



Contact:

Rachel Somma

Communications Manager, Staten Island Museum
1000 Richmond Terrace, Staten Island, NY 10301
P: 718.483.7117

RSomma@StatenIslandMuseum.org

For Immediate Release

Staten Island Museum marks a new era at 2018 GALA

Ralph Branca, Debbie-Ann Paige, and Jee Ra to be honored May 18 at the Richmond County Country Club

(Staten Island, NY – April 25, 2018) The Staten Island Museum hold its annual fundraiser on May 18, celebrating a new era in leadership and honorees that epitomize commitment to community. The **honorees** are **Ralph Branca**, Staten Island Museum’s immediate past Board Chairman and CEO of Victory State Bank; historian, educator, and professional genealogist **Debbie-Ann Paige**; and **Jee Ra**, principal of the Korean School of Staten Island and program director of the Korean Community Development Center. Gala co-chairs are Kashif Pervez and Oswaldo Pena. This year’s annual gala is the first under the leadership of recently appointed President and CEO Janice Monger, who began her tenure in September 2017.

The Museum recognizes Ralph Branca for his 5 years as Board Chair during which he ushered the Museum through a major renovation and opening of its flagship state-of-the-art facility at Snug Harbor. Honoree Debbie-Ann Paige’s research on local African American history has contributed to the scholarship for museum exhibitions and greater understanding of collections. Honoree Jee Ra has partnered with the Museum to present an annual Lunar New Year festival drawing over 300 attendees to learn more about Korean culture and connect the Museum to the local Korean community.

“This year’s honorees demonstrate the depth and breadth of investment in culture and history necessary to sustain and enliven the Staten Island Museum and the local community. Ralph Branca, Debbie-Ann Paige, and Jee Ra’s commitment to the Museum and serving the community at large exemplify the kind of service we want to amplify,” stated Staten Island Museum President and CEO Janice Monger.

The Staten Island Museum’s Gala will be held on **Friday, May 18, 2018 at 7:00pm** for the first time at the **Richmond County Country Club**. Guests are invited for an evening of cocktails, dinner, auctions, and live music. Tickets can be purchased online at StatenIslandMuseum.org or by contacting Amanda Straniere at 718.783.7119.

Gala sponsors to date are Bloomberg Philanthropies, Victory State Bank, Con Edison, Dr. Janet Norton, and Stop and Stor.

More About the Honorees



Ralph Branca

Ralph M. Branca is the President and CEO of both Victory State Bank and its holding company, VSB Bancorp, Inc., as well as a founding director and incorporator. Mr. Branca was one of the primary architects in creating Victory State Bank, and he has been instrumental in its growth from a one-branch operation to a \$350 million bank with five branches, all located in Staten Island. Victory State Bank is the Island’s only local commercial bank, serving the business and professional communities on Staten Island.

Additionally, Mr. Branca serves as the Chairman of the Staten Island Economic Development Corporation, Vice Chair of the Friends of Seamen's Society, board member of the Building Industry Association of NYC and Seamen's Society for Family and Friends. Mr. Branca is the Past Chairman of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, Past Chair on the Seamen's Society for Children and Families, Past Chair of the Staten Island Museum, and Past President and Executive Board Member of the Staten Island Boy Scout Council.

Born in Astoria, Queens and graduated from Stuyvesant High School, Mr. Branca received his Bachelor of Science in Physics from the City College of New York (CCNY) and received his Masters of Business Administration in Finance and Investments from Bernard M. Baruch College. He is a member of the Beta Gamma Sigma, an international finance honor society.



Debbie-Ann Paige

Debbie-Ann Paige is a public historian specializing in local African American history, a co-president of the newly chartered Richard B. Dickenson Staten Island Chapter of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS) and professional genealogist. She has worked on numerous local history projects including *In Pursuit of Freedom* with the Brooklyn Historical Society; *From Farm to City* with the Staten Island Museum, the *Louis Napoleon House* as a site with the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to freedom on behalf of the Sandy Ground Historical Society; and the recent City Council street naming of "Samuel A. Browne Way" as the corner of Fairview Avenue and Knox Place in the Castleton Hill section of Staten Island. Debbie-Ann has appeared as a historical interpreter on the Emmy winning show "Secrets of New York," and is working closely with Frederick Douglass Memorial Park to transcribe their historical records. She facilitates public history forums throughout Staten Island focused on the historical perspectives of race relations and lectures as an adjunct at the College of Staten Island.

