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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

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Today, the Chamber has grown to levels not seen in many years. We have achieved a membership level of 1,150 organizations; representing over 100,000 Queens-based employees.

We are thrilled to continue the rich tradition of honoring the best and brightest of Queens. Enjoy the evening as we celebrate the achievements of our 2019 Honorees.

QUEENS CHAMBER HALL OF FAME HONOREE

RICK COTTON

Executive Director,
The Port Authority



AIRPORT PROJECTS PUT FOCUS ON QUEENS

BY BENJAMIN FANG

As the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey continues its \$21 billion transformation of both New York City airports, the agency is paying special attention to Queens communities.

Whether it's contracting, concessions or hiring, Port Authority executive director Rick Cotton said, the emphasis is local.

"We are taking very focused and high-priority measures to assure the economic benefits accrue to the Queens neighborhoods around the airports," he told This Is Queensborough in a recent interview at the agency's offices on the 24th floor

of 4 World Trade Center.

According to the Port Authority's count, nearly \$400 million worth of business contracts, particularly in construction, have gone to Queens companies.

"Obviously, we're in the middle of the construction process," Cotton said, "so we anticipate that number will grow."

Last December, when LaGuardia Airport opened its new 18-gate concourse on the western half of

the new terminal, more than 60 percent of the 400 concessions jobs went to Queens residents. At the seven-gate eastern concourse, opened at the end of October, more than 80 percent of the 120 jobs were local hires.

Beyond the concessions, Cotton said, the Port Authority has been working with the Council on Airport Opportunities (CAO) to ensure that there's a local outreach partner.

The agency has already opened an office, in partnership with Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), at Elmcort Youth and Adult Activities in Corona. The office provides a pipeline for Queens residents to stay abreast of and be hired for job openings, Cotton said.

Another community focus of the airport redevelopment projects has been education. The LaGuardia Redevelopment program, for example, has been working with Vaughn College to recruit students living in neighborhoods around the airport.

In April, Vaughn College awarded six scholarships to students from Queens. The scholarships were sponsored by the Port Authority.

"We intend to sponsor another round of those scholarships," Cotton said.

This past summer, the agency sponsored a new science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) program at Langston Hughes Library for 50 middle-school students. The program introduced them to career paths that could lead to employment opportunities at the airports.

For the John F. Kennedy (JFK) Airport redevelopment, the Port Authority established an advisory council of local stakeholders to identify neighborhood priorities. The council is co-chaired by Borough President Melinda Katz and Congressman Gregory Meeks.

Cotton said the council established four areas where they wanted to see additional economic activity, which were announced last month. The

first is a jobs recruiting program for southeast Queens, with the target of 15,000 operating jobs at the airport and 4,000 construction jobs over a five-year period.

The hiring effort will be based out of the CAO office in Jamaica. But in an effort to reach residents from the Rockaways, the redevelopment program will open a satellite office at the Rockaway Development and Revitalization Corporation in Far Rockaway.

Another initiative is reserving concession venues for New York City-based restaurants, particularly in Queens. The Port Authority will begin a training program to prepare businesses to compete for those opportunities.

The third focus is a \$3 million initiative to support and expand STEM programs at York College. In 2020, the college will host a summer program, along with Saturday sessions in the fall and spring.

Finally, Cotton said, the Port Authority will establish a second-chance employment office, which has been an emphasis for the advisory council. The agency will work closely with half a dozen organizations that specialize in identifying candidates for jobs who have had previous involvement in the criminal justice system.

The employment opportunities will not only be at the airports, he said, but across all Port Authority facilities.

"That pattern and that outreach was really based on feedback from the advisory council," Cotton said, "which we view as the avenue by which we can get direct feedback from the community."

The Port Authority has faced its share of challenges with the development projects. Cotton said completely rebuilding LaGuardia, while also maintaining the full capacity of the existing airport, has been an "enormous challenge."

