



Donna Ramer President

My road to Quest started in Queens, where I grew up and launched my career in communications as a reporter for my hometown paper, *The Bayside Times*, at the age of 15. As an adult, and after several years living in other states and countries, I returned to NYC and recently celebrated 48 years in my Union Square apartment.

I joined Quest in 2018 and quickly became involved. My first semester, I jumped in to help others by filling the gap while Quest's admin position was vacant, very quickly becoming acquainted with numerous members as well as our governance. In my second semester, I began to present. Since then, I have presented in numerous courses and have been a coordinator for several others, including Mythology, Rise & Fall of the British Empire, Toni Morrison, Greek Dramas and Women Spies. I also have chaired the Membership Committee and currently sit on three other committees: Administrative, Document Management, and Marketing & Communications. And during Covid-19 lockdown, I was active on Zoom by presenting and leading discussions. Returning to Quest, I was involved in creating on-site activities as well as ways to engage members unable to return.

After being elected to Council as a member-at-large in 2021, I became acting vice president and, in 2023, I was elected president. During my tenure as president, I have overseen the triennial update to our bylaws; the streamlining of our budget and financial reporting process; benchmarking against other lifelong learning organizations; and participating in the annual Southeast Regional Lifelong Learning conference, as well as supporting many social activities and events.

Professionally, I am an award-winning communications specialist with an expertise in strategic planning, crisis and reputation management, and communications training. I have contributed to several books, professional publications, and Congressional set-aside programs; held a number of board positions; and have a long history mentoring others.

I felt at home from my first day at Quest and a camaraderie with other members. My interest in continuing as president is simple: I believe Quest has so much to offer and I want to continue to lend my expertise to maintain the integrity of Quest as we reach out to a wider audience and more actively engage Questers, at home *and* at 25 Broadway.



Bob Belfort **Member-at-Large**

I've had the great fortune of living in every borough of New York City.

I was born in the shadow of the Cross Bronx Expressway, raised mostly in Queens, lived up the hill from the Staten Island Ferry Terminal while I worked for an environmental organization, and did the typical stints in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

After graduating from NYU Law School, I handled eviction and public benefit cases for The Legal Aid Society before transitioning to a large law firm, where I've helped hospitals and other companies navigate the health care regulatory landscape for over 30 years.

As I began the process of gradually winding down my legal practice, I started to search for a place where I could learn, teach and meet new people who shared my interest in lifelong education. I found only one place that fit the bill: Quest.

I started out as an active participant in the *New and Classic Essays* and *Explorations in Philosophy and Literature* classes. This semester, I've been a presenter in the *Essays* class and hope to present in the *Philosophy* class. During the past year, I have also presented three times in the Supreme Court class on the following topics: "*Affirmative Action: The Supreme Court's Long and Winding Road*," "*Presidential Defiance of Supreme Court Orders*" and "*Personal Autonomy Rights Under the Constitution: What Remains After Dobbs?*"

In addition to immersing myself in the educational experiences Quest has to offer, I have embraced the opportunity to meet Quest's members. I have been inspired by the creative energy of the people I have met and their passion for ongoing personal growth.

I have a strong interest in helping Quest with curriculum development, especially in areas relating to legal and public policy issues. I recently participated in a curriculum brainstorming session and plan to develop new courses in the future.

I believe I can serve as a valuable resource for the Quest Council by using my legal experience providing governance advice to not-for-profit organizations to help make Quest as effective as possible in anticipating and meeting its members' needs.



Victor Brener Member-at-Large

I am a retired architect and real estate developer originally from Mexico. I moved to New York more than twenty years ago after living in Denver for an additional 20 years.

I have an interest in the outdoors having been a hiker, skier, and biker for most of my life. Enjoy classical music, opera, traveling and the arts, so NY is the perfect place for me.

I've taken classes at NYU and The New School in construction management and literature. With a lifelong passion for learning, I joined Quest 7-8 years ago because I liked the idea that it is run by members, the people and classes are of quality, and everybody is committed to a life of continued education.

I have been on the Technology Committee since I joined Quest, and co-presented a class of contemporary opera for several years. I also coordinated several courses. As a member of the Technology Committee, I apply my problem-solving skills and forward-thinking approach to advancing technological initiatives, helping to integrate modern tools and strategies to support education.



Tracey Lee Member-at-Large

First, just a word about me and my background. After a brief stint as a Certified Public Accountant, I attended law school at the University of Pennsylvania and started my corporate legal career in law firms in New York City. I joined the legal department at Home Box Office (HBO) in 1990, spending over 20 years working on legal matters related to international ventures, satellite and digital transmissions, encryption and other technology matters, and also on HBO branding, marketing, and consumer products.

After HBO, I worked as a consulting attorney at a variety of companies such as Nielsen ratings and Blackrock, and stepped back from full-time legal work after the pandemic.

I joined Quest in the spring of 2023 and have done several presentations since then, covering subjects as varied as the History of Mental Health Treatment in America, Book Banning in Education, AI in the Arts, and AI on Your Devices as well as the upcoming Frank Capra and American Populism. I have found these presentation experiences to be the most rewarding of my time with Quest and I hope that my excitement in bringing things I have learned to the group shows through.

I believe that Quest Lifelong Learning is a unique organization blending the love of learning with a vibrant community where ideas and opinions can be shared and challenged. There is a fine group of people running for member-at-large seats and I am honored to be among this group. Should you select me for one of the seats, I would see joining the Council as my opportunity help with the activities of the Council and to contribute my voice and perspective to help ensure Quest continues to add to both the intellectual and community life of its members.



