### DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL AUTUMN 2009 VOL. XXIII NO. 2

### SAVING THE EMBODIMENT OF HOPE: REV. DR. THOMAS F. PIKE, OUR 2009 LANDMARKS LION



REV. Dr. THOMAS F. PIKE has helped run so many organizations devoted to preserving buildings and landscapes nationwide that when he walks around a place where he has been proactive, people stop him to say

thanks. During a recent stroll through Gramercy Park, for which he currently serves as a Trustee and archivist, Arlene Harrison, head of the Gramercy Park Block Association, came through the glossily painted black iron gates and hugged him. "We love this man, he's very special, he's the real, real deal," she said. "He understands what this park means spiritually to this community."

For four decades, Rev. Pike has served as an Episcopal rector at Manhattan churches while finding countless hours each week to volunteer at city agencies and nonprofits, including the Landmarks Preservation Commission, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Partners for Sacred Places, Preservation League of New York State and Partnership for the Homeless. On October 28, he received HDC's Landmarks Lion Award at The Players, the famous club near his home on Gramercy Park.

On a balmy afternoon in the park a few weeks ago, he was asked to reflect on his influence and quietly replied, "When I look back, I just wish I'd done more." He attributes his lifelong interest in performing good works for historic architecture partly to his childhood in progressive intellectual circles. He grew up in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, where his father, Frederick, managed a newspaper and was friendly with African-American scholars including City College sociologist Kenneth Clark revved up about preserving religious and newspaper owner Alger Adams. In the late 1950's, as an undergraduate at SUNY New Paltz, the future cleric at first studied painting, then switched career tracks as calls for social change swept the United States.

"The fight for civil rights was in full swing and the peace movement was in its early days," he recalled. Soon after he received his Yale divinity degree in 1963, he was at the frontlines of these causes. "I was arrested five times: that gives you a flavor of my life," he said. He spent overnights in jail for alleged offenses committed while protesting workplace discrimination, giving antiwar sermons and leading marches demanding emergency housing for black families left homeless by suspicious fires.

In 1971 he was hired as rector for what is now the Parish of Calvary/St. George's—one church on Gramercy Park, the other on Stuyvesant Square and until his retirement last year he conducted numerous services at the latter. In the 1970's and '80's, as he patiently dealt with repairs on those structures, fellow clergy kept plaintively telling him about their own buildings' hefty maintenance bills and how they were occasionally resorting to demolition. "So I became more and more

buildings," Rev. Pike said. "I began to see the relationship between preservation and social justice." Old churches and synagogues, he added, "enable a community to tell its story honestly, tangibly and graphically, in a way that can't be denied. And the diversity of American religious buildings celebrates the diversity of our whole society. If we erase the buildings, we're rewriting history."

Serving in his numerous pro bono posts and grants-giving roles, he has persuaded other religious leaders to adapt structures for outreach projects including food kitchens, alcohol-abuse treatment programs and temporary housing for the homeless. He has also advocated for the preservation of secular buildings in struggling neighborhoods, like the humble row of freed slaves' homes in Bedford-Stuyvesant now called the Weeksville Heritage Center. "Buildings do not have to be beautiful to have powerful storytelling capacity," Father Pike said. "Preservation is not an elitist pursuit, although it's sometimes thought of as a rich man's sport."

Gratitude for his organizations' support, he added, has come from surprising sources. "I've been out to a Congregationalist church in Brooklyn

Continued on p. 2



Lion fireplace detail: New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company Office Building, Long Island City, Queens. PETER MAUSS/ESTO

### PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

## EDUCATING THE REGULATORS

I AM HONORED to be selected as board president and excited about the year ahead. In my time at HDC, I have come to appreciate the intelligence and effectiveness of our



staff and the passionate involvement of our directors and advisers. Without the hard work of our modestly paid staff and committed board volunteers, HDC would not be able to advise and protect the diverse landmark neighborhoods that rely on us.

Of course, HDC has been impacted by the recent financial unpleasantness. While our budget is lean, all not-for-profits have been finding it difficult to fundraise. My immediate concern is to get us through the recession and strengthen our development capabilities. I have not been shy about asking the board for help in expanding our network of donors and enthusiastically selling tickets to this year's Landmarks Lion event.