The agency doesn't tear down any of the old buildings until they have built additional capac-

ity with a new operational facility.

“That means we have to follow what’s almost a hopscotch pattern in terms of development,” he said. To address traffic and congestion on the roads leading to the airport, the Port Authority established an Airport Operations Center. Cotton said every hour the airport is open, there is a command center with banks of monitors watching “every square inch of the roadway network.”

Whenever the roadway becomes congested, the operations center makes judgements about re-adjusting traffic flow, sending vehicles to either arrivals or departure and ensuring no cars are double-parked.

They even have four tow trucks stationed around the clock at the airport in case a car breaks down. “We can’t have a disabled vehicle on any roadways for any significant period of time,” Cotton said.

The challenges are worsened when peak construction meets peak travel times, especially on the days leading in and out of a weekend, summer and the holiday season.

“The level of effort that has gone into sustaining the operation of the airport while the construction is underway has been huge,” he said.

So far at LaGuardia Airport, the redevelopment has finished building a new parking garage, new 18-gate concourse on the western side of Terminal B and a new seven-gate concourse on the eastern side. Each took between nine to 12 months to complete.

By the middle of next year, a large arrivals and departures hall, which can be prominently seen from the Grand Central Parkway, will be opened on the western half of the airport. After that, openings will shift back to the eastern side.

Cotton estimated that by the end of 2021 or beginning of 2022, the entire roadway network

should be open.

“There will be a continuous integrated frontage of the whole new LaGuardia,” he said.

The LaGuardia AirTrain, which is currently in the environmental review process, is expected to begin construction 18 months from now and be complete by 2024.

At JFK Airport, the new 512-bed TWA Hotel is open and operational. With new passenger facilities, Cotton said he expects the first groundbreaking of the new Terminal 8, run by American Airlines and British Airlines, to be this fall.

“Once it starts, it’s going to gain momentum,” he said.

By mid-next year, there will be more ground-breakings. The first will be for Terminal 1, which is run by a consortium of four international airlines: Lufthansa, Air France, Japan Airlines and Korean Airlines.

After that will be the international terminal next to JetBlue’s existing terminal. They expect the first gates to open in late 2021 or early 2022.

“The scale of the JFK construction will be quite dramatic,” Cotton said, “as well as LaGuardia’s.”



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QUEENS CHAMBER HONOREE

TYQUANA HENDERSON-RIVERS

President / CEO
Connective Strategies
Associates, Inc.



A BUSINESS ROOTED IN SOCIAL PROGRESS

BY SARA KREVOY

Tyquana Henderson-Rivers-Rivers moved to Jamaica from Brooklyn when she was 12 years old. From that point on, the community served as the foundation from which her career in civics and social justice activism sprung.

Henderson-Rivers is now president of her own government and political relations firm, Connective Strategies Associates, Inc. on Sutphin Boulevard, not far from the neighborhood where her passion for advocacy through politics was ignited.

The firm specialized in full-service public relations for political campaigns, grassroots community organizing, and all aspects of government relations from communications to lobbying.

“I don’t look for a lot of honors and awards,” she said. “If my community is winning, at the end of the day, that’s enough award for me.”

Henderson-Rivers was attending August Martin High School when the Rodney King verdict was handed down in 1992. Angered

by the injustice of the ordeal, she organized her peers in protest, marching to the local 113th Precinct.

“It wasn’t the brightest idea I’ve had in my life,” Henderson-Rivers laughed, recounting that the teens were on the verge of being arrested when the late-councilman Thomas White was called in to diffuse the situation. They made an agreement: if Henderson-Rivers dispersed the protestors, White would sit down and hear her out.

In a pivotal moment that solidified the course of her career path, the councilman delivered a piece of wisdom Henderson-Rivers still carries with her to this day: “The only way to fix the system is to learn it and tear it down from the inside.”

