

# QUEST Q NEWS

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**T**his Christmas and Hanukkah season seems like an ideal time to reflect upon the word “community” in our (somewhat lengthy) formal, legal name: “QUEST – the CCNY Community for Lifelong Learning.” Two thoughts come to mind.

First is the very sad news that all of us received on Monday, November 9th, that our much-admired member **June Dwyer** had passed away suddenly. June was such a bright light at Quest (I often described her to my friends and family by telling them that she was “the best person at Quest.”) As with any community, when a key member leaves, there is a profound sense of loss and void that is slow to fill. That is most surely the case with June; we will all miss her for a very long time.

But back to our formal name — *The CCNY Community for Lifelong Learning*. We have particular reason to be proud of our association with City College, for at least two reasons. First, I am pleased to say that CCNY itself is thriving. If you follow the news you know that the college is getting lots of really good press lately. I have had the opportunity to attend several City College functions, including some on the main campus uptown, and they are clearly thriving. And – even better – they are extremely proud of their relationship with us. Bob Hartmann and I recently had the opportunity to meet with Lisa Coico, CCNY’s President, and I can tell you that she is an ardent supporter of Quest, and our program, and of CCNY’s affiliation with us. I hope that everyone has seen a copy of CCNY’s Annual Report in which Quest was prominently featured (copies are available in the office in case you missed it). We have, as you know, an excellent relationship with all the CCNY/CWE staff here on the 7th floor, and I thank everyone who helps nurture this important affiliation.

The holidays are coming; our winter break is right around the corner, and I want to wish everyone a wonderful holiday season, a happy and healthy new year. With winter virtually at hand, spring is surely not far behind. We have so much to look forward to at Quest — I encourage everyone to get involved somehow, whether presenting a class, coordinating a course, serving on a committee, or volunteering in some other way. Quest is so much better and stronger when everyone participates. Thanks for all your good work.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

*Michael Wellner*

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QUEST, a community for lifelong learning, is affiliated with City College of New York (CCNY), and the Center for Worker Education (CWE).

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### GREAT PLAYS COURSE STAGES *THE PRICE*

Benefiting from two professional actors and three talented amateurs, the Great Plays Course presented Arthur Miller's classic, *The Price*. Emmy-nominated actor **Dominic Chianese** reprised his role as Gregory Solomon, the wise old antiques dealer, first having performed this role at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre to rave reviews.



### Cast of *The Price*

l. to r. **Roy Clary**, **Jane Pittson-Chianese**, **Dominic Chianese**, **Beverly Francus**, **Wayne Cotter**

**Roy Clary**, a veteran of the off-Broadway stage, starred as Walter Franz, one of the two brothers central to this play about family dynamics, and the price of one's decisions. The Quest production was presented in its original, full-length form on September 21, 2015.

### COMMAND PERFORMANCE

Health issues forced **Donna Rubens** to miss a good deal of this semester at QUEST. She was disappointed not to have seen the Great Plays presentation of A.R. Gurney's *Love Letters* because she heard such glowing comments about it. Actors **Bob Hartmann** and **Myra Nissen** decided to perform a "mitzvah" and take *Love Letters* to Donna.



l. to r. **Bob Hartmann**, **Donna Rubens**, **Myra Nissen**

On Sunday, November 22 at 2pm, *Love Letters* was performed at Donna's home in Brooklyn. An audience of 20 people including Donna's daughters and friends, and Questers **Hilda Feinstein** and **Eva Shatkin** enjoyed the love letters of Andrew and Melissa through 50 years of dreams and disappointments. After the performance, a wine/cheese/dessert buffet was offered by Donna's daughters, a perfect ending to a very special afternoon.

## MEET MARY BETH YAKOUBIAN



**Mary Beth Yakoubian**

Photo: Lila Heilbrunn

Tap dancer, dress designer, jewelry maker, opera buff,(especially bel canto), Handel aficionada, clogger supreme and Quest member for three years. How does

### **Mary Beth**

**Yakoubian** do it all? And com-

muting from Hoboken to boot!

Now I understand why Mary Beth comes to Quest only twice a week. Her plate is very full. She has had an eclectic career. Growing up in Connecticut, she contracted polio at age fifteen. Paralyzed on her left side, she missed a year of school but physical therapy brought her back to full mobility. Exercise has since become a way of life on how to maintain her mobility and strength.

Mary Beth was graduated from Hunter College with a B. S. degree in Physical Education, then went back to Hunter for two more degrees: one in mathematics, another in music. She followed those degrees with an M.S. from NYU in Health Education and then taught phys. ed. and coached volleyball for 20 years at the NYC High School for the Humanities.

