

PROJECT UPDATE



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BOARD CHAIR REUPHOLSTERED: ETTINGER STEPS DOWN AND MCDORMAND STEPS UP

Wendy Ettinger, the first and (thus far) only Board Chair of the 52nd Street Project, is stepping down from her post after twelve years at the helm. During her tenure at the Project Wendy has overseen the transformation of the organization from a dinky, goofy, little enterprise to a somewhat larger dinky, goofy, little enterprise. Through the years, Wendy's trademark leadership of diligent whimsy, of grace and humor, has shaped and buoyed the Project in deep and affecting ways, ways that even she may not realize. It is not inconceivable that without Wendy the Project may not have endured. Maybe, maybe not. One thing is for certain, though; it would not be what it is. It would be less. We happily report that Wendy will remain on the board and pass the gavel (actually we have no gavel) to long-time board member **Frances McDormand**. Fran has indicated that there will be sweeping changes. Her first order of business will be to buy a gavel. "I want one of those little Fisher-Price plastic ones that squeaks when you hit it," said McDormand in a recent interview. "That way no one can get hurt." WR



Wendy Ettinger and Fran McDormand

PROJECT BOARD NO LONGER RUTHLESS



After more than a decade of big favors and savvy advice, **Ruth Cohen** has joined the Board of Directors. Ruth is a development consultant and a big time movie producer who has earned the right to call **Robert Redford** "Bob" and **Arthur Dantchik** "Artie." But most impressively, Ruth, a Queens native, knows how to get to Kennedy Airport without taking the Van Wyck. WR

NINE BIG ANSWERS

After a nine-week Playmaking course administered by **Michael Bernard**, this season's second bunch of budding playwrights spent a weekend at **Stephen and Cathy Graham's** home in Kent, Connecticut scripting plays that centered on the theme "The Big Question." Trick rider **Lois Smith** competed for attention with circus drummer **Jose Soto** in **Hallie Gibson's** *Tell Me The Truth*. Sibling rivalry nearly tore **Larry Nathanson** and **Michaela Murphy** (married in real life) apart in **Vionel Ortiz's** *Love Me or Not?* **Jaya Rosado's** *One Crazy Married Couple* had vaulting ambition come between talk-show host **Allison Eikerenkoetter** and her

celebrity-impressionist husband **Danny Jenkins**. In *Friends Don't Pressure You*, Jaya's brother **Jayme Rosado** had fiendish delinquent **Alex Draper** (also a fiendish delinquent in real life) forcing his innocent girlfriend **Elina Löwensohn** to smoke. In **Anton Spivack's** *Wager to Wager to Thirty*, **Kevin Geer** gave a tour de force performance with his portrayal of Louise, a desperate game show contestant who shares an apartment with a petulant giraffe (**Oliver Platt**) and a doomed television set (**Arthur French**). Oh, yes: **George Babiak** played a rock in that one (George is a rock in real life). *Chi-Chi's Big Escape*, by **Mayleen Cancel**, saw a little girl (**Lenore Pemberton**) saving a cute little monkey (**Darrel Carey**) from the clutches of an evil zookeeper (**Stewart Sarkozy-Banoczy**) while being distracted by a young friend with a good-sized question (**David Wiater**). **Samantha Soto's** *Problem Solved* had singer **Cecilia Arana** vying for air time aboard *The Groove Plane* with dancer **Taro Alexander**. **Galo Santana** tackled the "Big Question" theme squarely in *Dream Love*, the tale of an actor (**Walker Jones**) who



ADAM RODRIGUEZ

must work up the courage to ask the girl of his dreams (**Camilia Sanes**) to marry him. He does, she doesn't. Finally, **Robin Miles** played a little girl who teams up with her insanely jealous doll (**Angie Phillips**) to defeat Satan himself (played by the normally angelic **Tom Schall**) in *Tina and Tira's Adventure With The Devil* by **Mona Lisa Barthelemy**. More names, you say? Well, let's acknowledge **Lisa Benavides**, **Diana Son**, **Anna Li**, **Adrienne Shelley**, **Tim Nelson**, **Michael Bernard**, **Wendy vanden Heuvel**, **Danny Johnson**, and **Elizabeth Keiser** for being a terrific bunch of Dramaturg/Directors. **GRB**

FLAMING TROUSERS EXTINGUISHED AT LAST



MIKE SELL

The afternoon of May 6 saw more discord at Chinatown's **Harmony Palace** than has been seen there in many a year. The thoroughly nonplussed staff watched as we trundled in a game-show set, sound equipment, an electric piano, some very tall decorative shrubbery, 500 gift bags, and a 15-inch tall army of Ms. Frizzle dolls. The Mott Street banquet hall became steadily more harmonious as the star-studded cast of **Pants On Fire**, this year's Annual Benefit, arrived. **Lewis Black**, **James McDaniel**, **Frances McDormand**, **Natasha Richardson**, **Marisa Tomei**, **Joanne Woodward**, and a tape-recorded **Geoffrey Holder** gathered with Project kids **Jed Clarke**, **Candy Godoy**, **Tessa John-Connor**, **Osage Lewis**, **Tanika Parson**, **Rufus Read**, and **Jaya Rosado** to do a sort-of-okay rehearsal followed by a great show. We think the presence of over 500 Project friends stuffed with 11 courses of Chinese food may have fueled everyone's adrenaline levels the second time around.