Councilman White went on to offer Henderson-Rivers an internship at his office, which she accepted. She gained a well-rounded experience of the political arena, serving as a council aide, attending community board and precinct council meetings, starting her own youth council, becoming president of the 113th Precinct Youth Council and staying active in student government.

Henderson-Rivers worked at the councilman’s office for three hours every day after school and on Saturdays, all without receiving a paycheck. At home, she balanced the struggles of growing up poor in New York City with following her dreams of fostering social progress.

“We lost everything due to fires three times,” recalled Henderson-Rivers, who grew up with her mother and three siblings, two of which her mom adopted. The family

moved into a hotel for nine months, and a young Henderson-Rivers was struck by the generosity of those around her. Neighbors cooked for them, or opened up their kitchens; the hotel manager worked with the insurance company to make sure they could stay there as long as was necessary.

Henderson-Rivers describes her mom as the “neighborhood mother” with a huge heart, opening her doors to the community despite not having much economically. It was the kindness she observed growing up that left a lasting impression.

“It makes you want to figure out how to give back,” Henderson-Rivers said. “These civic leaders, these pastors, they have all been a part of raising me. Any time something happens in this community it’s not just a win for me, it’s a win for them and an acknowledgement to them, because they poured in me just about my entire life.”

In college, Henderson-Rivers was promoted as White’s legislative director at City Hall. By 1998, she was working on statewide gubernatorial races for then-City Council Speaker Peter Vallone, Sr.

After five years of being involved at various levels of government, Henderson-Rivers was hired by her lobbying mentor, Joni Yoswein, in 2003. At Yoswein’s firm, she represented clients such as IKEA, SUNY Downstate, Brooklyn Philharmonic and Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce.

In 2008, Henderson-Rivers decided to take 16 years of political experience and go into business for herself. Connective Strategies Associates allows Henderson-Rivers, a pas-

sionate, hardworking professional, the freedom to decide which clients to invest her time and energy.

Throughout her career, Henderson-Rivers kept her first mentor Thomas White's words in mind as a mantra, informing her initiative each step along the way.

"I've spent my life learning the system and then teaching it to other people," she said. "I'd rather be behind the scenes, crafting the message and really working to put people in office who I believe want to make a difference in my community."

Of all the local races Henderson-Rivers has been involved in, she is most proud of the last. She was instrumental in Melinda Katz's successful campaign to be elected Queens district attorney. With mass incarceration disproportionately affecting communities of color, it was critical for her to work with a candidate she believed would regard her community equitably.

As president of one of less than ten black-owned lobbying firms in the state, Henderson-Rivers has fought equally diligently on her own behalf.

"Being black in the private sector is not easy," Henderson-Rivers explained. "We work twice as hard, twice as long, and we don't receive equal pay."

Compound that with being a woman, and not only is the pay gap even more disparaging, but Henderson-Rivers is also left with the feeling that she is constantly competing with the men - particularly white men - who dominate the political sector.

"There's this never-ending fight where

you're always protecting what you have and trying to grow," she said.

Finding support in her faith, as well as a reliable network of friends, family and fellow businesswomen, Henderson-Rivers is driven to continue her mission of lifting up those around her. In addition to being an ordained minister specializing in grief and death, Henderson-Rivers uses her business as a platform as well.

Connective Strategies hires anywhere between 15 and 20 people each year, making a point to select from hard to employ populations, such as those formerly incarcerated and aspiring young professionals looking for that first experience to jump start their career.

Henderson-Rivers brings her story full circle through giving young women and girls an experience of mentorship, much like the one that began her own journey (except she says everyone gets paid).

"The best advice I can give to someone is that they need to develop this thing called 'stickwitit.' People sometimes get discouraged and they abandon what it is that they really want to do, because they can't figure out how to make their path," she said. "You have doors shut in your face, you don't have a cheering squad, but nobody is going to cheer for you and encourage you until you figure out how to do it for yourself."



The pride is building.

