

# **Brooklyn Lifelong Learning**

**Annual Report 2024**

**July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024**

8/12/24

## Letter from the President

Having been in office for just the past few months, I will include BLL accomplishments during my tenure, along with accomplishments during the tenure of our late President, Joan Meyer, whose untimely passing we mourn. In addition, I would like to mention our aspirations for the coming year.

We are still adapting to conditions following the disruptions caused by the pandemic. We have gone from all classes on campus to all classes on Zoom and subsequently to a mixture of on campus & Zoom classes. We have transitioned to a greater percentage of classes on campus, while retaining Zoom for our members that enjoy that platform.

Increasing opportunities to meet in person, we have expanded the number of our walking tours and continued with Museum Walks & Talks, bus trips and ethnic lunches. We've also reinstated end of semester events that were paused due to Covid.

The lingering effects of the pandemic had caused the number of members to decline. However in this past year, we were able to reverse that trend and had a healthy increase in our membership. We also learned to pare our expenses, so that our finances have been stable over the year.

We reactivated our Facebook page after a long period of dormancy and we are experimenting with online advertising in pursuit of increasing our membership further. Having experienced disappointing results with the print advertising we did this past year, we tried new advertising platforms to grow our membership.

We have initiated a plan for succession in vital roles, in the event that officers or committee chairs choose to move on or are otherwise unable to continue their work. We have gotten these leaders to put down in writing what they do and how they go about performing their function. That is step one. Now we must find volunteers to serve as backup and eventual successors in those positions.

In other initiatives going forward, we are exploring the prospect of putting a portion of our bank balance into an interest bearing account, and making a concerted effort to gain access to our secondary bank account which has been unavailable to us since the death of former President Gene Reiser 6 years ago.

I am happy to report that our existing committees have mostly been running smoothly. We bolstered our Program/Curriculum Committee with Rona as chairperson and new committee members to work with her. We are determined to strengthen programming in order to enhance the number and quality of the classes we offer.

There have been requests to add a bowling league, physical activity such as yoga or Tai Chi and some form of arts & crafts. Finding volunteers to teach or facilitate classes is always a challenge, but we pursue every opportunity. Another goal is to increase the diversity of our membership and expand class offerings to incentivize a broader demographic to join BLL.

Sincerely,  
Robert Mishaan President

# Annual Report Narratives 2024

## Committee Activities

### **Scheduling** – Report from Susan Tischler

#### Accomplishments:

In Fall 2023, we had 19 classes and 3 lectures. There were 4 new teachers.

In Spring 2024, we had 18 classes and 2 lectures. This included 1 new class 3 new teachers.

We had 11 Museum Walks and Talks, 3 bus trips and 11 walking tours.

We are trying to balance classes on campus with zoom classes.

Our outdoor activities have increased.

Our goal is to improve communication with the faculty about their classes, dates and times.

### **Program Committee** – Report from Rona Goldwitz

This group was newly reconstituted in July 2024, since the previous committee had basically disbanded when Covid came along. It has 4 members: David Clough, Kathy Shanley, Matt Carnicelli and me. Its primary focus initially is on obtaining notable guest speakers, particularly professors from Brooklyn College and other institutions of higher learning as well as professionals in other fields. Despite the committee being so new, some new and note-worthy presenters have already been arranged for the fall 2024 program.

### **Winter/Summer Sessions** – Report from Rona Goldwitz

#### **Winter Session:**

29 class sessions were held during the month of January. Some highlights included an Ethics Series, a talk by photographer Marcia Bricker Halperin, discussions of *Demon Copperhead* led by Gail Green-Anderson and a pair of sessions on Bob Dylan.

Classes were all held on Zoom owing to the uncertainty of the weather at this time of year. There was also an in-person activity, namely two trips to the Shah Garg Collection through the Museum Walks and Talks program.

There has been a major expansion in the Winter session since it began in 2016. That first year, only seven sessions were held.

#### **Summer Session**

69 presentations were held from June through August. Highlights included: “The Caribbeanization of New York” by Brooklyn College Professor Aleah Ranjitsingh, a presentation on Beginning Genealogy, a pair of sessions on AI and ChatGPT and hands-on sessions for creating handmade prints and patterns on fabric.

There has been a major expansion in the Summer session since it began in 2015. That first year, 13 sessions were held.

