

# The Park Slope Civic Council CIVIC NEWS

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## *Lovgren Award Winner Matt Pinchik* **'Public Service is the Highest Kind of Reward'**

The story has been told so many times, at so many award ceremonies, that it has become almost legend: Jack Pintchik, hardware store proprietor by day and jazz musician by night, was leading his big band at the 1979 opening of Brooklyn's Albee Square Mall when he suddenly collapsed. A doctor attempted to revive him, failed and pronounced Pintchik dead. Two emergency medical technicians arrived on the scene, but the doctor wouldn't let them near the fallen man. A policeman intervened, the EMTs set to work, and they brought Pintchik back to life.

Much of Pintchik's family watched this drama unfold in horror and then wonder. His youngest child, Matthew, was in college at Stony Brook and only heard about his father's rescue second hand. Still, it changed Matt's life.

"I knew my father had been given a second chance at life by those EMTs," says Matt Pinchik. "I resolved then to become an EMT myself and to do everything I could to save lives the way my father's life had been saved."

True to his word, Matt trained at St. Vincent's Hospital after college, then joined a New York Police Department auxiliary emergency unit in 1982. Around this same time, Jack Pintchik suffered another heart attack, this one fatal, and Matt and Michael became the third

generation to run the family hardware store at the corner of Bergen Street and Flatbush Avenue. For 12 years, Matt sold paint by day and saved lives at night, working mostly on the Lower East Side at the peak of the crack epidemic and its associated mayhem.

"I can't count the number of lives our squad saved," recalls Pintchik, who eventually rose to the rank of sergeant in the all-volunteer corps. "We saw everything: overdoses, gunshot victims, heart attacks, people impaled on fences—you name it."

In 1994, Pintchik switched his efforts to the Park Slope Volunteer Ambulance Corps, organized two years earlier by residents concerned by the long emergency response time in our neighborhood. Pintchik soon became deeply involved in the corps' operations. He joined the board and eventually



*At the Civic Council's annual meeting on June 3, new president Michael Cairl (left) presented Matt Pinchik, long-time chair of the Park Slope Volunteer Ambulance Corps, with the Lovgren Award for his many years of volunteer service to the Park Slope community.*

became its chairman, all while still taking his turn responding to calls and saving lives.

Over the years, the Pintchik family has donated two refurbished ambulances to the corps, which, according to Matt, "started out with a van that leaked in the rain and whose door would sometimes fly open if you went around a corner too fast." They give out an annual Jack Pintchik Award to an EMT team in New York City that has exhibited special valor. They also sponsor the annual Second Chance Brunch, one of the city's more remarkable events, where people who have been saved by EMTs are reunited with their rescuers.

"You wouldn't believe what a neat event it is—the hugs, the tears, the stories—it's incredible," says Pintchik, sitting at his desk in an office above the hardware store lined with plaques and photos relating to ambulances and the men and women who staff them. The newest plaque on the wall is the Lovgren Award, presented by the Park Slope Civic Council on June 3 for his years of volunteer service to the community.

Pinchik brags about the many Park Slope volunteers who have gone on to become doctors, professional EMTs and leaders of other ambulance corps around the country. An open, gregarious man, he doesn't deny the sometime bitter rivalries among New York City's various emergency services. He insists, however, that everyone pulls together in the end and especially in times of great need.

"When there's a heat wave, for example, there can't be too many of us," he says. "Also, often, you need more than the two people on a normal EMT crew, when you're trying to transport someone down

See Pintchik, page 6



*Inside: Coverage of the Civic Council's June 3 awards ceremony, where honorees included Matt Pinchik and fellow Lovgren Award winner Tupper Thomas, shown here with Civic Council Trustee and former President Bernie Graham.*

## *Critiques and Kudos to a Person Near and Dear to Myself*

# Six Years Before the Masthead

The opinion column in the *Civic News* is usually written by one of the Civic Council's current or past officers, who addresses topics crucial to our neighborhood with wisdom and gravitas. This issue, I defied convention and assigned the column to myself. After six years, I am giving up the editorship of the *Civic News*, and this is my last chance to throw my font weight around.