Past board president Paul Graziano smartly recognized the 2009 City Council races as an opportunity to focus the candidates and local press on neighborhood preservation issues. HDC's League of Preservation Voters was founded to reach out to community groups in each contested district, identify their concerns about development and character and make these prominent in the election. To do so, staff contacted and surveyed neighbors, groups and candidates, compiled their responses and set up preservation forums across the city. The effort was exhausting, but has raised the profile of our issues and established useful connections to local leaders, media and future elected officials.

My personal interest this year is a campaign of re-education for city agencies. I have been frustrated recently by the loss of significant buildings due to official negligence or inability to recognize the value of old structures. The **Economic Development Corporation** did not act for ten years while the former Corn Exchange Bank in Harlem lost its roof and floor joists. The Department of Buildings has twice allowed faulty underpinning (at adjacent new construction) to compromise historic structures in the downtown block directly across from their offices and then allowed for an emergency demolition. The School Construction Authority determined that C.B.J. Snyder's P.S. 133 in Park Slope was too expensive to renovate, and must be torn down, based on a ridiculous cost-per-square-foot. And don't even get me started on the corrupted review process of the city and the National Guard at Admirals' Row! It is time for HDC to reach out beyond the Landmarks Commission and bring a preservation sensibility to other bureaucracies. I look forward to receiving your help in doing so.

–Leo Blackman



LEO BLACKMAN

Church of the Ascension, Manhattan, where Leo Blackman is the owner's representative for exterior projects and architect for their interior projects.

## LANDMARKS LION TOM PIKE

Continued from p. 1



NEW YORK PRESERVATION ARCHIVE PROJECT Tony Wood and Tom Pike, Landmarks Lions both.

where a young mother living across the street in an apartment building with every window broken came up to me and said, 'Looking out every day and seeing that steeple repaired now—it gives us a sense of peace and a lot of hope.' I'm absolutely convinced that architecture can change lives. I like to quote the philosopher Ernst Bloch, who said that architecture is an embodiment of hope. You only fix the roof of a place when you believe your community will be there for a long, long time.

Every repair is a gesture of commitment

to the future."

Retirement last year has allowed Dr. Pike and his wife, Lys, a former director of the city's Council on the Environment, more time to focus on their own landmark: a clapboarded 1790 farmhouse near Camden, Maine. They spend half the year there when not visiting their three children: Jean, an architect in New York; Nicholas, an assets manager in Boston; and Thomas Jr., an Army lieutenant-colonel about to be deployed on his second stint in Afghanistan.

Receiving a Lion Award, Rev. Pike said, "feels comfortable, but I feel a little unworthy, too, since I know and admire so many past Lions. But I like being identified as a Lion, a kind of radical preservationist. That brings together many threads of my life."

### NEW DIRECTORS AND Advisers Join the HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL BOARDS

THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL is pleased to welcome a number of new members to our Boards of Directors and Advisers. From architects to fundraising consultants to lawyers, this well rounded group of preservationists brings a wide range of expertise and experience to the HDC agenda. We are happy to welcome the following individuals to the boards:

### **DIRECTORS**



Dan Allen is a principal of Cutsogeorge Tooman & Allen Architects PC. Past preservation projects have included Pomander Walk (Thomas Healy, 1921) and the Chapel of

the Sisters at Prospect Cemetery in Jamaica, Queens (architect unknown, 1857). Prior to being an architect, he studied sculpture at The Cooper Union. He resides with his family in Sunnyside Gardens, Queens, and was active in the neighborhood's landmarking efforts.

Andrea Crawford is the chair of Queens Community Board 9, where she has been instrumental in local rezoning campaigns, including the successful efforts to rezone Kew Gardens and Richmond Hill North. As general counsel of the Kew Gardens Improvement Association she has advocated for the designation of a local historic district. She is an attorney in the Medical Litigation Unit at the New York City Health & Hospitals Corporation.



