

# Arts & Leisure

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A memorial for the beloved Elizabeth Egbert will focus on her twin professions: Art-making and museum-making

## CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF AN ARTS LEGEND

**"I had the privilege of having her (Elizabeth Egbert) as my mentor and friend for many years ... I am determined, together with the professional team Elizabeth assembled, to fulfill her legacy."**

— Cheryl Adolph, interim director of Staten Island Museum

**W**hen participants speak about Elizabeth Egbert during a memorial celebration at 3 p.m. this afternoon in the Music Hall, they will cite both of her professions: art-making and museum-making.

The late artist and administrator (1945-2014) led the Staten Island Museum through a lively 12 years, a bright stretch in the institution's 133-year history.

While other leaders not only failed to advance the museum's long-planned expansion, but also set it back, Elizabeth (as she was widely known in cultural circles) reignited the city-funded project.

Sadly, the new museum will open its new, \$38 million geothermically cooled and heated home in Building A at the Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden without her.

Many years ago, in 1979, when she arrived in Stapleton directly from a SoHo loft, art-making (not museum work) was her vocation.

She liked to joke that she and her husband abandoned the still-gritty downtown loft scene at exactly the wrong moment, when a modest down payment might have turned them into multi-millionaire loft owners.

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STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE



**Cheryl Adolph is named Staten Island Museum's interim president.**

The chief operating officer of the Staten Island Museum has been named interim president/chief executive officer:

She is Cheryl Adolph, a familiar presence in local cultural circles and a Staten Island Museum employee since 2004. The Stapleton resident succeeds Elizabeth Egbert, who was the museum's leader from 2002 until her death Aug. 30 at age 69.

Board chairman Ralph Branca noted: "Cheryl's hard work and dedication throughout her career

and especially in Elizabeth's absence has kept the Museum moving forward toward its goal of opening Building A. A continuity of leadership is crucial during this important phase of the Museum's growth."

Prior to her employment with the Museum, Ms. Adolph worked for the Staten Island Children's Museum. She is a past president of the Mud Lane Society for the Renaissance of Stapleton and a graduate of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Adolph said "Elizabeth's shoes will be hard to fill," but added she's up to the challenges ahead.

"I had the privilege of having her as my mentor and friend for many years, which prepared me for this transition," she said yesterday. "I am determined, together with the professional team Elizabeth assembled, to fulfill her legacy."

The nearly 134-year-old museum is scheduled to move into new headquarters, Building A at the Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden next year.

## MEMORIAL FOR ELIZABETH EGBERT

*Come celebrate the life of the late Staten Island Museum CEO*

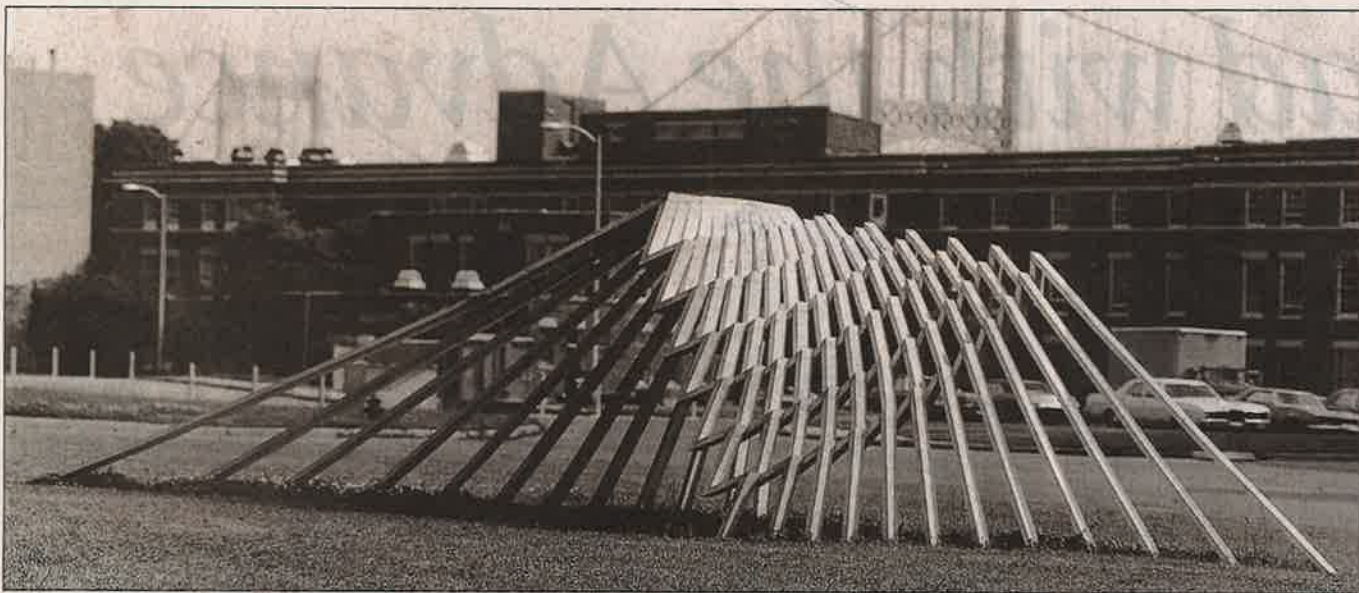
**When:** Today at 3 p.m.