It is also my last chance to apologize for some of the errors in my early writing. I am not so hubristic to claim that my more recent articles have attained perfection, but I will give myself credit for getting better over time because I had the good sense to listen to, and learn from, the wiser people by whom I was surrounded in the Civic Council and this community. I even learned a thing or two from people who astounded me with their wrong-headedness.

I resist the temptation to use stronger negatives to describe this last group because I find it difficult to give up all pretense of journalistic objectivity. I will, however, drop a broad hint about whom I am so pejoratively inclined by saying that the early articles that make me cringe the most have to do with Atlantic Yards. In retrospect, I am astounded by my naivete. I actually believed the assurances given by developer Forest City Ratner and its government enablers that the community's voice would be heard, and that the usurpation of power from our city council and the trampling under of our city charter were merely matters of convenience and not mechanisms to run roughshod over the pesky public, and to guarantee that there would be scarcely one iota of community input into this Goliathan project.

I am not so self-critical, however, to deny that there were also many good things about my tenure having almost entirely to do with giving voice to remarkable people: campaigners and crusaders; people who care deeply about neighborhood and community; the anti-Ratners, by which I don't mean those people who fought the project (though many of them are included in this group) but those whose love and respect for community and neighborhood are at the opposite end

of the spectrum from those who couldn't care less.

I am proudest of all of the voice I helped give to some of our older residents who lived through Park Slope's ups and downs, who put our story into context and who reminded newcomers that our status as the city's best neighborhood (according to *New York* magazine) is not something that just happened but that people worked very hard over many years to win. My pride extends especially to how I cleverly manipulated students at the Secondary School for Research at John Jay into doing my work for me, which turned out to be some of the best work in the *Civic News* in the last six years: Many of the interviews from their Park Slope Oral History Project have graced these pages, and there are more in the hopper that I will pass on to my successor for future issues.

Thinking about John Jay, however, brings me to one last regret: If there is one story I wish I had written, it would have been about the three secondary schools housed on the old John Jay High School campus: Law, Journalism and Research. The article goes unwritten because I never felt adequate to do it justice.

As much as I love this neighborhood—as much as I owe this community as the parent of three offspring who thrived growing up here—I worry about Park Slope's troubled relationship to the schools at John Jay, which are populated primarily by students of color. There are lessons here about class and race that I wish I had the wisdom and skill to address.

I focus in my regrets and ruminations on the Secondary School for Research only because that's the part of the story I know best, having spent lots of time there working with students and teachers on the oral history project. I have enormous admiration for the principal, Jill Bloomberg, who has doubled the school's graduation rate and who boasts, justly, that every single graduate this year was accepted into college, a claim few high schools can make. Still, she laments that virtually none of those graduates were from Park Slope.

Faced with threats from the city that the space might be turned over to a charter school if there is no increase in enrollment, the principal has launched a campaign to attract more neighborhood students to a school that sits smack in the middle of Park Slope. Bloomberg admits to two impediments to her recruiting efforts: One is the school's cumbersome and unwelcoming name, which she would like to change to Park Slope Collegiate; The other is the metal detector at the building's entrance, a holdover from the old John Jay, a troubled school in its last years.

Bloomberg sees the metal detector as a psychological barrier that scares away Park Slope parents. I worry that it is a symbol of a more fundamental divide between today's Park Slope and a neighborhood that was once much more diverse, when there was no metal detector and John Jay (or Manual Training, as it was first known) was, indeed, filled with local kids. Removing the metal detector and changing the name might do nothing about barriers of race and class. Or maybe it would. That's the story I wish I had learned enough in the last six years to have written.

At least, however, I see my education as ongoing and I am moving on now to learn from another remarkable group of people as the

See *Six Years*, page 7

### CALENDAR

#### PSCC Monthly Meeting

*Though Committees and Trustees will continue working on projects throughout the summer, the next public Trustees meeting will be in the fall: Thursday, Sept. 2, 7pm, New York Methodist Hospital Executive Dining Room.*



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## News & Notes for the Civic Minded



### Honors On Top of Honors

At its June 3 annual meeting at the Prospect Park YMCA, the Civic Council gave out honors and scholarships, passed the gavel to a new president, elected eight new trustees and paid tribute to the nine trustees who retired after many years of community service. The Civic Council honors seeded many others: Lovgren Award Winners Tupper Thomas (interviewed in the May issue) and Matt Pinchik (profiled on p.

