

WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT LUNCHEON

## It was a day that lifted the soul

It's a guarantee. And a celebration. Every year, the Staten Island Advance has sponsored its Women of Achievement luncheon. Thursday was the 57th. It is a day singled out to celebrate women. Those who do remarkable work volunteering to help their fellow Staten Islanders. Comforting the afflicted. Fighting for what's right. Making Staten Island better every day. The Women of Achievement concept was born in 1962. Then-Publisher Richard E. Diamond was its father. When he died, Caroline Harrison, his daughter and now Advance/SILive publisher, continued the legacy. "Today, we celebrate six fabulous honorees, each of whom personally has transformed our lives on Staten Island," the publisher told the more 700 people in Nicotra's Ballroom at the Hilton Garden Inn. Those who now hold the title are Katherine Connors, Bernice Fisher, Alla Mai Jones-Clark, Dr. Lori Weintrob, Carmela Montella and Councilwoman Debi Rose. It was a day to celebrate. But also reflect. For more on the event, see page D1.



The 2019 Staten Island Advance Women of Achievement pose for a photo with guest speaker Paula Zahn, center, on Thursday at the Hilton Garden Inn, Bloomfield. Back row: Katherine Connors, Councilwoman Debi Rose, Bernice Fisher and Dr. Lori Weintrob. Sitting: Alla Mai Jones-Clark, Zahn and Carmela Montella. Jan Somma-Hammel, Staten Island Advance

### Meet the newest Women of Achievement

Every year for the past 57, each honoree's achievements are detailed during the annual Women of Achievement gala luncheon. Advance Executive Editor Brian J. Laline profiled this year's class of six. The following are excerpts of how he described the accomplishments of each. Honoree responses appear on Pages D7-9.



#### Dr. Lori Weintrob

I cannot fully capture for you how this woman has exposed people to a long-ago, but abhorrent evil, bringing them to tears. That evil was The Holocaust. Tragically, that evil still exists. Today is Holocaust Remembrance Day ... This week we also remember victims, survivors and rescuers of a tragedy that happened just five days ago, in San Diego ... A worshiper — Lori Kaye — stepped between the shooter and the rabbi. She was shot to death. But saved the rabbi's life ... This is why the work Lori Weintrob has dedicated much of her life is so vitally important. Anti-Semitism, hatred, lunacy. It exists. The only way to address it is continually shining a burning bright light at it. Lori has given those who suffered horribly, lost entire families ... but who survived ... reason to stand proud and confident today. Celebrate, laugh and love life...She has given those survivors the courage to tell stories so painful they kept them hidden for decades...She spends each day trying to repair the world. One person at a time ... "The number one thing I'm committed to is to use my heart, my hands and my mind to open other hearts, hands and minds and to celebrate diversity and not just tolerate it," she says...That's Lori's mission. One person at a time... Through the eyes of these survivors, through their emotion, through their tears will you really feel the passion of Dr. Lori Weintrob's dedication to making sure none of us ever forget. And that some day, the tragedy of so many San Diegos never happen again.



Advance Publisher Caroline Diamond Harrison, right, presents honoree Lori Weintrob with a Tiffany bowl.



Honorees Lori Weintrob and Alla Mai Jones-Clark chat during the luncheon. Bill Lyons, for the Staten Island Advance



Honorees Carmela Montella, Lori Weintrob and Alla Mai Jones-Clark on the dais. Bill Lyons, for the Staten Island Advance

## Women of Achievement express thanks

**"To all who read this, please consider the words of the Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer: 'Thou shalt not be a bystander.'"**

Dr. Lori Weintrob



Woman of Achievement 2019 Dr. Lori Weintrob. Shira Stoll, Staten Island Advance

## Lori Weintrob

I am grateful for the path that led me to Staten Island, my beloved and dynamic community.

I am indebted to and share this honor with the Holocaust survivors of Staten Island, my neighbors. Through face-to-face interactions with over 5,000 local youth since 2010 with the Wagner College Holocaust Center, they have sent out a message of "Never Again." These resilient survivors have become like family to me. I was deeply touched by the letters that Brenda Perelman, Arnold Aronowitz, Arthur Spielman, and Auschwitz survivor Hannah Steiner's grandson Aaron Bondar wrote to nominate me. The "youngest partisan" Rabbi Romi Cohn, Rachel Roth, Margot Capell, Egon Salmon, Chaim Ben-Aron, Shirley Gottesman, Gabi Held, and others became an integral part of awakening youth of Staten Island to stand up against any form of prejudice.