Susan Hopper is trained as a medical anthropologist and has broad experience in healthcare program development and evaluation. She has

worked on both sides of the grant-making process, both as a grants manager and

for foundations and nonprofit organizations of various kinds, and created the Department of Lifelong Learning at The New School. She is an 11-year resident of the Gramercy Park and Union Square neighborhoods of Manhattan.

Richard Moses is an architect and project manager at Superstructures, an architecture, engineering and conservation firm. He was previously on staff at the Landmarks Preservation Commission in the preservation department. He is a founding member of the Lower East Side Preservation Initiative and a member of Manhattan Community Board 6.



Ivan Mrakovcic is a senior architect and director of construction phase at Rand Engineering and Architecture PC. He has extensive experience

working on historic properties and has been a leader in the fight to protect the landmark-designated yet dilapidated Richmond Hill Republican Club. He is the founding president of the Richmond Hill Historical Society and a member of Queens Community Board 9.

### Advisers

Patricia Dolan is a lifelong Queens resident active in many civic organizations throughout the borough. She is the president of the Kew Gardens Hills Civic Association, where for nearly 20 years she has advocated for lower-density zoning text amendments, and is executive vice president of the Queens Civic Congress. She is also the founder and president of the Flushing Meadows Corona Park Conservancy.



Paul Kerzner heads Con Edison's Renaissance Housing Program, which has rehabilitated more than 2,318 housing units throughout New York City and has generated over

\$179 million in private- sector reinvestment. He has spearheaded the successful landmarking efforts in Ridgewood, Queens, and has arranged the planting of more than 20,000 new street trees

writer and as a grantee. She has consulted in western Queens and in Brooklyn. He is the president of both the Greater Ridgewood Restoration Corporation and the Ridgewood Local Development Corporation.

> Chris Neville boasts more than 20 years' experience in historic preservation, architectural restoration and field archeology. He has been involved in diverse interdisciplinary projects on subjects from the Lower East Side to the African Burial Memorial in Lower Manhattan, and he is active in both the Brooklyn Heights Association's and the Municipal Art Society's Landmarks Committees.



Ethel Tyus is a court representative for the Office of the New York City Comptroller. She is a certified mediator and arbitrator and holds a J.D. from the Fordham

University School of Law. She is general counsel to the Crown Heights North Association, president of the Sterling Place Civic Association, and she sits on both the Economic Development and Housing Committees of Brooklyn's Community Board 8.



**Howard Charles** Yourow, S.J.D., has taught and written about American, Comparative, and International Law and Politics as a visiting professor at

Tufts and Harvard Universities and as a guest lecturer throughout Europe. He is currently principal of Ariston Creative UnLtd., and is developing a number of feature film and documentary projects. A Stanford White enthusiast, he chairs the Friends of the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, a White creation, at Bronx Community College.

Editor's Note: HDC is also pleased to announce that the following Advisers have recently been elected to the Board of Directors: Dan Donovan and Virginia Parkhouse.

## STATEN ISLAND'S FORGOTTEN CASTLE: WHO WILL SAVE THE FROST BUILDING?

ON A HILLTOP ON STATEN ISLAND overlooking New York Harbor sits a turreted brick building. Abandoned for decades and ravaged by time, it is affectionately monikered "The Castle." Preservation advocates are seeking to make sure that it is not forgotten.

Officially, "The Castle" is the former Frost Memorial Tower of the S.R. Smith Infirmary (renamed the Staten Island Hospital in 1917). The infirmary, Staten Island's first private hospital, was established in 1861 and occupied many locations, including Dr. Smith's house.

George W. Frost donated a six-acre plot of land in New Brighton for the hospital in 1888 just before his death. He had served as the head doctor of another Staten Island landmark, Sailors' Snug Harbor, in the 1860's. During the 1890 opening celebrations, the hospital was praised as Richmond County's "pride of the island." The centerpiece was the castlelike Frost Memorial Tower.

The tower, a large brick structure with Flemish stepped gable facades and four corner towers, was designed by Alfred E. Barlow and constructed in 1889. The rounded corners are reminiscent of the New York Cancer Hospital constructed on Central Park West in Manhattan in 1885—cornerless rooms with ample air flow and sunlight were thought to reduce germs. Additions to the Frost Building were constructed two years later and designed by Bradford L. Gilbert, the architect of the now-land-marked Young Men's Institute Building at 222 Bowery, Manhattan.