1) were honored additionally by State Sen. Velmanette Montgomery, Assembly Members Joan Millman and James Brennan, City Council Members Brad Lander and Steve Levin and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz. Here are a few highlights (counterclockwise from above): Sen. Montgomery presents Thomas with a proclamation in honor of her many years as Prospect Park administrator and president of the Prospect Park Alliance; Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz presents citations honoring Pintchik and Thomas, flanked by outgoing president Ken Freeman (left) and incoming president Michael Cairl (right); Pintchik poses with his brother, Michael, and a proclamation passed in his honor by the State Assembly; the winners of the scholarships given each year to students in the schools at John Jay, posing with their plaques and checks: Jodie-Ann Geddes (Secondary School for Law—Mary Laverne Allman Scholarship), Gencil Young (Secondary School for Research—Rosemarie and Francis J. Kazeroid Scholarship), and Monique Clark (Secondary School for Research—Evelyn and Everett Ortner Scholarship); and Scholarship Committee Chairwoman Joan Emerson gets emotional as she talks about Monique Clark and her fellow scholarship winners. The eight new trustees elected were Robert Gilbert, John Golobe, Isabel Hill, Josh Levy, Daniel Meeter, Cathy Sokil Milnikiewicz, Chandru Murthi and Rebecca Welch. Besides Cairl, officers for the coming year include Lauri Schindler, 1<sup>st</sup> vice president; Gilly Youner, 2<sup>nd</sup> vice president; Eric McClure, treasurer; Judith Lief, recording secretary; and Alexa Halsall, membership secretary.





## Viewing Brooklyn City of Churches

Brooklyn in the 1800s consisted mainly of the Heights, Cobble Hill and Dumbo, with Park Slope on the outer edge. That means that the nickname “City

of Churches” most probably was spawned by the many spires that could be seen from places like the foot of Manhattan’s Fulton Street, where you could catch a ferry to Brooklyn.

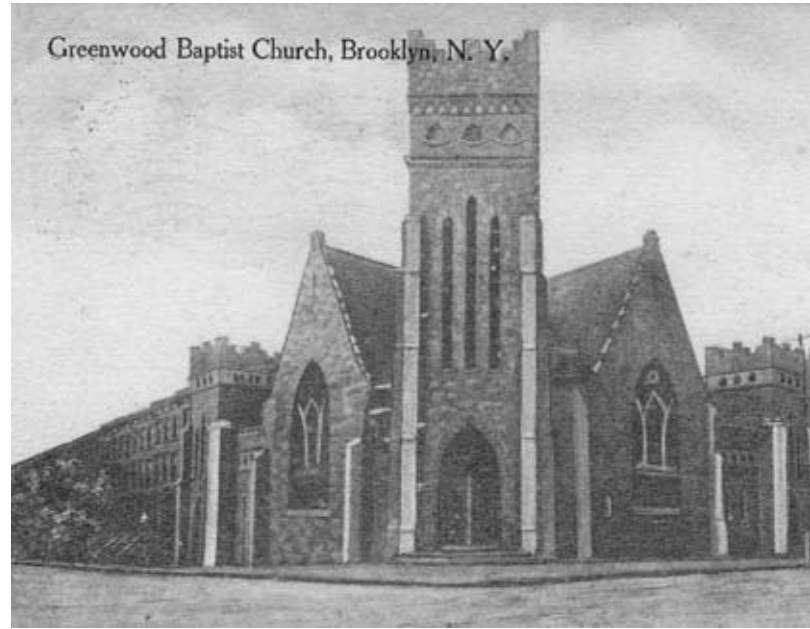
Of course, other towns in Kings County, such as Flatbush, had their churches. The Dutch Reformed Church at the corner of Church and Flatbush Avenue was chartered by Peter Stuyvesant in 1654 and is the oldest congregation in Brooklyn. The present building, completed in 1798, is the third on that site.