## **Membership/Publicity Committee – Report from Robert Mishaan**

The committee continues to work on publicizing BLL’s program and to attract new members. We utilize a number of tools to accomplish these goals. We have added members to our committee, which allows us to increase our outreach and distribute the committee’s work, so as not to be burdensome on just a few.

Lastly, we think it’s important to increase the diversity of BLL’s membership. We are exploring ways to reach out to groups whom we have not yet attracted in significant numbers.

### **Annual Information Session**

Our biggest push for recruiting new members is our Mini Class & Information session on the Brooklyn College campus. It is scheduled for Monday August 19 from 10:30 to noon in Tanger Auditorium in the Library. Last year we recruited upwards of 40 new members as a result of our presentation at the session. We will be repeating that session next week, highlighted by Brooklyn Historian Ron Schweiger’s presentation on “The History of Education in the Village of Flatbush.” Along with that mini class, we inform prospective members of the curriculum for the upcoming fall semester. This includes in-person classes on campus, Zoom classes, Museum Walks & Talks, bus trips, walking tours, other local events and ethnic lunches.

### **Ads**

To publicize the info session, we have used paid print advertising with Schnepps Media last year, with results which were deemed disappointing. This year we are hoping for better results from print ads in *The Tablet’s* “Boomer Edition,” the *Brooklyn Eagle* and online advertising on Facebook. We will evaluate the cost versus benefit of using these platforms in deciding our future efforts for publicity. To date, our greatest method of attracting new members has been word of mouth, We encourage present members to spread the word about BLL.

### **Street Fairs/Festivals**

We maintain a presence at table events, such as the Older Adults Fair at Brooklyn’s Central Library, the Flatbush Frolic street fair on Cortelyou Rd and the Newkirk Avenue Open Streets fair. In addition, committee members post our flyers where appropriate and hand out our flyers at Greenmarkets and other areas where people congregate.

## **Grants Committee – Report from Rona Goldwitz**

### **Grants**

We received two grant awards for fiscal 2024.

- We were notified of an award of \$5000 in discretionary funds from City Council Member Farah Louis for the current fiscal year.
- We received a 2024 Community Leaders Grant of \$2000 from the Citizens Committee for New York City. This was our first grant from this organization.

### **Donations from members (as of December 2023)**

- \$3693 was received in response to the BLL Annual Appeal.

- Sixty five members joined at the “Friends of BLL” level, which adds a \$50 donation to the basic cost to participate. A total of \$3250 was thus netted.
- Other donations totaling \$764 were also received.

A total of \$14,707 in Grants and Donations were received.

### **The Grants Committee makeup changed mid-year:**

- After 15 years as Grants Committee Chair, Rona resigned from the position.
- New committee members Joel Duckoff and Morty Marshack undertook the responsibilities of this role. They are greatly appreciated!

### **Events Committee - Report from Gail Naftalin**

Since the last Events Committee report in 2019, our responsibilities have expanded. In addition to some BLL social events we have also started organizing what we called “outdoor activities” (due to COVID) and visits for members to sites of interest (but usually not art museums, as that is Linda Silverman’s bailiwick), including walking tours.

Our committee members are Candace Lieberman, Iris Brahms, Marie Romano, Sheila Gerstein, Marilyn Kostroff (currently inactive), Mark Levine (recently joined) and Gail Naftalin (chairperson).

We arranged and executed two bag lunch events, one each semester. At the end of the fall semester, on December 8, 2023 on SUBO’s 5<sup>th</sup> floor, all members and faculty were invited to attend. We provided fruit, cookies, salty bagged snacks, paper plates, napkins, plastic tablecloths, table decorations and a gift for the speaker. We welcomed the 60-70 attendees and conducted a non-competitive Brooklyn trivia quiz (successful because fun). The speaker was Melissa Friedling, from the School of Media Studies at the New School. Her topic was “Midwood, Before Hollywood”. Her talk included slides and was very interesting to our members.

On June 3, 2024, we had a similar event in SUBO’s Gold Room, to close out the spring semester. There were ~78 attendees, we provided food and supplies as above and conducted another Brooklyn trivia quiz (thanks very much to Richard Redmond). The speaker was Marty Markowitz, an excellent choice, as people were very entertained. We received many compliments from BLLers and were pleased with the event’s success.

