



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE PHOTOS/HILTON FLORES

At "Staten Island Memories," the kickoff event for the 350th anniversary of the Dutch landing on Staten Island, the honorees included Aurelia Curtis, Mike Azzara, Bea Victor and Monsignor Edmund Whalen.

## Starting the anniversary year off right

'Staten Island Memories' is the opening celebration that marks the borough's 350th birthday

By JOHN ANNESE  
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

In 1661, Dutch, French and Belgian settlers made their home in Oude Dorp, a section of Staten Island now referred to as South Beach.

Yesterday, a celebration of memories and cabaret and song kicked off a year-long series of events meant to celebrate the 350th anniversary of that landing.

Staten Islanders gathered in the Hilton Garden Inn, Bloomfield, yesterday afternoon to attend "Staten Island Memories," viewing an array of historic photos displayed in a commemorative calendar and honoring four well-known borough residents.

Those honored included Advance columnists Mike Azzara and Bea Victor, Curtis High School Principal Aurelia L. Curtis, and Monsignor Farrell High School Principal Monsignor Edmund J. Whalen.

"I'm glad to be part of this, that they kind of highlighted education at the beginning of it is noteworthy," Ms. Curtis said.

A Liberian native, Ms. Curtis said she's proud to call the Island her home. "Staten Island represents to me a microcosm of what the world is," she said, pointing out the variety of ethnic groups all striving to make a life here over the centuries.

"Everybody sought this place because it offered them something," she said.

Robert Coghlan, a co-chair of SI350, the committee

### More on the web



For a video of the 'Staten Island Memories' event,

go [silive.com/video](http://silive.com/video).

formed last year to plan the celebration, said several attendees pointed out the photos in the Con Edison-sponsored calendar — which includes images of landmark buildings, churches and businesses long past — and provided anecdotes of their own. "The pictures bring back memories," he said.

Future projects will include a commemorative book, he said, and, possibly, a collaborative effort with the Dutch embassy to restore a classic house on Staten Island.

Azzara, who wrote the "Memories" column for the Advance for many years, regaled the crowd with jokes about his age, and, later, joined cabaret singer A.J. Race-Tyndale for duet on "The Way You Look Tonight."

"This is supposed to set the tone for the events that are going on," Azzara said.

SI350 has teamed with almost every cultural institution on the Island to present exhibits, conferences, seminars, tours and contests around monthly themes, such as transportation, health and education, business, ethnicity and immigration, food and drink, the arts, sports, environment, politics and civic life, architecture, military history and religion.

The 350th anniversary celebration will continue with a series of public sessions at all of the borough's branches of the New York Public Library, said Lori Weintrob, a Wagner College history professor and co-chair of SI350.

The first of those sessions



Vocalist Jack McDade sings to AJ Race-Tyndale during the kickoff celebration of Staten Island's 350th anniversary at the Hilton Garden Inn, Bloomfield.

will take place on Feb. 5, at the Great Kills branch of the library, on 56 Giffords Lane.

February will also bring a birthday party to the Staten Island Children's Museum, and in March, educators and curators from around the country will join all five borough historians at a two-day conference at the College of Staten Island in Willowbrook.

For more information about the events in the program, Staten Islanders can visit [si350.org](http://si350.org), which Coghlan said will be updated weekly.

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