The city of Brooklyn had no one central church or dominant religion. Its houses of worship reflected the city’s religious and ethnic diversity. An 1847 directory of Brooklyn churches included four Baptist and four Congregational (all downtown); four Dutch Reform (two downtown, a “South” church at 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue/Gowanus and a “Fourth” at Baltic and Court Streets); 12 or so Methodist Episcopal (the directory is unclear on the precise number, but one was an “African” on High Street near Bridge Street); seven New York Presbyterian (including the “South Brooklyn” church at Clinton and Amity Streets); 11 Protestant Episcopal; four Roman Catholic; and one each Unitarian, Universalist, Society of Friends, German Evangelical and Sailors Union Bethel.

Many of Brooklyn’s citizens had strong business and church ties to New York but, in time, they organized congregations here because they tired of crossing the river by boat on Sundays. That makes the history of our churches different from those in other parts of Long Island, where they evolved naturally as part of developing town centers.

After Edwin Litchfield built his mansion on Prospect Hill, wealthy guests often stayed the night because it was a long trip back to the Heights or New York. Perhaps that sold them on settling here, because 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue (now Prospect Park West) soon began to develop as Brooklyn’s Gold Coast. Wealthy families built homes along the avenue to escape downtown’s hustle and bustle. Brooklyn’s trolley system followed and brought large numbers of people to the Slope. The trolleys first linked to the ferries, then later to the Great Brooklyn and New York Bridge. Places to worship (as well as to relax, like the Montauk Club) sprouted up around the Slope.

The churches’ size, style and architectural design and elements reflected the demographics and affluence of the congregants. The churches near the Gowanus were often simpler because they were built for the workers at the factories and granaries along the canal. (Similarly, the houses were smaller near the bottom of the Slope.) St. Francis Xavier on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Carroll Street, built in 1895 for a parish founded 10 years earlier, is a beautiful example of a more

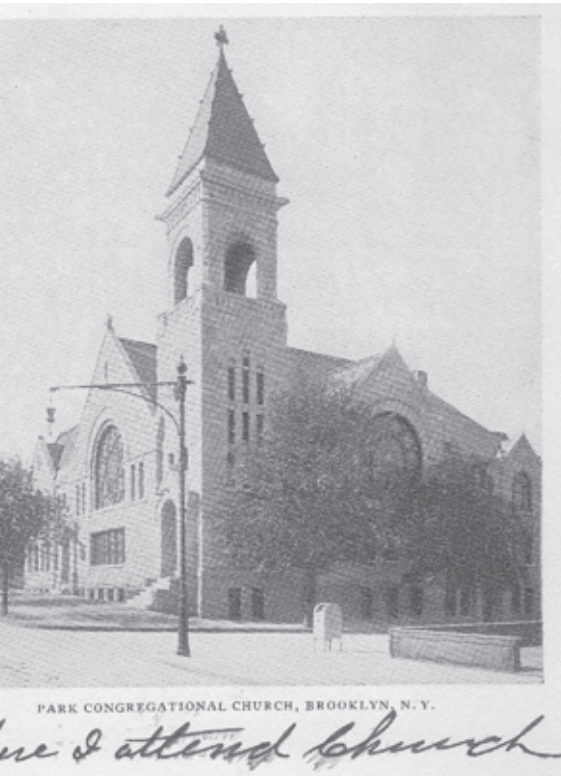
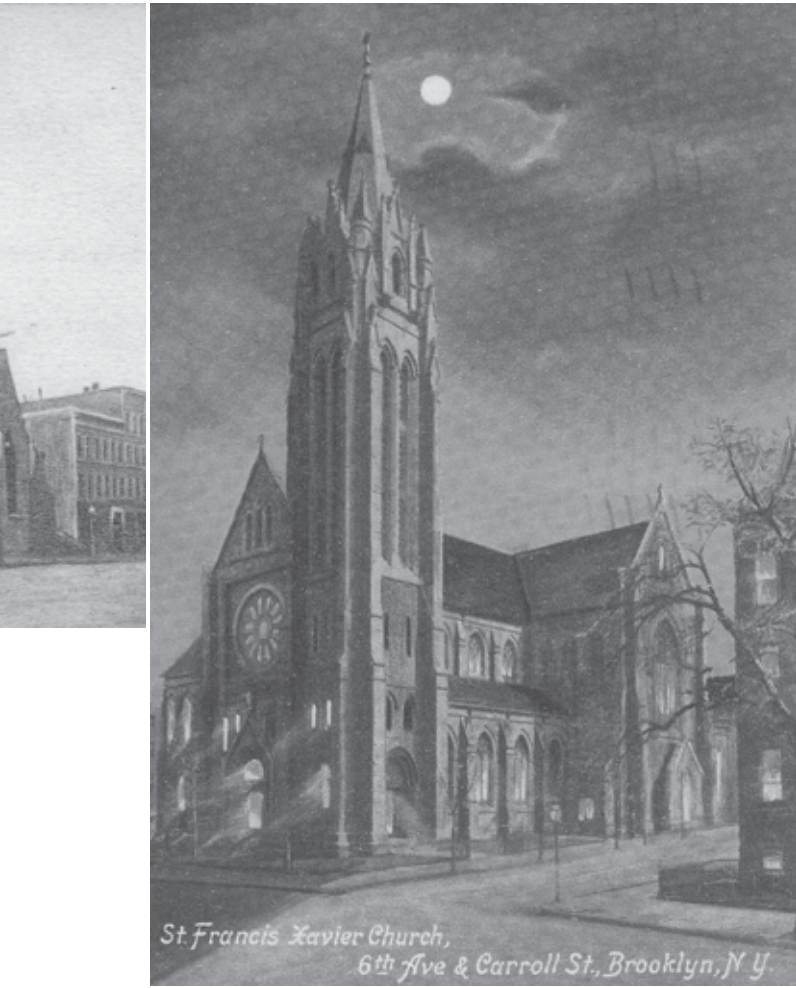