The committee oversaw walking tours as follows:

10/10/23 – SOHO, led by Robert Mishaan (tour guide extraordinaire and our new BLL president)

4/10/24 – Brooklyn Botanic Garden

5/2/24 – Historic Tour of the Town of Flatbush – Ron Schweiger (Brooklyn Historian)

5/9/24 – Historic tour of Flatlands – Ron Schweiger

5/16/24 – Victorian Flatbush – Ron Schweiger

5/17/24 – Bushwick – Hank Orenstein (great tour leader. We want to engage him again)

(6/3/24 – Robert Mishaan’s scheduled tour of Chinatown was postponed. It was rescheduled for the fall.)

The other visits we organized are as follows:

6/30/23 – The Brooklyn Navy Yard

7/10/23 – Grand Masonic Temple, located in Chelsea

10/4/23 – Whale Watching Expedition

1/29/24 – The Natural History Museum – we will repeat this and arrange for a tour, as none was available for this visit

6/10/24 – The Players, tour of a private social club of artists and arts lovers

## **Travel Committee** – Chaired by Sheila Gerstein

The committee arranged several full-day bus trips:

- June 22, 2023 - *Papermill Playhouse in Milburn, New Jersey to See Rent*
- November 9, 2023 - **A DAY AT THE WIND CREEK HOTEL & CASINO**

This bus trip to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania included *A MUSICAL TRIBUTE TO THE FOUR TOPS*, time for shopping at outlet stores, gambling and dining.

- June 12, 2024 – **Hunterdon Hills Playhouse** to see *Weekend Comedy*

## **Museum Walks and Talks** – Chaired by Linda Silverman

**MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM** SEPTEMBER 29 *Drawings*

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART** October 20 *Art for the Millions: American Culture and Politics in the 1930's*

**THE NEW MUSEUM** November 3 *Judy Chicago*

**WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART** November 17 *Ruth Asawa*

**AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM** December 1 *Black Presence and Absence in the Early American North*

**SHAH GARG COLLECTION** January 12 and 19

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART** March 8 *The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism*

**GREY ART GALLERY AT NYU** April 5 *Americans in Paris: Artists Working in Postwar France*

**BARD GRADUATE CENTER GALLERY** April 12 *Sonia Delawney: Parisian abstract artist*

**JAPAN SOCIETY GALLERY** April 19 *None Whatsoever: Zen Paintings from the Gitter Yelen Collection*

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART** May 3 *American Art Wing (and New York Art Worlds, 1870-1890)*

## **Diverse Ethnic Lunches** – Gail Weber

Our "Diverse Cuisines Luncheons" took us to many distinct parts of the world, each with its fascinating customs and cultures. The first was for a Caribbean lunch on Friday, June 9 at **The Islands**, which followed a talk on the Caribbean community in Brooklyn by Professor Aleah Ranjitsingh. In September, we were sampling Indian food at **Mumbai**, while in November, we tasted Vietnamese food at the **U Bar Restaurant**. To usher in the holidays, in December we dined at the Turkish restaurant **A Cherry**. The new term, in February, found us at the Ukrainian establishment, **Tatiana's** on the Brighton Beach boardwalk. This was followed by the Peruvian restaurant **La Chacra**, in March. And finally, we visited **Chris' Polish Restaurant** to cap off the year in May....and to think we didn't even have to hassle with passports and jet lag!

I have been chairing the diverse ethnic luncheons this year. I have new member Bill Kahn to assist me. First, I scope out restaurants in Bklyn that can hold at least 35 people, will give separate checks and will bring in a lunch for \$30 or less. I visit an assortment of restaurants to see which is aesthetically more pleasing, has the best ratings, and offers the most value.

Once I decide on a restaurant, I write up an announcement and submit it for Rona's approval. It is then mentioned in the weekly newsletter with an RSVP date. I try to talk up the event to all I meet in my classes! I stay in touch with Ellen during this time to see how the response is. Once the date arrives, I get in touch with the manager of the restaurant to give him/her a final count.

I have also taken to doing some research on the particular cuisine we are sampling and present it to the group after orders are placed. I have also indicated that one might bring a guest if they desire with the hope that a guest can ultimately become a dues paying member.

Luncheons are held approximately every month.