



Well-heeled visitors smile on Snug Harbor Cultural Center

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- In a bid to highlight Staten Island as the undiscovered cultural jewel of New York City, borough cultural leaders welcomed a group of off-Island philanthropists to Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden in Livingston yesterday.

The purpose of the visit — which included a tour of Snug Harbor and a lunch — was twofold: To show off Snug Harbor as one of the Island's premier attractions and to drum up private support for cultural venues across the borough.

The event was hosted by the Staten Island Foundation and the Council on the Arts and Humanities for Staten Island. The guests were grantmakers from Philanthropy New York (PNY), an umbrella group of private funders based in Manhattan.

The tour was an eye-opener for one funder, Carol Schlitt of the Open Society Foundations.

"I was incredibly impressed," she said. "This is such a jewel, such a find."

After touring the Newhouse Gallery, the Children's Museum, the Tuscan Gardens and other attractions, including those under construction like the new Staten Island Museum site, Ms. Schlitt said Snug Harbor is making topnotch use of both its historic buildings and lush grounds.

"It's great for children, families and artists," she said. "It really speaks to the community."

Ms. Schlitt, who said she'd been looking forward to the visit, acknowledged that the Island sometimes has to overcome "preconceived notions" about itself with big-time Manhattan funders.



Staten Island Advance/Jan Somma-Hammel

Betsy Dubovsky of the Staten Island Foundation, foreground, leads Ariana Helleman of The Wallace Foundation' left, and Carol Schlitt of the Open Society Foundations in a Grecian turn.

"There's a wealth of contemporary artists here," she said. "That's something you wouldn't have known."

Said Ms. Schlitt, "It deserves support from the community. And from the philanthropic community as well."

Foundation Executive Director Betsy Dubovsky said that the Island groups and PNY "have teamed to give the participants a glimpse of all that Snug Harbor Cultural Center does and, given the funding, what more it could do."

The Foundation is also looking to help streamline the grant process and make it easier for all borough culturals to tap off-Island donors.

With funding groups across the city a priority, off-Island donors are also looking for avenues into the outer boroughs, making yesterday's tour a mutual match.

Roderick Jenkins of the New York Community Trust, said that the event was "a fabulous idea."

"It gets us out there to find out what's going on on Staten Island," he said. "It's an interesting way to introduce people to Staten Island. It's interesting and diverse, and there's a lot to look forward to."

The visit comes on the heels of an Advance story wherein cultural leaders said that city budget cuts were making it close to impossible for them to keep staff, fund programs and do upkeep on their facilities.

"I hope good things come of it," said Alice Diamond, a Snug Harbor founder and immediate past vice chairwoman of the Foundation, "and I'm sure they will."

At the luncheon in the Winter Garden, which was attended by cultural leaders from across the borough, Dr. Jonathan Peters of the College of Staten Island gave preliminary results of his analysis of the Pew Foundation's Cultural Data Project, which includes figures on cultural spending.

The results showed that the vast majority of federal, state and city arts funding continues to go to Manhattan.

"It begs the question of whether you're getting the arts out to the people," he said.

But Allan Weissglass, chairman of the Foundation, said it was too early to draw firm conclusions from the preliminary results.

"We have to dig in and around the numbers some more," he said, adding that there are reasons why culturals in Manhattan, one of the top tourist destinations in the world, continue to get the funding that they do.

Weissglass said that yesterday's tour was a step in a "long process" aimed at bringing more private, off-Island cultural funding to the borough.

"That's the message," he said. "Philanthropy New York will be helpful with it."

Snug Harbor President and CEO Lynn Kelly said that yesterday's visit would generate "great word of mouth" for borough culturals and help them "get the funding that we rightfully deserve."

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