affluent church, as is Old First Reformed Church just up the block at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Congregations often bought land for their church buildings, but when Edwin Litchfield subdivided his land into building parcels, he donated building sites to many of the neighborhood’s denominations. Litchfield’s land stretched from 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Streets and from the Gowanus to 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue (now in Prospect Park). Though St. Saviours is within those boundaries, its parish was established later. Litchfield’s donation to the Roman Catholics was at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 9<sup>th</sup> Street, which became St. Thomas Aquinas. The church served the many Italian and Irish Catholic families who lived and worked near the Gowanus Canal.

I’m sorry that I can’t give specific details and stories about Park Slope’s other churches in the limited space that’s left for me in this column, my last. I’ve enjoyed writing these articles over the last several years and hope to continue them in some form (maybe a blog or a book) in the future.

—Bob Levine, former Trustee and Civic Council Historian



*Greenwood Baptist Church (top left) hasn't changed its name since these cards were printed early in the 20th century, nor has St. Francis Xavier (above). The 6th Avenue Methodist Church (far left) is now Park Slope Methodist, and the the Park Congregational Church (left) is now the Church of the Virgin Mary Melkite Greek Catholic.*

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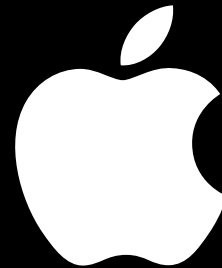
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**Pintchik**, continued from Page 1

from the fourth floor, for example. Most importantly, the whole trick is to get the response time down as much as possible. If you don't get to a comatose heart attack victim in six minutes, they're already starting to go brain dead. As they say, it takes a village.

"Also, a lot of people may not know this, but we get exactly the same training as the people who work for the fire department. We have to get re-certified every three years, just like them, and we all take the same test. We get the same briefings from Homeland Security about how to operate in possible terrorism situations."

Over the last year or so, Pintchik has largely removed himself from both the ambulance corps and the day-to-day operations of the hardware store. This shift has happened ever since his son, Jack, who is now two, was diagnosed as autistic. He spends most of his time with Jack in Hewlett, Long Island, in a home just down the street

from where he grew up after the family moved from Brooklyn.

