

May 2011

United Way Volunteer Spirit Awards Celebration

By Stephen E. Lipken

The location of the 31st Annual United Way Volunteer Spirit Awards Celebration at the Renaissance Hotel in West Harrison on Friday, April 15 seemed especially appropriate as it certainly pointed to a Renaissance of inspiring and dedicated volunteerism.

CBS 2 broadcast journalist Lou Young hosted the ceremony as eight innovative and dedicated volunteers stepped up to receive their awards. Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino and Young noted that there are 18,000 volunteers from 500 non-profit organizations performing \$8 ½ million dollars in services.

The awardees came from all walks of life, locations and avocations including Missy Fink for Pelham Art Center who received the Arts and Cultural Award for creatively combining cooking, nutrition and art in an after school program at Mt. Vernon's Edward Williams Elementary School.

On a related note, Missy Palmisciano, Pelham garnered the Quality of Life Award for initiating County Harvest in 2009, inspired by City Harvest of New York City, ultimately rescuing 120,000 pounds of food that would be normally thrown out to feed Mt. Vernon's hungry and homeless.

Noting that most Jews fast for Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) George Karp from Mamaroneck organized the Yom Kippur Appeal in 1990, benefiting Food Bank for Westchester (FBW) to give missed meal(s) or monetary equivalent; Karp and his partner Jack Safirstein of Hartsdale received the Health



Left to right: NY Guard Lt. Col. Robert Coulombe; United Way Executive Director Alisa Kersten; Jamie Stein; Doug Rogers, Chair; County Executive Rob Astorino; Angela Taylor, Mayor's Office New Rochelle

and Safety Award for collecting over 735,000 pounds of food and \$441,000 from synagogues.

New York Life Youth Group in Action Award went to Project Relief Group, sponsored by Briarcliff Congregational church with students

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from Briarcliff Manor; Ossining; Peekskill and Chappaqua who for the past four years have helped rebuild homes in New Orleans devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The Social Advocacy Award went to Geoffrey Wiener, 92 for his efforts in helping 3,500 Hispanic immigrants by providing social services, English as Second Language (ESL) and job placement as one of the founding Board Members of Hispanic Resource Center (HRC).

When Jamie Stein broke her leg, her physical therapist, a former Marine mentioned that serving in the Armed Forces could be boring and stressful during downtime in remote locations of deployment. So the Ardsley High School sophomore organized Books for Soldiers in 2009 and has delivered 12,000 books to military bases such as Fort Dix, Fort Drum, Veterans Hospitals and New York State Veterans Home. Ms. Stein received the New York Life Leader Award.

Assemblyman Robert Castelli stated, "It is an honor to represent as diverse a District that has so many individuals that are kind enough to volunteer their time, efforts and finan-



Left, Missy Fink, Arts and Culture Award Winner; Board Member Reena Kashyap

cial support to make our community a better place."

"They are the unsung heroes in our society and strongest threads in the fabric of our great nation."