Additionally, Debbie-Ann is a policy analyst with the Council of State Governments Eastern Regional Conference working with state policymakers on issues relevant to veterans' affairs and staffs the organization's new initiative Council on Communities of Color (CCC). For the past two years, Debbie-Ann has also served as an advisor to the Daniel Society, Center for Law and Justice.

Debbie-Ann holds a BS in Business Studies from Southern New Hampshire University, and both a BA and MA in History from the College of Staten Island, CUNY. She and her husband of 34 years resettled in Staten Island after Ernest retired from the USN 2004. Their son Eric lives in Brazil and daughter English lives on Staten Island. They recently welcomed two sweet kittens (T'Challa and Shuri) into their home.



Jee Ra

Jee Ra was born in South Korea and moved to Argentina with her family when she was twelve years old. After graduating from high school in Buenos Aires, she came to the United States to be a fashion designer. She studied patternmaking at FIT but found that the fashion industry was not for her. Following her marriage, and while raising her children, two daughters and a son, Ms. Ra returned to school and earned her teaching degree from the College of Staten Island. Jee then taught Spanish at Susan E. Wagner High School for fifteen years, retiring in 2016.

As a Korean woman teaching Spanish to American students, Ms. Ra found teaching to be a very rewarding experience, allowing her to communicate with people from all different backgrounds and cultures. For example, the Korean Fan Dance Club, which Ms. Ra formed in 2002, is now comprised of students from all ethnicities performing a traditional Korean dance.

"Being a trilingual person, I feel the responsibility to represent each culture in me in this diverse community where I live," said Jee. "I have especially enjoyed working with the Staten Island Museum. The entire staff has passion and appreciates the importance of learning and sharing the unique and beautiful culture of Korea."

Today, Ms. Ra serves as the principal of the Korean School of Staten Island, is the program director of the Korean Community Development Center, and serves on the advisory board of the Greater Youth Symphony of Staten Island.

Event Committee

This year's event co-chairs are Oswaldo Peña and Kashif Pervez*. Committee members include: Virginia Allen, Samantha Floyd Altmann, Kathryn Aquino, Victoria Cerullo, Arielle Di Ciollo, Kevin Drumgoole, Dina Marie Filippini*, Gustavo Galván, Cara Gordon, Nancy Myers Benbow, Claire Regan*, Yolanda Rudich, Jennifer Straniere, Jaclyn Tacoronte, Arlene Viviano*, and Marilyn Zayfert.

The honorary committee members are: Keisha Amey-Hambric*, Linda Baran, Henryk Behnke & Sterling Gilreath, William Blanco*, David Businelli*, Marie Cole, Patricia Geraghty, Susan Grabel & George Rappaport, Dr. Kerry Kelly & Daniel Jost*, Wesley Kropp, Constance Lane, Robin Lefkowitz, Dr. Michael Mantello*, Carol McCarthy, MaryBeth & James McCarthy, Rim Salem-Melnik & Ray Melnik, Dolores Morris*, Latoya Murphy*, Oswaldo Peña & Gary Reichard*, Gina-Marie Reitano*, Linda & Henry Salmon, Barnett Shepherd & Nick Downen, Barbara & Alan Tepper*, and Patricia Walker & William Geoghegan

** indicates Board Member*

###

About the Staten Island Museum

Founded in 1881 and celebrating its 137th year, the Staten Island Museum engages visitors with interdisciplinary exhibitions and educational programs that explore the dynamic connections between natural science, art, and history based on its diverse collections. Staten Island Museum is owned by the City of New York and benefits from public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. For current exhibits, visit StatenIslandMuseum.org.