

PLG Loses Three Special Neighbors

Chances are Pearl Cozier, Gary Aigen and Robert Thomason never met.

It must be one of God's little jests that as close as their homes were to one another, they didn't connect. They represented exuberant, well-lived lives where charity, community spirit, love of family, and appreciation for music and the arts were components of their DNA. And they were all neighbors of ours who died in the past year. Whether subtle or overt, their contributions will be long remembered.

Pearl Cozier, 48-Year Sterling I Resident, Dies at 100

Even living to 100 seemed to be too little time to accommodate the highly productive, well lived, and selfless life of Pearl Cozier. She was a devoted and loving wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and a multi-career entrepreneur whose ventures included a retail business, travel agency, beautician, caterer, and work as a cook and a certified nurse's aide.

Pearl was also a lifelong devout Christian who, despite the onset of Alzheimer's, could flawlessly cite scripture even in her final days.

Born Idyllen Pearle Fenton on March 9, 1920 in Petersfield, Westmorland, Jamaica—the fifth of six children—Pearl died May 4, 2020 in Sarah Neuman Nursing Home in Mamaroneck, New York, where she moved to in 2016.

Growing up during the Great Depression, Pearl graduated high school in Jamaica and with the help of a beloved aunt, moved to Harlem near the end of World War II.

She worked for the Defense Department, studied cosmetology, and worked simultaneously as a beautician. Later, she earned a nursing certificate to increase her job skills.

Pearl had enough energy left to avail herself of Harlem's swinging nightlife when the war was over, frequenting many of the era's famous nightclubs and dance halls. She was virtually a regular at the Apollo Theater.

It was during this time that Pearl met Enos I. Cozier. Together they hit the famed dance and jazz halls like the Savoy and Smalls Paradise, dancing to such legendary bands as Lionel Hampton, Duke Ellington and Count Basie orchestras.

Pearl and Enos married in 1947 and bought their first home in 1954 in Brooklyn. They would ultimately raise five children.

In 1961, the family moved to Jamaica and started a clothing and dry goods store but returned to Bed-Stuy in Brooklyn two years later. In 1968, they moved to Sterling Street in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, which was on its way to becoming a busy Caribbean and West Indian enclave.

Pearl and Enos valued education and instilled in their children the importance of hard work in attaining success in life and career. They also sponsored numerous family and friends migrating to the United States, providing them with financial support, housing and guidance.

Pearl's household became the center of activity for a large extended family that gathered around her great cooking. She cooked Jamaican and southern soul classics, which she learned how to prepare during her Harlem years. She also launched a successful catering business that served churches and neighbors.

In 1978, the Coziers retired, and they bought a second home in Florida.

Enos, who worked as a real estate broker, died March 17, 2010.

Pearl is survived by her five children, 16 grandchildren, 25 great grandchildren, one great-great grandchild, a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, and numerous friends.



Gary Aigen, 15-year Midwood St. Resident, Reliable LMA Fundraiser and Art Collector, Suffers Fatal Stroke

Up until COVID-19, one of the saddest examples of misfortune striking good neighbors occurred when a fire destroyed the lovingly restored, meticulously decorated Midwood Street brownstone of Gary and Helen Aigen.

About 15 years ago, the Aigenes were on the eve of moving into their new home when a bucket filled with sawdust self-combusted and destroyed nearly a year's worth of scrupulous and exacting renovation work. Undefeated, they started from square one, taking the restoration to a higher level. Along the way, Gary became an exemplary community cheerleader and two-time house tour participant who worked behind the scenes every year, successfully soliciting donor support for the annual event.

Gary died from a stroke on May 3, 2020. He was 65.

"What happened to him doesn't make sense to me at all," Helen said at the time. "Gary was in excellent health and a checkup about a month before he died had reported that everything was good."

Born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Gary worked his entire career in the financial services industry. He also owned rental property in New Jersey.

He and Helen met on the job. In 1987, he was a manager at Drexel, Burnham, Lambert's database group, when he interviewed Helen and hired her. They were immediately attracted to each other, Helen said. They lived together for 10 years before getting married in 2000.

"The attraction was mutual from the beginning, and everybody, even Gary's boss, knew about us," Helen recalled. "The group was effective and successful, so nobody really cared."