Stu Parker

Member-at-Large

In 2017, I joined Quest following my retirement from the New York City Police Department and 46 years practicing law. After college and prior to law school, I served as a Vista Volunteer in poverty programs in Trenton, New Jersey and Brooklyn, New York. My witnessing social and legal injustice while in Vista motivated me to pursue a legal career.

During my career, I was a law clerk to a United States District Judge, an Assistant United States Attorney, a litigation partner in three law firms, a Senior Litigator at the New York City Law Department and in my last job before retiring, the Assistant Police Commissioner for legal matters involving intelligence gathering in NYPD's counter terrorism program. Prior to leaving private practice to join the City Law Department in 1998, I was a member of the Board of Directors of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, an organization where I now do pro bono work for people with disabilities.

My primary reason for joining Quest was that it presented an attractive vehicle for learning from and exchanging ideas with interesting people. My experience at Quest has exceeded my every expectation. I have found it to be a warm and welcoming environment in which other members have helped me pursue new interests and increase my rather deficient technical skills.

With lots of help from kind and generous fellow Questers, I have done presentations on the law pertaining to foreign electronic surveillance, jazz musicians, including Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, and on Robert Moses. Preparing the presentation on Robert Moses was at times consuming, difficult and ultimately satisfying as anything I had done in my legal career.



Ellie Schaffer Member-at-Large

I view Quest as a community of “ferocious seniors” who passionately love to learn and laugh. That’s why I joined in 2019.

The pandemic interrupted my involvement but, thankfully, Zoom was there. Once we were back downtown, I slowly became more involved. In the Quester’s Choice class, I first presented on Irving Berlin and in other classes, on Cole Porter, Ella Fitzgerald, and on linguist John McWhorter’s latest book, *Woke Racism*.

I have been co-coordinator of the Shakespeare class for several years in which I continue to give short talks. I also currently co-coordinate the Dostoevsky class. Preparing and presenting is enriching! I learn much and enjoy sharing what I’ve learned with others.

I do a regular lunchtime gig called “Name That Tune,” where I play a song’s introductory verse (these are American Songbook and Standard songs) and you guess the tune. We then sing along as we hear or watch a terrific performer. For Creativity Day, you will find me performing Quest parody songs.

Several years ago, I served on the Technology Committee and currently serve on the Curriculum Committee.

I majored in history at the University of Buffalo and spent several years doing welfare rights and union organizing upstate. I soon moved back to New York City and obtained a programming degree at NYU where I worked at Xerox and several small software companies. For most of my career, I was a programmer and systems analyst at TIAA in their Document Publishing area.

Outside of work, I have served on multiple synagogue committees and currently serve on the leadership committee of my community chorus.

In 2015, I took an early retirement, obtained my ESL certification, and then taught for several years at the Henry Street Settlement House on the Lower East Side.

I love our peer-to-peer learning model and would love for *everyone* get involved. There are many ways – read a poem, give a short talk in a discussion group, present in a lecture class, join a committee, participate in a workshop. There is a place for everyone!



Lynn Vairo

Member-at-Large

I joined Quest in the 2024 spring semester after retiring from a 50-year career in the non-profit world.

After working for a number of years in a variety of capacities, in 1992 I joined an organization which I built from the ground up, moving from Program Director to Associate Executive Director and finally serving as CEO for 15 years. In addition to my work in my organization I served on several boards of non-profit entities outside of my company.

Once retired I knew I wanted to find something meaningful to fill my time and Quest filled the bill perfectly.

I quickly became involved in the organization by joining the Bylaws Committee. My experience with developing and reviewing bylaws of numerous non-profit organizations was integral to my ability to be a contributing member of this committee. In addition, my participation in this committee provided me with a very detailed knowledge of Quest and its operations.

I have also been an active member of the Membership Committee and have joined the Scheduling Committee.

I am preparing to dip my toes into presenting and I am scheduled to do a presentation in the short stories class in May.

I am flattered to be running for Council and I believe that my experience makes me a strong candidate.



Ruth Ward Member-at-Large

My name is Ruth Ward and I am running for Quest Council member-at-large.

First, my background: I was born in Brooklyn and raised in Queens. I returned to Brooklyn in 2013 when I retired from teaching Spanish and French in Nevada and California public schools. During the next three years, I wrote fiction and audited history and literature courses at NYU and FIT. I started to host and participate in several online French conversation and reading groups.

Once I joined Quest in 2016, my whole world opened. In the past 9 years I've given presentations, coordinated courses, chaired committees, provided technical support, and participated in a number of plays. Now I'd like to contribute my understanding of how Quest functions to the important work of the Quest Council.

To be more specific, my presentations have included subjects related to modern dance and ballet, to ethnic groups like the Kurds and Uyghurs; and to leaders and thinkers like Angela Merkel, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, James Baldwin, Nicole Hannah Jones, Ibram X. Kendi, and Robert Reich.

Currently I coordinate The World of Religions course as well as the lunchtime Déjeuner Français.

As to my work as a committee chair, in 2019 I chaired the Nominating and Elections Committee. I've served as Prose Editor and Editor-in-Chief of the *Q Review*, and currently, I'm Vice-Chair of the Membership Committee.

I've enjoyed acting with and directing other Questers. In 2020 I wrote and directed an original play called *The Next Step*, which was produced post-covid in spring of 2022. In 2024 I directed and acted in *Long Day's Journey into Night* and this May I will do the same for *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Basically, I love service. Several years ago, I served for one year as Quest Vice President and then for a year and half as Quest President. I would love to return to the Quest Council now to talk again to you, our members, about your interests, concerns, and wishes, remaining sensitive to what you appreciate or would like to improve in our organization. I realize that meeting the needs of our attending and home-bound members is important. So is creating and implementing relevant new courses. Quest has greatly enhanced my personal well-being, and I'd like to return the favor to you.