Toiling away in the theatrical engine room were director/raconteur **Mark Linn-Baker** (the words "Why don't we start now?" were never as forcefully spoken), composer/

bon vivant **Henry Krieger**, lyricist/kibitzer **Willie Reale**, and writer/funnyman **Michael Bernard**. **Scott Ramsay** and **George** also built an all-foamcore set designed by **Derek McLane**. The terrific **Tom Morse** did sound and the great **Greg MacPherson** would have done lights had he not taken ill that day and been replaced at the 11th hour by handsome **Hank Meiman** (who also stage-managed).



Rufus Read got off some good wisecracks at the benefit.

As for the gift bags this year, they set a new Project benchmark in excess: compact disks from **BMG**, baby lantern keychains from **Coleman**, *Flyer* bars from **Paris Chocolates**, *Rugrats* fridge magnets from **Nickelodeon**, the phalanx of Ms. Frizzle dolls from **Scholastic**, coffee from **John A. Vassilaros**, lip balm and skin salve from **Watkins Products**, and from us, the great new 52nd Street Project Mugs. Maybe you missed out on all of these goodies, but you'll be able to buy mugs at future Project shows.

Thanks to you Project Pals, this Benefit was really great. It pulled in so much cash, in fact, that we'll be able to buy new office computers and a stack of books for our library with the windfall. Many thanks to all who came, and kudos to **Sally Bock**, who masterminded the entire affair and is (sigh) still looking for an apartment (see page 3). **GRB**

PROJECT TAKES ON NATURE-AND WINS!!!

"It's gonna rain, it's gonna rain!" That's what they said, all the naysayers, all the do-not-believers, all of those who tried to bring us down. But on Saturday morning the sun came out and the 52nd Street Project celebrated its fourth annual **Replay Picnic**.

From baked beans to cous-cous to pork loin to tuna burgers it was a gastrointestinal fiesta. Not only that but we rolled out some brand-new plays by seasoned Project vets **Edith Berko-nti**, **Jonathan Brown**, **Michael Castro**, **Alex Cooper**, **Candy Godoy**, **Aisha Jabour**, **Matthew Jellison**, **Hakim Latimore**, **Osage Lewis**, **Lorraine Lopez**, **Tanika Parson**, **Christina Ramirez**, **Isha Rodriguez**, **Jaysunn Rosado**, **Gloria Trejo**, **Peter Ventura**, and **Lorraine Zambrano**.



Tanika Parson, Picnic Playwright

STEPHANIE BERGER

Some of the highlights: a proselytizing hippie; two men in fashion crisis; Christmas marriages; bringing your bully on *The Jenny Jones Show* to alter his behavior; a witch and a computer hacker's fight against animal abuse; the team-up of an alien, a secret agent, and an Amish man; evil gangs; cotton magicians; people dating, fighting and marrying; a woman who is part cat, part human, and part balloon; a suicidal sofa; a toilet who was sick of his career.

After the readings and a tasty lunch, there was a spirited game of Keep-Away in the pool during which both **Alex Draper** and **Bruce MacVittie** earned more **Minutes™** than any kid in Project history. A huge Project shout out to **Wendy Ettinger** and **Derek McLane** for opening up their home so generously to us all. **MB**

*Minutes™ are the Project's patented punitive measure in which the offender is sentenced to a period of time during which to privately ponder the transgression.



The NEA lives and supports really worthy Theater! The following foundations and corporations recently made generous grants to The Project:

National Endowment for the Arts: \$50,000 (For 1997-99), **NYC Department of Cultural Affairs:** \$15,000, **The Florence Gould Foundation:** \$17,500 (France), **Surdna Foundation:** \$30,000 (Capital & Teen Program), **NorthWest Point:** \$500, **William & Mary Greve Foundation:** \$5,000, **The New York Times:** \$5,000, **Harold & Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust:** \$25,000 (One-On-One Endowment).

We are grateful to these organizations for their support as well as to the many individuals who help sustain the Project's programs year-round.

DIX NITS FOR 12TH NIGHT

For two years now, nine Project teenagers have been working with Chris Ceraso, Willie, and Michael on an acting class, the final result of which is a sleek version of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Thanks to the **Florence Gould Foundation** and Project *amis* **Bill and Jane Muddyman**, we will spend a week rehearsing the show at the **Chateau de Berne** in Lorgues, France for a performance to be held at the new performing arts center there. After that it's three days in Paris and then home for a performance at the **Ensemble Studio Theatre** in New York City on July 11.