Congratulations to Hall of Fame Honoree Rick Cotton and fellow honorees Tyquana Henderson-Rivers, Chris Xu, Alexandra Vassilaros, and the late Dimitrios "Jimmy" Kaloidis.

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QUEENS CHAMBER HONOREE

ALEXANDRA VASSILAROS

President, Vassilaros & Sons



THE COFFEE THAT BUILT THIS CITY

BY BENJAMIN FANG

For the women owners of the 100-year-old coffee company Vassilaros & Sons, looking forward to the future is as important as looking back at its rich history.

The College Point-based company was founded in 1919 by John A. Vassilaros, a Greek immigrant from the island of Ikaria.

John Vassilaros worked two jobs as a waiter to support his family. After the birth of his first son, he took on another job as a coffee salesman in Queens.

According to Sophia Kasselakis, Vassilaros's oldest granddaughter, it was actually her grandmother, also named Sophia, who came up with the idea of starting their own coffee business.

"She said to my grandfather, 'you can't be an employee anymore,'" Kasselakis said. "You have to start your own business and be your own boss."

They started Vassilaros & Sons in a little storefront on 34th Street and Third Avenue.

Vassilaros would roast the coffee, while Sophia and his sister-in-law, Frosini, packaged bags and bags of a special blend of freshly-roasted coffee.

Vassilaros would deliver the coffee to customers, often taking the subway while carrying 40-pound bags on his shoulders.

Eventually, the coffee company, dedicated to quality and built on relationships, flourished and moved to Long Island City.

From the outset, founder John Anthony maintained a strong reputation in the Greek community, many of whom were diner and restaurant owners who became lifelong customers.

Kasselakis said her grandfather “baptized” nearly 300 children. He kept an “open house” on Sundays, inviting friends to come over with big pots of food on the stove.

They welcomed immigrants from Ikaria and other parts of Greece to come to New York City, many of whom settled in Astoria, where many Greeks lived in community with one another.

Vassilaros even gave loans to many of his customers to help them start businesses. During the Great Depression, when many in the Greek community were struggling financially, he helped put many of them to work.

For Vassilaros, community, service and strong values were the foundation of their lives.

He and his wife also helped fund the build-

ing of the cathedral on East 74th Street in Manhattan, and helped to found a much-needed hospital back in Ikaria.

“This is how he established a loyalty base,” Kasselakis said. “Community was the basis of the business.”

Vassilaros’s son, Anthony, came into the business as a young man to help his father, learn the ropes and eventually guide and grow the company.

In the late 1950s, at age 13, Kasselakis began commuting with her father to Queens to work at the roastery and the plant in the summer. She worked in the office, while her brother John Anthony, the only son of five children, would help in the back with the roasters.

“Everybody in the family always worked in the company,” she said. “First summers, and then full-time after that.”

The family business expanded even more in the 60s and 70s when it won a government contract to sell coffee to the U.S. Army. Due to growth and demand, Vassilaros & Sons moved to its current home, a 25,000-square-foot plant in College Point.

Over the years, the company was passed from father to son twice. John Anthony, its founder, handed it off to Anthony John, who then passed it on in 1972 to John Anthony, who was named after his grandfather.

The grandson, John Anthony Vassilaros, led the business into the 21st century, but passed away after a difficult struggle with

cancer in 2015. He was survived by his wife of 23 years, Alexandra Vassilaros, and their three teenage boys, Adonis John, Luka John and Stefano John.

The name and legacy of Vassilaros & Sons took on even more meaning after John's death, especially to the next generation of the family.

According to Kasselakis, though there was no clear line of succession in place, it was a "tight-knit family business." "So we all did whatever we had to do," she said.

Her husband, George, who was the general manager of Vassilaros & Sons for decades, helped to stabilize the business along with her daughter, Stefanie, an attorney who stepped in temporarily to help lead the company as plans for the future were weighed and considered.