At the High School for the Humanities, she wrote a proposal for an opera class and was the first to teach it, taking her students to rehearsals at the Met, where they met opera singers (including Placido Domingo) and conductors. She ran the

opera class for five years, and a class on Handel for one year.

After discovering clogging, she would travel 1 1/2 hours to Easton, Pennsylvania to attend a clogging class. Finally she came upon a better idea: start City Stompers, a clogging class in Manhattan which she led for six years. (Ed.note: I didn't know what clogging was because I missed Wayne Cotter's Quest class on American Roots Music where Mary Beth gave a presentation on Appalachian Old Time Music.) She explained that clogging is rhythmic tap dancing to old time music, a precursor of Bluegrass. If you have ever been at the S-Line platform at the Times Square station, you may have seen the Ebony Hillbillies there playing Old Timey.

Mary Beth toured the opera houses of Europe on her school vacations in search of her love, bel canto opera.

She speaks Armenian and retains her maiden name, explaining that Armenians can readily find one another by their identifiable last names, all ending in "ian."

Mary Beth had a dress shop in the Village on Thompson Street from 1963-68 where she designed the dresses and had seamstresses help make the finished products.

If her schedule isn't full enough, Mary Beth sings alto in the Hunter College Choir on Thursday nights. Rounding out her busy week are classes in silversmithing at the School of Visual Arts and the 92nd Y. Three morning classes a week find her at the McBurney Y, where she met **Helen McMahon**, who introduced her to Quest. If you want to catch up with Mary Beth Yakoubian, look for her on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Quest.



## QUEST GOES INTERNATIONAL!

**Jane Pittson-Chianese**  
**Photos: Lila Heilbrunn**

On Monday, September 28, Quest joined the world of international relations. A 12-member Thai delegation headed by Professor Naraporn Chan-o-cha, the wife of the Prime Minister of Thailand visited our facilities and sat in on a class. She was accompanied by the Thai Ambassador to the U.S. and his wife as well as the wives of the Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations and the Consul General in New York.

**Michael Wellner** received the request for Quest to receive the party directly from the Thai Mission to the United Nations. Knowing he would be out of the country on the day they hoped to visit, Michael asked **Bob Hartmann** to make the necessary arrangements to host the group. There wasn't much lead time. I offered to lend a hand, given my U.N. experience, and so the diplomatic machinery sprang into gear. Nothing involving high-level diplomats (or their wives) is ever straightforward!

Could special arrangements be made for the group to enter the building with their U.N. IDs? Could someone from the Thai Mission come and inspect the building on the day before (a Sunday)? Could we send ahead pictures of the rooms the dignitaries would visit? Could someone meet the Prime Minister's wife downstairs and escort her up? These and many other details had to be sorted out. Bob did a sterling job negotiating with building security to ensure that all the members of the party would be al-

lowed in without a hitch (at least that was the plan). Prime Ministers' wives are not accustomed to showing passes or being stopped by security personnel, so fingers were crossed.

Monday morning, Bob and I arrived here bright and early to meet the advance party (Director of Protocol and security detail). Joining us were **Lila Heilbrunn**, camera at the ready, and **Pam Gemelli** from the Membership Committee. Pam had prepared 12 lovely gift bags containing *Q Review*, *Q News*, our *Fall Curriculum*, plus some extra goodies, to give to our guests. We took the early arrivals around the premises – they didn't want any surprises later. The Protocol Director specifically asked to see a bathroom that the high-level ladies might use (I was so glad we have the private disabled-access one).

Shortly after 10.30, we were notified that Madam Naraporn's limo was arriving. Bob and I hurried down to welcome her, only to find the lobby filled with photographers. We were impressed. Did she merit that much press attention? It turned out, however, that this was part of a film crew. Shooting was taking place, coincidentally, in and around the building that same morning. So much excitement!

We proceeded outside to greet Madam Naraporn, timing it perfectly as her car was just arriving. When she emerged from the limo, I was quite taken aback, she looked like a queen, beautiful and regal, and dressed to kill. (I was almost tempted to curtsy). We escorted her and the rest of the party upstairs and into the conference room. After we had greeted them all individually and settled them in, Bob gave a brief introduction and suggested we take a tour of the Quest facilities. They peeked into each of our



rooms, including the lunch room; then we all trooped into the auditorium to visit a class in progress.

The course that morning was “Awesome America, from A to W”, and the State was Nevada, presented by Harriet Finkelstein. What could be more perfect for our visitors? Well, we stayed about 15 minutes, just long enough to catch the part where Harriet gave away State secrets (classified in that era) about Government installations in the Mojave desert in the 1940s and 50s!! Composed faces all around. With much smiling, we quietly exited and re-paired once again to the conference room.



