment to People in Need.

Diamond, a loving husband, father, exemplary family man, neighbor and friend, served as publisher of the Staten Island Advance and led the newspaper through five decades of unparalleled expansion and growth.

Bank of America honored

The Bank of America has supported the community with funding specific to revitalizing neighborhoods, educating the workforce for 21st century jobs and addressing basic needs, such as hunger and homelessness, along with programs that connect to veterans, the environment and the arts.

In 2013, Bank of America bestowed Project Hospitality with one of its 60 national Neighborhood Builders awards, which granted \$200,000 in flexible funding and provided more than 100 hours of training for leaders within the agency.

"Project Hospitality could not do this work without the fi-



At the annual Winter Gala for the benefit of Project Hospitality are, from left: Rabbi Gerald Sussman, president of the board of Project Hospitality; Dr. Salman Zafar, secretary of the board; Zafer Durmaz of the Turkish Cultural Center; Jeff Barker of the Bank of America; Brandon Patterson, community liaison in the office of state Sen. Diane Savino; Samantha Siegel, director of the Wagner College Center for Leadership and Community Engagement; and Richard Guarasci, president of Wagner College.

(STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE PHOTOS/CAROL ANN BENANTI)



Gathered for a photo are members of the Wagner College Center for Leadership and Community Engagement; the Rev. Terry Troia, standing left; Caryn Guarasci, kneeling left; and Dr. Richard Guarasci, kneeling right.

nancial support of friends like Bank of America or without community partners like the Turkish Cultural Center and Wagner College Center for Leadership and Community Engagement," Rev. Troia said. "And hats off to progressive legislators like Sen. Diane Savino, who lifts up the lives of low-wage workers with leg-

islation that secures a livable wage and protects against discrimination and abuse in the workplace."

The 2016 honorees

The Wagner College Center for Leadership and Community Engagement received the Eleanor and Paul Proske Memorial Award for Distin-



Also attending the gala at Nicotra's Ballroom at the Hilton Garden Inn are, from left: Melanie Rafael, Katelyn Alcott, Jazmin Diaz, Richard Guarasci, Hadeel Mishal and Brandon Hart.

guished Service to the Poor. Wagner College is a national leader in civic engagement, serving as a model for liberal arts education that connects teaching and learning with public work within our broader community.

The Center for Leadership and Community Engagement's Port Richmond Partnership has given hundreds of Wagner students a hands-on

understanding of the economic challenges and cultural wealth of the North Shore community.

Since 2008, the Port Richmond Partnership has worked alongside Project Hospitality, El Centro del Inmigrante, local schools and other community leaders to support educational access, economic growth, health care enhancement and youth pro-

grams, as well as to promote communication among neighbors.

Outstanding contribution

The Turkish Cultural Center received the Les Trautmann Memorial Award for Outstanding Contribution to the People of Staten Island. Trautmann was editor of the Advance from 1965 until his death in 1992.

The Turkish Cultural Center is a charitable, cultural and educational nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting harmony in diverse cultural settings in the United States.

The Center's Staten Island chapter is especially active in helping foster strong and lasting friendships by promoting a better understanding based on mutual respect between people of Turkish background or origin and the wider community.

State Sen. Savino, New York State Senate District 23, received the Project Hospitality Award for Distinguished Community Service. Sen. Savino has dedicated her career to improving the lives of working families.

During her 12 years as a state senator, she has been a strong supporter of Project Hospitality's work and a tireless advocate for social justice.

Sen. Savino began her career as a caseworker for New York City's Child Welfare Administration, providing direct assistance to abused and neglected children. She came into public service through her local labor union, the Social Service Employees Union, where she rose to be vice president for political action and legislative affairs.

As a labor official, she actively and successfully campaigned for an increase in the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.15 — the first raise for New Yorkers in over a decade.

She continues to be at the forefront of the movement for a livable wage for all New Yorkers.

Also of note: Among the evening's guest speakers was Charista Mroczek, Miss Staten Island Outstanding Teen, who addressed the crowd about increasing the bone marrow donor registry for children and minorities.