After the hospital moved in 1979 to its present site on Seaview Avenue, a developer purchased the property with plans to create condominiums. The plans fell through and the old hospital campus has since been left in a tangle of legal issues and tax liens. In 1983 and 1991 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held public hearings for the structure, but no decision was ever made. The Frost has been vacant and abandoned for decades now, taking on the appearance of medieval ruins.



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

Frost Building, once the "pride of the island."

Less idyllic, the Fire Department has warned that the Frost is a safety hazard to the entire hospital campus. As the AIA Guide to New York City describes it, the "neo-medieval fantasy ... awaits a white knight." With this in mind, HDC promoted the building as one of our 21 "Unprotected and Under Consideration" sites in 2005.

Recently a new group of concerned Staten Islanders have picked up the gauntlet and are charging to this building's rescue. The Coalition to Save the Castle has been working with its local City Council Member, Kenneth Mitchell, and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the city agency now managing the property, to gain access to Frost in order to conduct a proper structural engineering analysis. Such a report, something which has not yet been done, will be an important step toward planning a future for this historic structure.

# "HDC @ LPC" DOCUMENTS OUR REVIEW OF LANDMARKS APPLICATIONS

HDC HAS RECENTLY created an online archive and e-mail newsletter, "HDC@ LPC," which documents applications to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission for major changes to landmark buildings along with HDC's testimony on each proposal. HDC is the only organization to review and comment on the hundreds of Certificate of Appropriateness applications that come before the commission from all five boroughs. At least twice a month HDC's Public Review Committee examines applications and testifies at public hearings. Through its testimony, HDC consults with the commission about inappropriate applications and acknowledges exceptional design that sensitively treats and responds to historic buildings and districts.

HDC@LPC was developed by HDC adviser George Calderaro. "I always felt that the work of the Public Review Committee was among HDC's most important as well as most unacknowledged work," notes Mr. Calderaro. "In fact, that's why I joined the board. I was so impressed with the diligence of the Public Review Committee at every public hearing when I worked at the Landmarks Commission. HDC is truly the public—and often the only—voice providing thoughtful consideration of many items that other citywide organizations

Continued on p. 6



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUN HDC's Public Review Committee at work.

## "Hey, Mr. Mayor!" A Few Humble Suggestions

REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME of the November election, January 2010 will be an opportunity for a fresh start in City Hall, either as the third term of Mayor Bloomberg or the first term of someone else. The preservation community is already talking about possible legislative agenda items that should be introduced in the new Council cycle, but what about improvements from the Executive Chambers? Shouldn't the next occupant of City Hall's West Wing be given a list of forceful suggestions as well, even if it is the same tenant under a new lease?

With that in mind, here are a few humble suggestions from the Historic Districts Council:

• Install preservation experts in every city agency that has a capital budget, and make them part of the planning process. The Department of Design & Construction and the Parks Department already have active preservation units. Why shouldn't the Department of Housing Preservation & Development, the Buildings Department and the School Construction Authority? New York City owns an enormously rich trove of significant historic resources but is terribly inconsistent in caring for these treasures. For every landmark school building that is meticulously cared for, there are equally significant buildings that are neglected or, much worse, threatened with destructive alterations or demolition.

If every municipal agency responsible for the construction or upkeep of publicly owned physical structures had a historic-preservation division within it that was incorporated into the agency's planning structure, many urban tragedies such as the proposed demolition of P.S. 133 in Brooklyn and Elmhurst Library in Queens might be avoided.

• Create a rational, transparent planning process for New York's historic neighborhoods. The Bloomberg administration has made great strides



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

Preservationists rally for greater funding for LPC.

both in contextually rezoning large swaths of the city and trying to address the paucity of protected landmarks outside Lower Manhattan. However, there is still an enormous amount of work to be done to safeguard New York's historic neighborhoods and significant historic buildings. Unfortunately, over the past few years a real opportunity has been missed that could have helped address this goal.