**(l. To r.) Pisan Manawapat (Thai ambassador to U.S.), his wife, Professor Naraporn Chan-o-cha**

Now that they had experienced a class firsthand, Bob told them more about the origins of Quest and how it had grown since those early days. I expanded on our current operation, and Pam and Lila rounded out the presentation with some personal reminiscences. The whole party paid attention, some taking notes, and there was genuine interest especially on the part of the Professor (as the Prime Minister’s wife likes to be addressed—she used to teach at the university level) in how Quest functions. She asked questions about our curriculum, how the courses were chosen, funding of the program and logistics of setting the class schedule.

Of course, when our turn came, we had one overarching question for them — how did they learn about Quest? Well, it turns out that the King of Thailand has always been very much interested in education in general, but a particular concern throughout his reign has been the continuous learning of his subjects throughout their lives. One of his pet programs is called *Quest for Knowledge*, a project that Professor Naraporn has helped him implement. Before coming to New York for the General Assembly, her staff googled the title, and that’s how they found us.

It’s certainly gratifying to know that our fame is spreading, maybe not far and wide – yet, but who knows from whom we’ll hear next. ∞

## TRAVELING QUESTERS

### Carolyn Maguire

Over the past few years, Quest has developed a Travel Program during school breaks in January and the summer. So why not pack a bag and visit a new part of the world, or revisit an old haunt with some adventure-seeking Questers.

Among our 2014 jaunts were the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, a real winner and perhaps worth a re-visit. Iceland in July — complete with glaciers, wonderful scenery and thermal baths, was another highlight.

As we look toward January 16-24, 2016, we can almost taste that Colombian coffee. (We hope they grow decaffeinated too.) The Colombian trip will include stops in Bogota, the coffee triangle, Medellin and Cartagena. In 11 days, highlights include museums, boat rides, the Cartagena beach and walled Old Town. The 12 Questers on this trip should enjoy wonderful weather in January.

In May 2016 what could be better than nine days in London? We are staying at the Strand Palace Hotel — right in the heart of the theatre district with minimal walking to the theaters. Our itinerary includes daytime tours of the Globe Theatre, a concert in St. Martin in the Fields, a theatre—history lecture, high tea, and highlights of the British Museum, among other activities. We will probably manage five plays during our stay. Are you still standing?

NOW we’ve finally put our heads together and come up with two possibilities for August 2016.

Heading north to cool weather, the first possibility from August 16-24 is the Canadian Triangle (Toronto, Stratford Festival and the Shaw Festival) (nine nights). The cost of this trip is \$2995 based on 10 participants plus air (which is inexpensive). The price includes hotel with breakfast, wine tasting tours, a few dinners and miscellaneous tours and six theatre performances including many famous plays.

Heading east and more cool weather, it’s “the old sod,” the land of the leprechauns, Guinness and Irish Coffee. Yes, IRELAND. We’re offering a nine night private tour for a group of 11 or more participants for \$1,975 plus \$958 air. This trip is from July 26 – August 3rd. It includes three nights in Dublin and the countryside with sightseeing, as well as Belfast, one night in Killarney and the ring of Kerry, two nights in Galway and the Aran Islands, and two nights in Sligo at the Yeats Summer School.

If you look at these dates and have lots of time and cash, you can do both trips and be gone for most of August. Or maybe we’ll just “Shuffle off to Buffalo” ∞



## EXPERIENCING CHAUTAUQUA

**Ruth Kovner**

Well, it finally happened. I was able to get to Chautauqua as I had hoped years ago. Yes, I attended the presentation about Chautauqua given by **Carolyn Thompson** at lunchtime, and I promised myself that should the opportunity arise, I would go for it. It came and I did.

Somehow Chautauqua was a surprise, and yet it wasn't. I did not expect to find myself in a turn-of-the-(20th)century village. But that's what I found. As we drove into Chautauqua, I half expected a model T to drive by. The hotel was what I expected...



but the lake ... now that was a surprise—large and gorgeous, so big there were two steam boats ready to transport passengers!



I did anticipate interesting courses given by highly credentialed presenters. In the main, that was true.

The large amphitheater was as Carolyn described. It serves as the venue for lectures, concerts, opera and ballet, all enjoyed by 4,000 people, plus or minus.



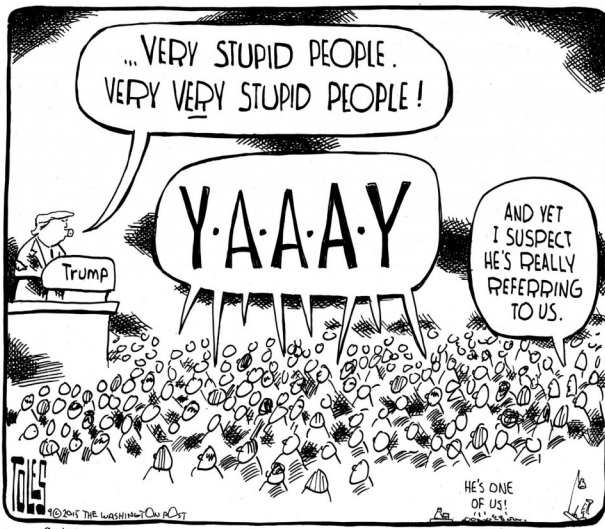
And the attendees were from all over - Ohio; Arizona; South Carolina (where my roommate, a lovely woman, was from). Bettina was fun and so great to talk with. I also discovered that so many others had been there before (and many times before).