The kids are **Jeffrey Zambrano, Lori Quinones, Tina Vamvoukakis, Kulondi Frier, Victor & Diana Rojas, Fernando Ramirez, Jill Barbosa, and Luis Santoni**. Chris Ceraso did the adaptation and will play Antonio, **Alex Draper** will play Malvolio and interpret. Michael is directing, George is production managing and playing a gendarme, and Sally will sweat the details as Trip Coordinator and shopping consultant. **Kevin Roach** is designing the set and **Sheila Kehoe** is doing costumes. There are only three words that can sum up this incredible trip; *OOO, LA, and LA!!!* MB

HOW GREAT ARE HAROLD AND MIMI?

Pretty darn great. The fabulous **Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust** has done it again. For the past two years the trust has underwritten the Project's One-On-Ones. Now it is providing an endowment to support one set of One-On-Ones in perpetuity. This \$125,000 grant is the largest single grant in Project history! The fund will be complete in 5 years. And for those of you flush with cash, well, there's always the other set of One-On-Ones to be endowed... SB

RETURN TO SALLY'S APARTMENT

Did you get that coveted guest spot on "The Nanny" or the role of the third wise man in Scranton for the holiday run? Sally is still quasi-homeless and as of November will again be searching for an abode in which to abide. If you are going out of town for a couple of weeks or months and could use someone to keep the dust bunnies out or care for plants and pets, or if you have any other leads on apartment shares etc. please call 333-5252. SB

BRAIN PROGRAM SEEKS HEAD

After our first year with nine kids in the **Smart Partners Program** we've figured out a thing or two and are ready to expand the program to serve 50 kids by January 1999. We are currently in the midst of a search for our first-ever Educational Director who will begin work in September. We need someone with some of the following qualities:

- A degree in education
- A working knowledge of the NYC school system
- Experience with kids aged 9-13
- A working knowledge of Spanish
- Serious administrative chops
- The ability to imitate at least 3 "Simpsons" characters
- A gift for smug newsletter copy

If you know anybody with the right stuff to take on the job, have them fax us a resume at 212-333-5598. We are interviewing now. WR

"BETCHA BY GOLLY WOW YOU'RE THE ONE THAT I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR FOREVER."

These were the opening lyrics to Project board member Pam Tyson and Sean Mudd's LA nuptials. Truer words were never sung or spoken. The real miracle of the union is that "Queen" Pam has met her match on the dance floor. The humble printing process we employ cannot do justice to the regal outfits worn by the wedding party. Suffice it to say that purple and gold figured very prominently. Willie, Jenny, Carol, Bruce, and a very well turned-out **Baby Sophia** were there as well. (For other personal milestones, don't miss **Megabits** on page 4.) WR



Pam Tyson greets Angela Bassett as Baby Sophia awaits the chow.



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IRIS A. BROWN

Occupation: Graphic Designer for the Bernhardt Fudyma Design Group and Official Graphic Designer of The 52nd Street Project. In her spare time she freelances for high-end, well-paying readers of PU.

Hobby: Watching Joe White, her husband and fellow Project volunteer, cook in short shorts.

Favorite thing about the Project: "George (our Production Manager and-resident Desktop Publisher) understands my work and is sensitive to my graphic design needs."

Most Recent Accomplishment: Finally cashed in on 13 years of pro-bono work for the Project by designing the posters for Tim Nelson's "Eye of God," Michaela Murphy's "Something Blue," and Michael Ritchie and Jenny Gersten's Williamstown Theatre Festival.

Credo: "Give it to them fast, cheap, and perfect and make them think it's their idea."

Advice for the Kids: "Don't ever skip art class and don't let anybody tell you to stay within the lines."

On Flyer Bars: "I never feel guilty eating them. I got over that when I got my head straight about Catholicism."



There are two ways to get a box of your favorite Flyer bars: 1) Get Profiled 2) Call 1-800-CANDYBAR. Why wait?

5-1-80-30-57-5

Well, folks, even as the clacking of the keyboard gives birth to this issue of the PU, Sophia Oliva Ochs MacVittie sleeps peacefully in the next office and her dad Bruce saws his own logs on the executive couch as Carol bangs out next year's budget.

The other supersized megabit baby arrival is the fair Juliet Brooke Graham, the brand new daughter of Stephen and Cathy Graham. As any of the Project Teen Shakespeare aficionados will tell you, "She doth teach the torches to burn bright."



Prizes! Prizes! Prizes! Many Project adults will have more objects to shine on their mantel-piece this spring. Fran McDormand and Joel and Ethan Coen each got Oscared while Chuck Cooper got Tonied and Ray Anthony Thomas, Karen Kandel, and Derek McLane were Obied.

And on the diamond exchange: Greg MacPherson and Jane Perlmutter, Hank Meiman and Betsy Foldes, Jane Muddyman and Jonathan Heine, Cecilia Arana and Kevin Grant all got engaged (in pairs, we mean).



Happy Birthday to the Virginia Avenue Project in Los Angeles. They just turned five.