As part of the required environmental review that accompanies every rezoning, a survey and study of the area's character and historic resources is completed. Preservation efforts, particularly ones that aim to preserve the character of a neighborhood, are most effective when they approach the issue of inappropriate development from several angles. A stronger collaboration between the Department of City Planning and the Landmarks Preservation Commission during the pre-certification process, when an area is being closely examined, is the obvious first step to appropriately protecting vulnerable historic neighborhoods. Such a collaboration has been accomplished to great success in a few areas, such as the Far West Village and West Chelsea, where collateral rezonings and landmark designations resulted in reasonably thoughtful protections for the neighborhood.

In most other areas, however, LPC participation never materialized; and despite appropriate zoning, areas such as Park Slope and Broadway-Flushing are still sadly deficient in the fine-grain protection landmark status brings. If the two agencies were specifically instructed to work on joint plans for neighborhoods, the city would be able to preserve its historic neighborhoods much more effectively.

• Commit the funds for the Landmarks Preservation Commission to do its job effectively. For the past three years, preservationists have successfully rallied first for additional funding for LPC and then to retain that funding. LPC's record of achievement in both designation and regulation since the funding increase of 2006 has been remarkable. Over the past three years, more landmarks have been designated, more permits have been issued, more legal victories have been secured than at any time since 1990.

In order to maintain this level of activity, the Mayor must at the very least commit to fully funding the agency at its current level. We should be in the position of advocating for more positions at the Landmarks Commission, not mounting a rear-guard defense to save the positions it has.

Everyone knows these are hard times, and all city services and expenses are being scrutinized. But as a mayoral candidate once said, LPC is a "small thing that doesn't really have any great impact on the budget...so you could increase Landmarks' budget at the same time you deal with a fiscal crisis... Times when we don't have a lot of money to do things, to buy buildings out of public trust, that's the time you want a strong Landmarks and a well funded one. Landmarks is like your top management and organization, that's where you really want to spend your money. If you've got great people and structures at the top, it filters all the way down."

Those were Michael Bloomberg's thoughts in 2001, and we certainly hope he hasn't changed his mind.

### "HDC@LPC"

Continued from p. 4

aren't aware of and which extend beyond the area of interest for many local communitybased organizations."

Immediately following HDC@LPC's first appearance over the summer, the popular real-estate blog Curbed and the Brooklyn Daily Eagle picked up two projects being considered by LPC that were highlighted. Curbed focused on a proposed rooftop addition in the Ladies' Mile Historic District that was "buried deep within the confines" of the LPC agenda. The blog quoted extensively from HDC's testimony. The Brooklyn Daily Eagle detailed another proposed rooftop addition in its article "It's Back to the Drawing Board for 2 B'klyn Developments," also including extensive references from HDC's testimony that week.

The Public Review Committee of HDC meets on Fridays to review proposals coming before the commission the following Tuesday. Current committee members are Dan Allen, Teri Slater and Christopher London (co-chairs), Penelope Bareau, Leo Blackman, Tom Fenniman, dorris gaines golomb, John Jurayj, Bob Kornfeld Jr. and Jack Taylor. The committee is also often joined by community members from historic districts around the city who are interested in projects affecting their buildings and neighborhoods.

HDC@LPC can be accessed at www.hdc.org/hdc@ lpc as well as by the weekly email newsletter. The site contains testimony dating back to 2005, which can be searched by neighborhood and by historic district.

### RECENT GIFTS AND GRANTS

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS by government, foundations, organizations, companies and Friends of the Historic Districts Council are very much appreciated. Every effort has been made to list donors accurately. Many thanks to those who gave in the period from April 2009 through August 2009:

Government: New York City Council Manhattan Delegation, New York City Councilmember Vincent Gentile, New York City Councilmember Jessica Lappin, New York City Councilmember Rosie Mendez, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Senator Liz Krueger.

Foundations: Joan K. Davidson (The J.M. Kaplan Fund), DJ McManus Foundation, Joan & Alan Ades-Taub Family Foundation, The Kandell Fund, New York Community Trust/ Windie Knowe Fund, Puffin Foundation, Robert W. Wilson Charitable Trust, Sy Syms Foundation, Helen Tucker/ The Gramercy Park Foundation.