And, of course, Quest was well represented, led by our 20-year Chautauqua veterans, **Sandy and Al Gordon**.

Each week Chautauqua focuses on a specific theme and the lectures follow suit. My week was devoted to “Art and Politics.” In the amphitheater we were treated to an interview of Ava DuVernay, the young woman who directed the wonderful film, “Selma”.



Ms. DuVernay’s words proved eye-opening as she responded to the controversy about her depiction of President Johnson in the film. She came across in a blunt and forceful manner. We heard from a Georgetown professor who proved animated, knowledgeable and interesting. We also heard an amusing lecture from the political cartoonist of the Washington Post. His name? Tom Toles. Though lecturing is not his usual medium, his talk was very well received by the large audience. He spiced it up with his incisive cartoons.



On my first morning I got up early, at the ready with my new Nikon and headed out in the mist. I found a jogger up as early as I was. I saw several young people, chatting in groups, as I went down to the lake. Many sailboats were waiting, yearning for their crew to arrive.

Everywhere I turned was a photo op. The houses were 19th century and kept so tenderly with colorful gardens and well-kept lawns galore. Chautauqua is noted for its front porches and there were many, everywhere.



The hotel at which we stayed was perfect. Very turn-of-the-century like Mohonk, that upstate oasis. The food was quite good and certainly plentiful. Conversation flowed no matter what table we joined. We met more folks, this time from California. The day we ate on the back porch at dusk, facing the lawns and the lake, was a highlight.

My friend, with whom I traveled, can’t wait to return. I’ll get there again, I’m sure. But first London awaits and who knows what else? If you are looking to experience a really interesting week, try Chautauqua. It’s a treat for the eyes, ears and soul. It’s a pleasant relief from our daily headlines and a way to get away from Trump.



## QUEST DISTINGUISHED—GUEST LECTURER SERIES

Thanks to **Sandy Gordon**, our distinguished-guest lecturer series continues to stimulate and amaze us. Some highlights from Fall 2015:

**GUEST: LARISSA BAILIFF**

**SUBJECT: Yo, Picasso: The Art of Invention, Improvisation and Irreverence**



Ms Bailiff explored the sculptures of Pablo Picasso, acknowledged as the most important artist of the 20th century, and one whose influence shaped

this century and beyond. She introduced us to the current MoMA blockbuster exhibition, *Picasso Sculpture*, as well as expanding our knowledge of Picasso and his sometimes lurid love life.

**GUEST: MARY J. MAUDSLEY, J.D., M.A.**

**SUBJECT: Famous and Infamous Trials: Holocaust Trials**

Ms. Maudsley revealed some fascinating details about libel trials arising from histories of Jewish communities during the holocaust. Her talk focused on a libel trial involving Professor Randolph Braham who wrote a two volume history, *The Politics of Genocide: Hungary*.

**GUEST: PROFESSOR MARIA ISABEL ALFONSO**

**SUBJECT: Rethinking Cuban Civil Society: Cuba's Social Dynamics**

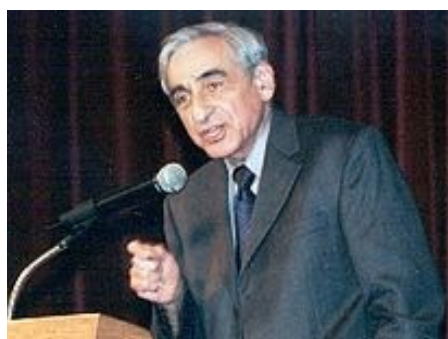


Maria Isabel Alfonso represents the modern Cuban immigrant, who supports the economic transformations occurring in Cuba, and hopes to see a change in politics without sacrificing the culture, education

and social programs, now that the embargo is softening. She gave us important insights into Cuban civil society today and how it differs from that portrayed by American mainstream media.

**GUEST: PROFESSOR MICHAEL WALZER**

**SUBJECT: The Paradox of Liberation: The Impact of Social and Cultural Forces**



Dr. Walzer, Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, School of Social Science, continues to be

a force in the world of political philosophy and social science. In his talk, he explored the intersection of nationalism and ethnicity with respect to Israel, India and Egypt.