John's wife, Alexandra, whose grandmother and grandfather also immigrated from the island of Ikaria, stepped in as president to continue the legacy of her late husband and his storied family coffee business.

She sensed there were opportunities to pursue as a new women-owned business. Though daunted by the recent loss of her husband, Vassilaros said she was determined to be a model of resilience and fortitude for her family.

As her interest and dedication grew, her strategy was to preserve the relationships that kept the company thriving for 100 years and pivot toward growth.

The other part of the strategy was thinking

outside the box and innovation.

"You have to take risks," Vassilaros said.

By early next year, the company will launch new brands of coffee into grocery stores and markets.

After three generations of men leading the company, Vassilaros & Sons is now wholly women-owned and is currently going through the Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) certification process.

"That enables us to participate with city, state and federal channels of the market we might not have been able to compete in otherwise," Moore said. "It gives us a competitive advantage."

Alexandra Vassilaros, formerly a writer and Pulitzer Prize finalist, said she's still learning what it means to be a woman leader in a business built by men.

"We are very proud of our identity as immigrant-grown and now women-owned," she said.

Kasselakis added a reminder that it was her grandmother who was behind it all from the start.

"We also want to honor the women in the family who supported the ambition and hard work of these formidable men," Vassilaros said. "One-hundred years in business is a testament to great product, great customers and a strong family."

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QUEENS CHAMBER HONOREE

CHRIS XU

President,
United Construction
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QUEENS LUXURY DEVELOPMENT IS ON THE RISE

BY BENJAMIN FANG

Chris Xu grew up in a village in Yangzhou, China. In search for a better life and more opportunities, he and his family moved to the United States to find their “American dream.” in 1986

After working in the construction field, in 1994 he founded United Construction and Development Group.

What began as a construction development company, building single and multifamily houses has grown into one of the leaders in real estate development in Queens.

The firm’s marquee project, Skyline Tower, is a 67-story building that officially became the tallest building in Queens after a topping

out ceremony in October, surpassing the Citibank building.

His latest project - building the tallest condo in Queens. Recently, Xu scored a loan worth over half a billion for his record-breaking Long Island City condo project at 23-15 44th Drive.

The total cost for the project, named ‘The Court Square City View Tower’, is said to be around \$700 million.

Xu’s partners on the development include FSA Capital’s Brian Pun, Hong Kong developer Risland U.S. Holdings LLC and Henry Yeung. Xu acquired the site in July 2015 from Citigroup for \$143 million.

Their sales & marketing firm expects pre-sales to begin as early as the end of the year with pricing reportedly ranging from \$500,000 to \$4 million.

Construction is underway and the first round of units are expected to be ready by 2021.

According to Real Estate Media Company, 'The Real Deal', the loan comes as the number of filings for condominium projects in Queens have reached a nine-year high.

The median price for an apartment in LIC is currently between about \$880,000 and \$1 million.

"Xu is attentive in procuring new developments and properties, and utilizes his skills to evaluate, analyze, and source solutions throughout the construction process," said

Tom Grech, CEO of The Queens Chamber of Commerce.

"It's important to network and engage with my local community while developing lasting relationships with contractors and partners," said Xu, when asked of the importance of the relationship between him and the Queens community.

He became a member of the New York Chinese Business Association and served as a president of the association for multiple terms, during which time he was able to help grow the association to over 800 members.

The association has been a major pillar of support for his business ventures and investments. His involvement in the local community and networks are the roots of his successful leadership skills, as well as his recognition abroad.