"They say this is the most crucial time, when a parent's intervention can help the most with a kid like Jack," he says. "I want to be there with him as much as possible."

He brags about the new team of leaders at the ambulance corps and also about his brother, Michael, now largely responsible for the hardware store. "Have you seen Bergen Street?" he asks, referring to the block stretching south from Pintchik's to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which is lined with small shops, food stores and restaurants. "Isn't it something? It's what my grandfather, Nathan, dreamed of when he moved his paint shop here from Court Street in 1930. It might have taken a little longer than he imagined, but it's happening, and it's all Michael's doing."

"And do you know, a fast-food chain tried to rent space from us on Bergen and he turned them down even though the rent would have been many times higher, because that's not the kind of street he wanted here."

Matt said that his brother hopes to extend his success on Bergen onto Flatbush, reflecting the fact that the Pintchiks own a lot of property in the neighborhood of their store—much of which they bought to protect their base in the years when many of their neighbors fled Brooklyn.

The family was criticized for selling some of their buildings to the developers of Atlantic Yards, though it was property they would probably have been forced to sell eventually through eminent domain. Also, a 2008 article in the *New York Sun* said that the family was prepared to cash in on Atlantic Yards with its own large-scale development on Flatbush Avenue.

Pintchik called the *Sun* story overblown, pointing out that all the property his family owns is limited in size by city zoning. He said that, like many of their neighbors, the Pintchiks are disturbed by the scale of the buildings proposed for Atlantic Yards, which has been granted a blanket override of the zoning laws that apply to the Pinchiks' buildings.

Pintchik is careful in his assessment of Atlantic Yards, which would rise a few short blocks from the store. "The arena will be an arena," he says. "It will be okay if it attracts restaurants and things like that. It won't be okay if drunken fans urinate on people's stoops. We are, frankly, disappointed that the housing component is on hold. That's what would affect us the most."

For the time being, at least, such issues will not be Matt's. Besides caring for Jack, he has thrown himself into the growing movement of parents determined to find out why autism rates are soaring.

He has no intention, however, of foregoing the rigorous re-certification required of EMTs every three years, and tells the story of coming to a sick passenger's aid on a recent Jet Blue flight from Miami to New York. When the plane landed, the EMTs who came on board to take over recognized Matt and asked, "You don't mean to tell us you beat us here from Park Slope?"

Pinchik laughs and says, "What kills me is they sentence celebrities who get in trouble to community service like it's some kind of punishment. To me, and to thousands of people like me, it's a reward. The highest kind of reward."


—Ezra Goldstein

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oldest member (by decades!) of the collective that is running the Community Bookstore in Catherine Bohne's absence. Catherine has taken a bit of Park Slope off to Albania, where she is fighting to save a pristine mountain valley and its inhabitants from—what else?—rapacious developers in league with the government.

For all I learned in my years with the Civic Council, I have too many people to acknowledge even to begin. I will leave my specific thanks at just a handful: former Trustee Sheila White, who was copy editor throughout my tenure and who was instrumental in bringing me on board; Trustee Judith Lief, who caught innumerable typos and misplaced commas by reading proofs before we went to press; and the three presidents under whom I served, Tom Miskel, Lydia Denworth and Ken Freeman, who inspired me with their dedication to community. May my successor be blessed by as many excellent teachers as I, and may he have far less about which to cringe.

-Ezra Goldstein

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Organized as the South Brooklyn Board of Trade in 1896, PSCC is one of the oldest civic associations in Brooklyn. We identify and address quality-of-life issues important to the community; create and support projects geared to improving and protecting the neighborhood; and assist local non-profit organizations that benefit those living and working in Park Slope. Our many ongoing programs include the Halloween Parade, the Clean Streets campaign, community forums, and a holiday toy drive. Our annual House Tour raises thousands of dollars for neighborhood initiatives. All are welcome to join. To learn more, go to [parkslopeciviccouncil.org](http://parkslopeciviccouncil.org).

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