Organizations: Atlantic Avenue Railway Tunnel Tour, Auburndale-Bayside Improvement Association, Bay Ridge Conservancy, **Bedford Barrow Commerce** Block Association, Broadway-Flushing Homeowners Association, Brooklyn Heights Association, Carnegie Hill Neighbors, Crown Heights North Association, Defenders of the Historic Upper East Side, Ditmas Park West Neighborhood Association, East 12th Street Block Association, Fifth Avenue Committee, Fort Greene Association, Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance Foundation, Gramercy Park Block Association, Greenwich Village Community Task Force, The Green-Wood Cemetery, The Jackson Heights Garden City Society, Landmark West!, Merchant's House Museum, Midwood Park Homeowners

Association, 93rd Street Beautification Association, Ocean on the Park Preservation Association, Preserve and Protect, Queens Civic Congress, Ridgewood Property Owners & Civic Association, Roosevelt Island Historical Society, St. Mark's Historic Landmark Fund, The Scottish-American Foundation, Senator Street Historic District, SoHo Alliance, Stockholm Street Block Association, Sutton Area Community, Tottenville Historical Society, Westerleigh Improvement Society.

Companies: A. Ottavino Corporation, Acheson Doyle Partners Architects, Adrienne Neff Design Services, Allen Architectural Metals, Alliance Contracting Group of NY, BKSK Architects, Burda Construction Corporation, Cutsogeorge Tooman & Allen, Françoise Bollack Architect, Higgins & Quasebarth, HOK, Jan Hird Pokorny Architects, Joyce Matz Associates, Kevin Wolfe Architect, LandAir Project Resources, Li Saltzman Architects, Mary B. Dierickx Architectural Preservation Consulting, MBLM Productions, Montalbano Initiatives, Page Ayres Cowley Architects, Platt Byard Dovell White Architects, Robert A.M. Stern Architects, SAM Fundraising Solutions, Samuel J. DeSanto & Associates Architects, Solomon Wood Company, Thomas A. Fenniman Architect, Walter B. Melvin Architects, West New York Restoration of CT, William Stivale - Building Conservator, Winter Hill Associates.

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HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

Department of Buildings Commissioner Robert LiMandri speaking at a Monday Morning Coffee Talk.



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL
Reading and celebration for Constance
Rosenblum's new book, "Boulevard
of Dreams," about The Bronx's
Grand Concourse. The event was at
Ursus Books in the Carlyle Hotel.

James Gormley, Paul Graziano, Marian Greene, Carol Greitzer, Ron Gross and Eric Rouda, Mary M. Habstritt and Gerald P. Weinstein, Estelle Haferling, Julia and James Hall, Lee A. Hebner and Kenneth Nassau, Laura Heim and Jeffrey A. Kroessler, Olga Karlovna Heisler, Joseph Hellmann, Isabel Thigpen Hill and David Sweeney, Victoria Hofmo, Marsha Jacobs Hogarth, Sylvia R. Hoisington, Anne and Malcolm Holderness,

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Tunick, Deborah Van Steen, Raymond Vinciguerra, Sandi and Art Viviani, Cynthia C. Wainwright, Arete B. S. and William B. Warren, Annie and Ted Wolff, Katharine B. Wolpe, Kate Wood and David Sprouls, Penny Zahler, Anonymous (1).

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e-mail	Albany, NY 12231.

### DISTRICT LINES

#### In this issue:

p. 1 Saving the Embodiment of Hope: Rev. Dr. Thomas F. Pike, Our 2009 Landmarks Lion

p. 2 President's Column: Educating the Regulators

p. 3 New Directors and Advisers Join the Historic Districts Council Boards

p. 4 Staten Island's Forgotten Castle: Who Will Save the Frost Building?

p. 4 "HDC@LPC" Documents Our Review of Landmarks Applications

p. 5 "Hey, Mr. Mayor!" A Few Humble Suggestions

p. 6 Recent Gifts and Grants



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

Robert LaValva, Carter Craft, Peter Sanford and Terry Walton take questions following the screening of "Street of Ships," a 1982 documentary by Charles Richards chronicling the early efforts to preserve the South Street Seaport area, shown as part of HDC's Fall Series.

### DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE



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