They bought their Midwood manse in 2005 and created a jewel in the neighborhood. But just before they were set to move in, the fire occurred.

"We had to do it all over again," Helen said, describing the cleanup and restoration. "This



house was important to us because in many ways it reflected who we were."

Gary and Helen shared a passion for music and other cultural pursuits. When Gary and Helen met, he was collecting rare American pottery, but over the years his special pride and love became his home stereo system.

They collected paintings and sculptures, attended classical and jazz concerts, and hosted recitals in their home. They also sponsored gatherings of the Audiophile Society. Some of these events were attended by as many as 40 people who came from around the tri-state area.

Gary and Helen were active in the community and worked on the LMA's House Tour Committee, opening their home twice for the annual event.

"Everyone who knew Gary knew how good and generous he was," Helen said. "He touched many people's lives with his kindness and advice."

"We all mourn him because he lived his life according to his own world view: to help anybody who needed it and to support just causes as much as he could."

Besides Helen, Gary is survived by two brothers.

"Generous of heart, brilliant of mind," is carved on his tombstone.

Robert Thomason, Neighborhood Icon Who Co-founded PLGNA, Started Annual House Tour and Biked the World, Dead at 92

Robert Thomason, a social justice and fair housing activist who biked the world—including one five-month jaunt in 1985 from Lefferts Avenue to San Diego—died at 92.

When Thomason and his wife, Jane, moved into Prospect Lefferts Gardens in 1963, he perceived a neighborhood desperate for the "love of a living God" to eliminate the tensions of integration. Those tensions were wrought by devious real estate brokers provoking white flight.

Brokers would call white homeowners advising them to sell immediately lest their housing values declined as the black population grew. Meanwhile, banks redlined the neighborhood, writing loans with unfavorable terms for black homebuyers while refusing to give mortgages to whites.

"The only way a white person could buy a home in the neighborhood was to buy it from the owner," Thomason told the *Echo* in 2017. That was how they were able to buy in 1973 the home on Lefferts 3 where he and Jane originally rented.

Heartbroken by the discrimination in housing and the media's depiction of PLG as a racially troubled enclave, Thomason, an ordained Christian minister who graduated from Yale Divinity School, teamed up with other neighbors to form the Prospect Lefferts Gardens Neighborhood Association and start the annual house tour as a means for people to get to know one another and create a united neighborhood.

Thomason died in November from complications of Lewy Body disease.

"Bob Thomason was the closest to a saint of any person I've ever known," said longtime LMA board member Bob Marvin. "He was an ordained Baptist minister who never had a congregation [in New York], but who considered his calling to be maintaining an integrated community in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, the neighborhood he helped name."

"Bob's religious motivation was very foreign to a confirmed secularist like me, but entirely admirable," Marvin continued. "I'll miss him very much."

Born in the neighborhood now known as Crown Heights, Thomason was the only child of parents who hated President Franklin Roosevelt. Despite his parents' politics, Thomason said he grew up liberal and approached life with a natural sense of social justice and equality.

He served in the Army during WWII in the Panama Canal, earned a liberal arts degree from the University of North Carolina and went to Yale Divinity School where he became an ordained minister.

He and Jane met and married in Springfield, Ohio, where she taught in a country school, and he worked in a settlement house.

Back in New York, he earned a library science degree at Columbia University, beginning a 20-year career as a librarian at the Hewlett Woodmere Public Library in Nassau County. Except for a handful of horrifically bad weather days, he biked the 40 miles round-trip between Lefferts 3 and the library every day.

Confident that he had the physical conditioning and stamina, he retired at the age of 57 with the goal of spending his retirement years biking the world.

In a pre-GPS world without cellphones, Thomason fulfilled his dream: every two-to-three years he logged hundreds of miles in China, France, Japan (three times), Germany (three times), Austria, Scandinavia, and America, coast-to-coast.

He went on his last trip at 89 years old, just a "weekend quickie" to Baltimore.

Former Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz said he admired Thomason's commitment to the neighborhood and enjoyed attending talks he gave about his bike treks.