**Where:** The Music Hall at Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden, located at 1000 Richmond Terr., Livingston

**LEFT:** Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Staten Island Museum Chairman Henry Salmon and Elizabeth Egbert at the museum's 2013 groundbreaking ceremony at Snug Harbor. **RIGHT:** Egbert collaborating on a project with Frances Huber in 2004.



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE PHOTOS/JAN SOMMA-HAMMEL



Elizabeth Egbert, *Nautilus*, 1979, yellow cedar. (COURTESY OF THE STATEN ISLAND MUSEUM)

## Legend

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By the early 1980s, she had become involved with some showcases for outdoor sculpture, joining some memorable OIA (Organization of Independent Artists) exhibitions. Her large in-public works of art were elegant, fluid, wooden constructions often equipped with steps, handholds and perches for seating. She liked to combine beauty and utility.

In the mid-1980s, when art-critic-turned-curator John Perreault was busy launching Snug Harbor's Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art as a significant player on the metro art scene, he gave Egbert a large indoor/outdoor exhibition. He was a fan.

Her meticulous drawings and maquettes, or models, were shown indoors while large sculptures were arrayed on the Harbor's lawns, a perfect setting.

Like minimalist music, her complex sculptures were generated from repeated forms. They were usually built out of red oak, tough but flexible, like the sculptor herself. Her "Broadway Starship" (a play sculpture) graced a West Brighton park. Like her other large works, the piece represented a collaboration of basic elements, ingeniously organized.

In the late 1980s, Egbert curated a well-reviewed New York Sculpture Center show. She even showed a worktable, set with heavy-duty sculptor's tools — a revelation for most laymen.

Around the same time, she did a year-long stint as interim curator of the Newhouse Center. She was disappointed when she wasn't offered the permanent position.

Later, her work was shown in other venues and in the American Craft Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park.

In the mid-1990s, she and a colleague/friend, Diane Matyas, won a plush competition for a semi-covered walkway in Arizona. Their design — for a 150-foot-long installation called "Desert Pergola" — included the community (who made decorative tiles) and opened in Mesa in 1997.

Egbert went to work at the Staten Island Museum several years later, as president and chief executive officer. She began negotiating the revival of the long-stalled 30-year-old plan to move the venue into a retrofitted new home on Snug Harbor.

Along the way, she found ways to illuminate nearly all aspects of the museum's idiosyncratic collections, from minerals and meteorites to art, ephemera, science and history.

Despite its indubitable worthiness, the museum's growth plan could have been easily quashed. Elizabeth, diplomatic and charming whenever feasible, but tough and implacable when appropriate, persisted. Funds were earmarked; plans were thrashed out and contracts were signed. Construction got under way and the new museum is set to open in 13 months.



Museum Chairman Henry Salmon, singer Ingrid Michaelson, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, donor Helen Granatelli and Elizabeth Egbert pose in front at the March 2013 groundbreaking ceremony for the new museum space at Snug Harbor Cultural Center.

(STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/JAN SOMMA-HAMMEL)



Ms. Egbert's children, Charlie Michaelson and singer-songwriter Ingrid Michaelson, and her husband, Carl Michaelson. (STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/BILL LYONS)