None of this would be possible without the support of the Chai Society of Wagner College, chaired by Dr. Victor and Kim Avis, a most special couple. I also thank my colleagues: Laura Morowitz, Theresa McCarthy, Kristen Whitaker, Steve Greenwald, Arlette Cepeda, Nancy Tricolorio, Ruta Shah Gordon, Jeff Kraus, Devorah Lieberman and current and former students (Ruth Kupperberg, Julia Loria, Aisha Raheel, Elizabeth Weintraub, Tara Scavo, Joseph Manzo and Jennifer Weile). My life, like countless others on Staten Island, was transformed by the inspiring vision of impactful community engagement of our President Richard Guarasci.

I thank Ken Byalin, Jennifer Hermus and many other S.I. educators who opened their schools to teach about genocide, including the five million non-Jews killed. Lisa Sloan of the Pride Center of Staten Island taught my students lessons about the murder of 10,000 homosexuals marked with the Nazi's "Pink Triangle." A few dear friends, notably Michelle Lee and videographer Maria Rusolo, consistently volunteered to help.

For the past two years, Shira Stoll, videographer of the Staten Island Advance/SILive.com, has been a most talented, energetic partner in this work. I am exceptionally grateful to Brian Laline, Caroline Harrison and the Advance, not only for this special honor but also for their elevating Holocaust remembrance on Staten Island with the NYC Department of Education. I have long been a great fan of the Advance for its community spirit, outreach and ethic of "love thy neighbor."

Among those doing Holocaust work on Staten Island for decades, Manny Saks and Rabbi Stephen Stern are owed a special debt for involving me in programs honoring American WWII veterans and the Albanian Muslim community that rescued Jews.

The S.I. Jewish Community Center and particularly Sara Cohen, Neshama Marcus and Rachel Borenstein, opened their arms to my ideas to interview local survivors with enthusiasm.

I am also grateful to George Laufer, Mordecai Schwartz, Rabbi Yaakov Lehrfield, Taube Import, Rabbi Mark Ben Aron, Rabbi Gerald Sussman, Hillel Lofaso, Amy Posner, Judge Phillip Straniere, Rabbi Michael Howard, Fern and David Zagor, and many others. Together we have ensured remembrance of the six million Jews killed in the Shoah, including one and a half million Jewish children.



Childhood photo of Lori Weintrob. Family photo

I also share this honor with countless other volunteers and educators, with whom I have been partners for nearly 25 years. From the moment I arrived in 1995, Staten Island's diverse community leaders exhibited incredible warmth and enthusiasm in collaborating on a range of projects. Celebrate Diversity! would not have happened without Dominick Brancato (New York Center for Interpersonal Development), Rufus Akroi and Samuel Owusu. Imam Tahir Kukaj of the Albanian Islamic Community and Salman Zafar of the Al-Noor Mosque opened the doors of their mosques again and again from 9/11 to today. Among many others, I thank City Councilwoman Debi Rose, Rev. Terry Troia, Sally Jones, Jacob Massequi, Gonzalo Mercado, Bobby Digi and Shereese Mullings.

Among Staten Island's many assets is its diverse 350 years of history, and the entire team that launched s1350 worked so hard to make 2011 an unforgettable celebration — Jessica Kratz, Claire Regan, Patricia Salmon, Cheryl Bontales, Ann Merlino, Meg Ventruddo, and others. Together we wrote the most multi-cultural history of our borough thus far, Discovering Staten Island (2011), including the contributions of waves of immigrants and refugees from Huguenots to Liberians and Sri Lankans.

That book, and so much that I do, would not be possible without my partner, Phillip Papas, an accomplished historian and dedicated educator. He encouraged my fascination with local history, on romantic walks around the borough and trips to Historic Richmond Town's archives. He co-authored Port Richmond (2009) and co-chaired the s1350 academic conference. He is, above all, a devoted father.

My family has motivated me to make the world a better place and been my most loving support group.

I send love, too, to my in-laws Elizabeth and Nick Papas. My daughters Sophia (age 8) and aspiring actress Joelle (age 18) have grown up planting community gardens, singing to survivors and doing other creative work with their mom. Finally, my parents, Barry and Sheila, are ready to help in any and every way, with endless love, energy and attention to detail.

Like all my aunts and uncles, they are role models of community leadership. I've been truly blessed.

To all who read this, please consider the words of the Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer: "Thou Shalt not be a Bystander." LOVE thy neighbor. Toda Raba (Hebrew). Merci (French). Shokran (Albanian). Gracias (Spanish).



Honoree Dr. Lori Weintrob listens to special guest Holocaust survivor Arthur Spielman. Jan Somma-Hammel, Staten Island Advance



Honorees Carmela Montella, foreground left, Councilwoman Debi Rose, foreground right, Katherine Connors, center left, and Dr. Lori Weintrob talk before the ceremony. Bill Lyons, for the Staten Island Advance