

# A Season of Firsts for the Jewish Conservancy

By VOICE Staff

Despite the challenging economic climate, the Lower East Side Jewish Conservancy (LESJC) has celebrated numerous special events and programs over the fall and winter. With a new roster of tours, successful fundraisers, and art exhibitions, the Conservancy is branching out to wider audiences and teaching more people about the historic Lower East Side.

“There have been a lot of ‘firsts’ for the Conservancy in the past few months,” reported Laurie Tobias Cohen, executive director of the LESJC. “We’re very fortunate to have committed volunteers from the neighborhood who are involved and committed to the Jewish community.”

The LESJC Kling & Niman Family Visitor Center serves as an orientation, exhibition space, and starting point for the popular walking tours of Lower Manhattan institutions and historic synagogues that the LESJC has led in the neighborhood for the past 12 years. Since opening the Center earlier this year, Conservancy personnel have worked hard to make innovative use of the new space and attract more visitors to the neighborhood.

On October 30, for example, the Conservancy hosted a benefit, ran several mini-tours, and marked the opening of a photographic exhibit by noted artist Julian Voloj. The “Art & Architecture Fest” drew record crowds to the Visitor Center, where they met the self-styled “Gals from the Hood,” four Lower East Side women who shared their memories of the neighborhood’s evolution.

Marilyn Guss Altman, daughter of the founding owner of Gus’s Pickles; Carol Schneider Margolin, daughter of the “K’nish Man;” Hesta Taube Fort-

gang, daughter of Ruth Taube, 40-year veteran professional at the Henry Street Settlement; and Carol Hordin, daughter of the founder of Hordin’s Jewish Deli, comprise the Gals from the Hood. They chatted with visitors and sold vintage jewelry and ‘tchotchkes,’ with all proceeds benefiting the Conservancy.

Later the same day, photographer Julian Voloj was on-hand for the opening of his photo exhibit, “If you live in New York...”

A German-born photographer and writer, Julian Voloj created the exhibit to present portraits of Jewish New Yorkers in their surprising diversity, exploring aspects of identity and heritage. Voloj’s photos have appeared in various newspapers and magazines such as the New York Post, Presentense Magazine, and the Brooklynite. The exhibition runs through December 31.

Before Thanksgiving, the Conservancy held its first guest-celebrity-led walking tour, with revered tour guide Justin Ferate and a capacity crowd of over 60 participants. Ferate is considered the premiere guide for New York City walking tours. He is an urban, social, and architectural historian who has worked as Director of Adult Education for Cooper Union and Director of Tour Services for Gray Line New York.

On November 13, the LESJC held a special event to honor one of its long-time volunteer tour guides, Barry Feldman.

“The event was very successful,” Laurie Tobias Cohen reported. “Barry has been with us since 2004, and he’s developed many popular tours. Returning groups ask for him by name.” The fundraiser was held in the Visitor Center and drew a large crowd of supporters and well-wishers.

“In addition to these events, we had a busy season of private



A capacity crowd came out to honor popular Conservancy tour guide Barry Feldman on November 13.

customized group tours, with some new groups coming from Touro College, Care One in Teaneck, shuls in the Five Towns area, and others,” she added.

On Chanukah, the LESJC ran a “From Delancey to Donuts” tour, featuring visits to Kehila Kedosha Janina and the Stanton Street Shul. Participants enjoyed traditional soufganiyot—fried donuts—and other refreshments.

The Visitor Center is located at 400 Grand Street and is made possible through the generous support of Michael Pertain and other donors. It is open every Sunday and from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. The Conservancy welcomes any interested parties to inquire about renting the space, collaborating on an event, or simply coming by to learn more about the Lower East Side and the Jewish immigrant experience.

The Lower East Side Jewish Conservancy is an educational and cultural organization representing many Lower East Side



Barry Feldman poses with his grandson at the Conservancy fundraising event held in his honor.

synagogues, schools, and cultural institutions. The Conservancy was created with two initial goals: to support, enhance and activate the Lower East Side’s community of living synagogues and other historic structures, and to raise public awareness of the Lower East Side’s distinct cul-

tural identity. Joel Kaplan, Esq., is president of the Lower East Side Jewish Conservancy.

For more information about LESJC tours, customized private group events, and the Visitor Center, call (212) 374-4100 ext. 1 or visit [www.nycjewishtours.org](http://www.nycjewishtours.org).



16. Bobov Boys...



17. The Law.jpg



21. Brooklyn Bri...



22. Emissaries...



26. Shabbat Str...



27. Shalom Alei...

A sampling of Julian Voloj’s “If you live in New York...” photo exhibit, exploring Jewish heritage and identity in the quintessentially Jewish city.



Barry Feldman points out architectural features and points of interest during his popular walking tours of the Lower East Side.