Ben Edwards: Born to Lead
A DAUGHTER’S TRIBUTE
by Shaleah Nyx

My father, Ebenezer Edwards, was born in Trinidad in Victoria Village. He was known for his prolific artistic abilities: he designed the Public Medal of Merit in Trinidad, logos for various companies, and worked throughout the Caribbean as a graphic artist. He was also a militant in the Trinidadian army. While serving, my father’s rare blood type was in high demand and he selflessly traveled extensively throughout the Caribbean donating blood. Upon moving to an arts district in the United States, he settled in Brooklyn where, for the past 20-plus years, he was actively involved in politics and PTAs, showing his interest in educational progress and reform.

On January 11, 2019, Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams issued an official Proclamation honoring Ben Edwards. It read in part:

“On behalf of 2.6 million Brooklynites, I salute Ebenezer Edwards...”

Ben was the only child of a small family. His parents were荚vine and Martin Edwards. He grew up in Maple Street, where he became the president of the Lefferts Manor Association in 1991. As LMA president, my father worked with former Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz and other politicians to advocate for the community. He assisted the NYPD to ensure that officers who were killed in the line of duty did not die in vain. He helped organize rallies and protests for NYPD Betty’s Fall.

My father was known for his unselfishness: he designed the Maple Street park, which my father pulled his car over to rename after him, freeing the driver last. Ever since, he always checked on drivers if they appeared to be sleeping, something I continue to do. He was a first-class expediter who could oil the rusty cogwheels of government bureaucracy and tap the right people to advance this community’s agenda.

And on this there is no quibbling: Edwards’s hard work and leadership in PLG as the long-serving president of the Lefferts Manor Association were as impactful on the quality of life here as that of any elected official.

Edwards led an organization whose core mission was to uphold and defend the one-family-only housing covenant over the two homes that comprise the Lefferts Manor Historic District, a subset of Prospect Lefferts Gardens. The group also orchestrates the popular Prospect Lefferts Gardens House & Garden Tour. The LMA also publishes the Echo.

Edwards’s leadership and influence around the neighborhood has been lasting. He persuaded the Landmarks Preservation Commission to issue advice instead of fines when several homeowners in recent years ran afoul of the historic district’s exterior rehabilitation codes, especially as it related to window replacement.

Working with then Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, funds were found for all of PLG—and not just the Manor—to receive wosunm tree guards throughout the neighborhood.

He managed to get the city to live up to a promise it made years earlier with the installation of the historic Bishop’s Cookbook markers that line the Manor’s blocks. He helped bring landmark status to the stately limestone block on Ocean Avenue near Lincoln Road.

All that energy and know-how ended December 28, 2018, when Edwards succumbed to injuries he had sustained weeks earlier after being struck by a vehicle on Flatbush Avenue, just a quarter of a block away from his Maple Street home. He was 74.

Pia Raymond, vice president of the LMA, is Edwards’s well-prepared successor in both experience and spirit. A lifelong PLG resident who was raised on the same Maple Street block as Edwards and was mentored by him later in life, Raymond has a long background in community engagement. She ran for city council, sits on Community Board 9, and is an entrepreneur. She is also a professor of social work at New York University, as well as a wife and mother.

Buoy and Productive
Markowitz didn’t know my father had died until a reporter called to discuss Edwards’s life of leadership. One could hear the change in Markowitz’s voice in reaction to the news.

“He was very clear in his objectives but always courteous,” he said. “Even his phone manner was polite and respectful. He always returned calls and did it quickly.”

More important, Markowitz said they trusted each other.

“I felt overwhelmingly that he was an ally of mine and together we did the best we could to make Brooklyn and Prospect Lefferts a better place,” Markowitz said. “When I called, he took his calls. He was serious and straight. No gossip or showing the breathing. He was all business.”

Beyond Edwards’s long presidency of the LMA, he served nearly ten years as a board member and most recentest treasurer on CB2, and he was a long-standing member of the 71st Precinct Police Community Council. He had it all and more. While working as an associate broker at Century 21 franchises—earning the real estate chain’s “fast Century Achiever” honor—and living a quiet life with his family on Maple Street. “Mutt and Jeff”

Semi-retired even though he still promotes Brooklyn (and Queens) for the city’s tourist arm—NYC & Company—Markowitz knew Edwards well during his 34 years in elected office, from state senator to borough president.

With his calm reserve, conservative business attire, and soft-spoken demeanor, Edwards was the straight man to the booming baritone of the high-spirited Markowitz.

In fact, Markowitz teasingly referred to the two of them together as “Mutt and Jeff,” after the long-extinct cartoon strip about two hammers. But Markowitz meant it not in jest, but out of respect.

“He was short and tubby like Mutt and Ben was tall and lean like Jeff,” he said. “So not only did I look up to him because he was taller than me, I looked up to him because of his leadership.”

One irony about Edwards’s leadership was that despite his public presence over two and a half decades, he avoided the spotlight, deflected attention from himself, and preferred that others took credit for initiatives he started or backed.

“For a long time, he had the privilege of knowing him.”
An assessing Ben Edwards, essentially characteristically in causal wear, casts an appreciative eye on ticket sales at last year's neighborhood house tour.

During a national wave of police killings of unarmed black men, Pla Raymond and Ben led a “peace and justice” prayer, consisting of light the relationship between the 21st Precinct and the community. Between them is NYPD Officer Daniel Oh.

Ben was active with the organizing for the West Indian Day parade for many years. In 2004, he was greeted by Mayor Michael Bloomberg at a Grand Concourse reception honoring the West Indian community.

Crescencioa Stewart Smith delivered a eulogy at the service celebrating the life of Ben Edwards. She spoke movingly about the life man to her.

He did a lot of things behind the scenes most people will never know about,” she said. “I'm glad I was able to say this man was an awesome force for good before I leave this community.” [Friederick is retiring out of state.]

City Councilman Mathios Eugene, who pushed to Ed- wards's side at the hospital the night of the accident, praised his friend as a “quiet force.”

“He was a quiet and wise man and he treated people with respect no matter the circumstances or who the oppo- nent,” Eugene said.

NYPD Detective Vinny Martino, the community rela- tions officer of the 74th Precinct, told the celebrants that he met Edwards at the start of his career and worked with him when there had been a short-lived LMA civil security task force.

“We spent a lot of nights together,” Martino said. “He taught me how to be of service. I'm proud to say that we became friends.”

“We serve Prospect Lefferts Gardens, in this great city of diversity, where Ben Edwards brought people together and that was an inspiration.”

The obituary program ended on this poignant verse: “...well done, thou good and faithful servant...” from Matthew 25:21.

Echo Lefferts Manor Association

President Pla Raymond
Vice President Vince Lisi
Secretary Roberta Woelfling
Treasurer Mary Butts

Lefferts Manor Association Board Members

MILITARY STREET
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MIDWOOD STREET
Carlene Brathwaite ......... 718-287-6796
Bob Marvin .................. 718-282-8403
Lefferts Manor... milfordprewit t@ aol.com

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