

BLOCK SYMPOSIUM BRINGS COMMUNITY LEADERS TOGETHER

OP-ED

The third annual meeting of block associations was a big success

BY MELISSA ELSTEIN, COALITION OF BLOCK & COMMUNITY LEADERS CO-FOUNDER

UPPER WEST SIDE On Saturday, April 26, the NYC Coalition of Block & Community Leaders (CBCL) held its' Third Annual Blocks for Blocks Symposium organized by and for block associations and community leaders. Since 2012, this Symposium has focused on improving communities and neighborhoods by sharing best practices, and linking block and community groups to form a more powerful civic voice. The Symposium was specifically created for those

already involved in community organizing, as well as for people desiring to start a block, neighborhood or other type of grassroots community organization.

Originally conceived as a West Side event, the Symposium has grown to attract block association leaders from all over the city, including the Upper West Side, Midtown, Upper East Side, Inwood, Greenwich Village, and Queens.

As in the past, the Symposium was held at Rutgers Community Space, on West 73rd Street. Topics discussed at six separate informational sessions included organizing block parties and increasing civic participation, greening our communities, clean energy issues, utilizing technology and social media, emergency preparedness, and drafting effective newsletters.

What was exciting about this

year's CBCL Symposium was the especially diverse mix of people all gathering together to discuss how we can make NYC better, safer, cleaner, and greener. We were able to connect community leaders, environmental groups, government agencies, nonprofits, local businesses, and elected officials in a positive, non-partisan setting. CBCL co-founder Dee Rieber, of the West 75th Street Block Association, agreed that "this annual Symposium is a unique and needed forum where block and community leaders can connect and learn from one another as well as from the varied panelists."

The "Creating a Winning Newsletter" panel was led by members of the W. 75th Street, West 102-103 Street block associations, and the Coalition for a Livable Westside. West 76th Street Block, West 116th Street



From left: CBCL organizer Melissa Elstein (West 80s Neighborhood Association), CBCL organizer Susan Lahn (W 58th St Block Assoc), State Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal, attendee Stu Lahn (JASA), NYC Council Member Helen Rosenthal, CBCL Organizers Dee and Dan Rieber (W 75th St Block Association)

Community, and West 44th Better Street Block Associations facilitated the panel on "Planning Neighborhood Parties and Events." UWS CERT and Nextdoor.com discussed emergency planning and safety procedures - a brand new topic at the Symposium this year, but certainly relevant after Hurricane Sandy. The "Greening and Block Beautification" panel included speakers from the Department of Health (discussing NYC's rat problem and solutions), Department of Sanitation (discussing composting and organics recycling), UWS Recycling (hard to

recycle items), Midtown Manhattan Court on graffiti cleanups, and Plastic Bag Laws (plastic pollution issues and the new proposed City Council plastic bag legislation). Also contributing to the greening panel regarding tree care and tree wells were speakers from Trees NY, Community Board 7, and Columbia University.

The "Clean Energy" panel was comprised of speakers from NYC Clean Heat (demonstrating with vials, the differences between the dirtiest #6 and #4 heating oils, versus the cleaner #2 oil), Sane Energy Group

(discussing boiler conversions, pipelines and radon in natural gas), Sustainable CUNY and NY Solar Energy Society (solar panels), NYC Cool Roofs (white and green roofs), Community Energy (wind power), NYSERDA and Solar One (energy efficiency), 32BJ (building worker environmental trainings), 350NYC (climate change and divesting from fossil fuel investments), and Community Board 6 (environmental community organizing).