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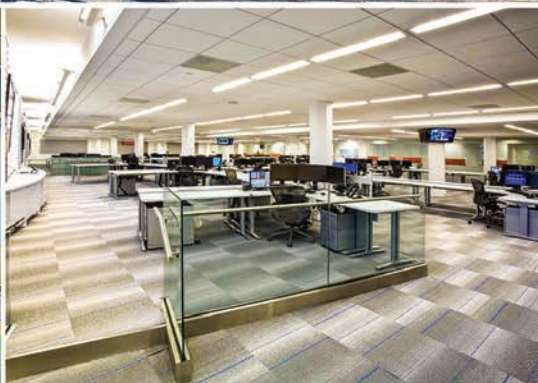
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QUEENS CHAMBER HONOREE

DIMITRIOS "JIMMY" KALOIDIS

Philanthropist, Entrepreneur,
Co-owner of Terrace on The Park



KALOIDIS LEAVES BEHIND PHILANTHROPIC LEGACY

BY BENJAMIN FANG

As a prominent businessman, philanthropist and community leader, Dimitrios "Jimmy" Kaloidis left an indelible mark on New York City and beyond.

Born in Petrina, part of the Laconia region of Greece, Kaloidis arrived in the United States in 1955 at 21 years old.

He married Georgia Christou Manolakas, who is also from Laconia, in 1974 before moving to Upper Brookville on Long Island.

Together, they founded a chain of diners and restaurants named after states from across the country, including the Nevada Diner and the Georgia Diner in Elmhurst.

In 1997, Kaloidis, in partnership with George Makkos, was awarded a long-term concession to operate the banquet and event facility Terrace on the Park at Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.

In addition to their entrepreneurial success, the Kaloidis family gave back to many Hellenic causes, educational facilities and religious and

cultural institutions in both the United States and in Greece.

Some of their largest donations were made to the Holy Cross Parochial School, which was officially renamed The Dimitrios and Georgia Kaloidis Parochial School, as well as the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church in Bay Ridge.

The family contributed \$800,000 to the school's cultural and educational center, as well as \$1 million for the church's life insurance policy. Every year, they pay the tuition for the three top students at the parochial school.

Other donations include \$100,000 for the Laconian Cultural Center, \$1 million for the Cardiovascular Center at New York Hospital in Queens and \$50,000 to the St. Demetrios Cathedral Parochial School in Astoria.

Outside of the United States, the couple donated \$50,000 to the Aniaton Hospital in Sparta, Greece, to purchase a transport vehicle for the children's ward.

In 2015, they gave \$150,000 to New York's Cosmos FM, a Hellenic radio station that broadcasts under the aegis of the Greek American Educational Public Information System. The station's new broadcast studio was named after Dimitrios and Georgia Kaloidis.

Their generosity over the years have garnered recognition and accolades. In 2002 and 2003, Dimitrios and Georgia each received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

They have also been honored by the Pan Gregorian Federation, the Federation of Dodecanese of USA, the Council of Hellenes Abroad and others. Elected officials such as former Brooklyn

Borough President Howard Golden and former City Council Speaker Peter Vallone Sr. also recognized their philanthropy.

This past September, Dimitrios Kaloidis passed away in Greece at the age of 85.

Eleni Thermos, the controller for Terrace on the Park, worked for Kaloidis for two decades. She said he was a great philanthropist who loved all children and always gave back.

As the co-owner of the banquet facility, he always had a "hello" and a "how are you" for all of the staff, Thermos said.

"His office was always open, he never turned anyone away" she said. "He was a very good man, and he will be very deeply missed."

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The Queens Chamber of Commerce publishes a 32 page magazine for its members and the business community at large. Our historic, century-old organization has a mission to foster economic growth and prosperity in the Queens business community. We network, advocate and educate. With over 1,150 Members, representing 100,000 Queens-based employees, the Queens Chamber is THE go to source for all things business.

'This is Queensborough Magazine' is the center-piece of communication for our Chamber. We give our members the business news of our borough and of the Chamber. It is published monthly during the first week of each month, and has a circulation of 4,000 monthly. It is directly mailed to 1,200 members plus another 1,300 large businesses, libraries, schools and high-traffic areas. It is also distributed to all Queens elected officials; City, State and Federal, and at other outlets where business owners congregate. The magazine's website is ThisIsQueensborough.com.

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