

Focus on Bay Ridge

By Charles F. Otey



Bay Ridge Center's new leadership team guiding 'NORC' toward recovery

New director Fliedner aims to 'strengthen and diversify' vital senior citizen programs

First in a continuing series on the Bay Ridge Center

With the dreaded Coronavirus posing a comeback through the Omicron variant, the leaders of the Bay Ridge Center — the premier senior services operation in our area — has been waging a valiant effort to gently aid older residents in the internet era while working to ensure that the personal touch remains the key ingredient of true senior care.

The Center operates out of Bethlehem Lutheran Church on Ovington and Fourth avenues. For more than four decades, its leaders — starting with the late Rev. **Darrell Helmers** — were the first to recognize that Bay Ridge was becoming a place where many older residents preferred to stay rather than opt for retirement condos in Florida or various retirement projects in New Jersey.

Due to the significant number of 'over 60s' residents, the Ridge was officially declared a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community.

In short, as one gray-haired 72nd Street neighbor once told me, "We like it here!"

Thanks to community input and even before its official designation as a NORC, the Bay Ridge Center (which actually started out as the Bay Ridge Senior Center) is gifted with one of the most talented "senior" staffs in Brooklyn.



Bay Ridge Center Executive Director Todd Fliedner. Photos courtesy of Bay Ridge Center

Executive Director

Todd Fliedner urges outreach

Heading the team, which helped seniors and others survive the initial deadly sweep of COVID-19, is Executive Director **Todd Fliedner**, who has a long service record at the Bay Ridge Center and succeeds recently retired **Marianne Nicolosi**, admired throughout the community for her work at the Center. He sees his role as helping "to promote seniors' well-being" and "to support their independence and encourage their involvement in community life."

Fliedner has an impressive background in organizing. Before joining the Center's executive team several years ago, he was development director for the Brooklyn Community Pride Center and Tribeca Performing Arts Center.

He's taken lead administrative roles with the vaunted Circle Repertory Theater, Roundabout Theater Company, WPA, the Pearl and Primary Stages. As an entrepreneur, he founded, launched and operated NYC Navigators, OUTboundNY, Inc. and POV NYC.

For his work at the Center, where he had brought his array of skills years earlier, In 2018 Todd was honored as one of the Kings of Kings County for his service to the community.

(Columnist's note: In future columns we will happily report on how well his theatrical and organizational talents have been benefit-

ing those who are part of the Bay Ridge Center.)

Center's Cathy King leads Bay Ridge Connects

Cathy King has been described by many (including this columnist) as a dedicated social worker having a unique combination of professionalism and a great heart! A Columbia University graduate, she has a reputation for being passionate about helping older adults meet the challenges of aging, and also mentoring the next generation of social work practitioners. As director of senior programs, King provides "programmatic oversight" of the Bay Ridge Center and its satellite office, Bay Ridge Connects.

Bay Ridge Connects has, according to one senior we know, "been like a lightness shining through the darkness of this damn pandemic!"

Rounding out the Fliedner leadership team is **David Dring** with the unique title of director of innovative programs.

"Since the pandemic, we've had [more than] 5,000 attendees to our more than 300 virtual programs," Dring said.

He's enlisted "community experts" — older adult volunteers and Center staff and interns — to lead these key programs, which are extremely important to older residents who are still much more at home chatting in person or by phone instead of using their cell phones to Zoom.

Martin McQuade performs at Greenhouse Café Dec. 5



Martin McQuade is performing a very special Christmas show at Greenhouse Café on Dec. 5. Eagle Urban Media file photo

*(Columnist's note: We're pleased to offer a guest review of the multi-talented Brooklyn legend, **Martin McQuade** — a gifted vocalist, educator and music impresario. Guest reviewer is **Lucia McCreery**, who has enjoyed McQuade's shows at the Greenhouse Café and other local venues.)*

"If these often-dismal days are getting you down, or even if they somehow aren't, a real upper is available right here in Bay Ridge. Classic American songs are brought to life every so often by Martin McQuade and his keyboard artists at the Greenhouse Café.

"On a recent Sunday they presented a 112th birthday tribute to lyricist **Johnny Mercer**. It was a revelation: I knew Mercer had written 'Moon River' (among his four Oscar winners), but was astounded that he gave us so many others that I was familiar with, such as 'Autumn Leaves,' 'Blues in the Night,' 'Days of Wine and Roses' and 'On the Atchison,

Topeka and Santa Fe.' Marty couldn't begin to cover Mercer's more than 1,400 songs, but what he did was 'cherce.' Besides 'Glow Worm,' he also sang a hilarious Christmas version of it.

"The songs' wit and poetry came across thanks to Marty's excellent diction and his feeling for this music. This time the pianist was **Pete Sokolow**, who not only accompanied the singer and played interesting breaks but even sang a few himself. He and another regular pianist, **Dan Furman**, are a real treat to listen to.

"As always, I stayed to the end; the last set is often the most interesting.

"The next date is a Christmas show on Dec. 5. Information and reservations are available at the Greenhouse, 7717 Third Ave., 718-833-8200. The songs should be a mixture of holiday and non-holiday numbers, many of which you may not have heard before. It's sure to be an enchanted evening."

To keep tabs on their success, Dring said the Bay Ridge Center frequently distributes surveys and holds focus groups "to identify the programs that members would most enjoy."

Dring and his team have also created a tech-lending program that provided tablets to members who didn't have them "so that we could help reduce their social isolation."

The Center reopened on July 6, 2021 at 25 percent capacity.

"To help those that still couldn't attend, we've continued virtual programs as well as created hybrid programs, which incorporates people onsite and virtually in the same program," Dring said.

And, to their credit, they have done a remarkable job of persisting through almost 16 months of COVID-mandated closure.

"It has been a joy to welcome back our members, who are the reason Bay Ridge Center exists in the first place," Fliedner said.



Cathy King serves as the Bay Ridge Center's director of senior programs.



David Dring serves as the Bay Ridge Center's director of innovative programs.