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Community Impact Awards: Tireless activist carries flag for Queens civic groups

Corey Bearak organizes neighborhood advocates and leads the fight to preserve quality of life

By Howard Koplowitz
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Photo by Christina Santucci

Much like a circus act, Corey Bearak does a lot of juggling.

Aside from running his political consulting practice, doing part-time work for the Little Neck-based Community Partnership Referrals and Resources and being a licensed attorney, the Bellerose resident finds the time to represent the collective interests of borough community organizations as president of the Queens Civic Congress while also being involved in nearly a dozen other local groups.

“Basically, I’m about trying to make a difference,” said Bearak, 52. “If you want to make a difference, you have to step forward. And sometimes that means taking a leadership role.”

While Bearak wears many hats, his most visible volunteer role is as president of the civic congress, a conglomeration of the borough’s civic groups that he helped found in 1997.

Bearak said that before the Queens Civic Congress, there were two separate councils of civic organizations based in northern Queens. But that meant that groups in western Queens could not be as active.

“We decided the best way to do it was to form a boroughwide congress,” he said, noting he had to convince both councils to fold and give their treasuries to the newly formed organization.

Bearak said the biggest accomplishment of the congress was getting the Padavan Campus — a site in Glen Oaks on the grounds of Creedmoor where two middle schools and a high school are situated — created.

“We came into [then-Borough President Claire Shulman’s] office with our own master plan for Creedmoor,” he said. “If not for our efforts, you would have seen some sort of development that would not have been as compatible” with the existing Creedmoor site.

Bearak is also a member of Community Board 13, which stretches from Glen Oaks down the Nassau border to Rosedale.

In his 17-plus years on the board, Bearak said he is most proud of helping unify its members after District Manager Sally Martino-Fisher stepped down in January 2008 amid questions about her residency.

Bearak also volunteers for the Glen Oaks Little League, where he currently helps the organization bring elected officials to its opening day and awards ceremony. When his two children — Jonathan, 22, and Marisa, 20 — were younger, Bearak managed their Little League teams.

The Bellerose resident is also involved with the Knights of Pythias, a fraternal organization, where he is the secretary of the FDR Lodge in Brooklyn and writes the lodge’s award-winning newsletter.

In his professional life, Bearak is a political and public affairs consultant and has been vocal in the congestion pricing debate in working with the group Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free.

Bearak said he only works for interests and causes that coincide with his views.

“I’m not a mercenary,” he said. “If I don’t believe in an issue, people aren’t going to hire me and I’m not going to take a job.”

Bearak said his professional career, which included being former City Councilman Sheldon Leffler’s counsel and chief of staff and working in the offices of former Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer and former Secretary of State Mario Cuomo, is an asset to his volunteer efforts.

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