"He was a wonderful and active man who, needless to say, participated in PLGNA all those years and improved the neighborhood," Markowitz said. "But I enjoyed his bike talks: He visited every corner of the globe and saw more places than I've even dreamt about visiting. He was a very, very unique person to say the least."

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Cecilia Cortez

Background: Born in Ecuador; "proud" mother of an Army Ranger; 27-year resident of Ditmas Park West; 35-year public school special needs teacher to deaf and hard of hearing students (retired); community organizer; family advocate; and United Federation of Teachers Chapter Leader.

Policy Priorities: End homelessness; bring more senior citizen services to district; affordable healthcare and housing; and restore sanitation budget

Agenda Statement: "I will fight for affordable housing and healthcare, work for high quality schools for our kids, restore the better garbage cleanup and ensure the community has safe and clean streets. Rank me #1 on June 22nd."



Kenya Handy-Hilliard

Background: Wife, mother of two, lifelong resident of PLG; 14-year public servant with budgetary, legislative, investigative and community organizing skills; worked on Capitol Hill with the Congressional Black

Caucus on immigration reform; partnered with local officials and the Justice Department on stop-and-frisk; and worked on staff of Rep. Yvette Clarke in D.C.

Policy Priorities: Affordable housing, reform zoning and community development

Agenda Statement: "I am the person elected officials, your community stakeholders, and your advocates call to get something done in government. I strongly believe that government should be a service to people, in partnership with people. It should be transparent, accessible and responsive and help people make the best decisions for their lives and their families."

Key Endorsements: District Council 37, Run for Something, The Jewish Vote



Harriet L. Hines

Background: Physically disabled from slip-and-fall accident at a bus stop; community activist; single mom of three; president of Parade Grounds Friends of Parks; member of the Baptist Church of the Redeemer; co-vice president of PSI39; elected member of the Democratic County Committee and 43-year district resident.

Policy Priorities: Affordable housing, quality education, handicap access, criminal justice reform, small business opportunity and civil rights protection

Agenda Statement: "We're witnessing a district that is currently being overridden by predatory development. Capitalists have received support from our community board and elected officials, a political machine that can decide our fate with the stroke of a pen. I am fighting for accessibility and inclusivity."



Victor Jordan

Background: Guyanese-born lawyer (passing the New York State Bar Examination 1999), economist and mathematics teacher; first vice chair of Community Board 17 which includes East Flatbush; previously served as chair of CBI7's Land Use Committee; ran five times for the State Assembly.

Policy Priorities: Wants rezoning that conforms to district's traditional building heights and architecture; wants to end street gang recruitment and gun violence through mentoring

Agenda Statement: "Every child deserves a first-class education regardless of their zip code, their race or their parents' income. Social justice is near and dear to my heart. Every night I go to sleep, I pray that my boys do not become the next Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner or George Floyd."

• ELECTION 2021 •

Crowded Field Vies to Succeed Mathieu Eugene

Love him or hate him, there's one thing you can say about outgoing city councilman of the 40th District, Mathieu Eugene: he knows how to draw a crowd. Eugene, who is a candidate to be the next Brooklyn Borough President, has a crowd of nearly a dozen Democratic Party primary candidates aiming to fill the seat he has occupied for almost 14 years.

Here are sketches of the major contenders (those with media platforms or phone numbers).

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Early voting is available until June 20; to find your early voting site and hours go to findmypollsite.vote.nyc or call 311. Primary Day is June 22. You must be a registered party member to vote in the primaries.

Agenda Statement: "Given all this knowledge and experience in education, economics and law, I believe that I'm well prepared to represent the people that live in the 40th NYC Council District," he told *Caribbean Life*. "I am running for the NYC Council because I believe that I have the training, experience and commitment to the people in the district to do my very best to bring the desperately needed resources to the community."



Kenneth D. Lee

Background: Lifelong Brooklyn resident; board member of Black Lives Matter Brooklyn, helping to work in partnership with community groups for neighborhood betterment; as Medgar Evers College student, represented nearly 1,500 students and successfully secured \$70,000 in grants during the COVID-19 pandemic and organized the student body against school's mismanagement.

Policy Priorities: Better funding for CUNY including subsidized student MetroCards; K-12 school infrastructure investment; affordable housing; Pressure MTA and DOT to commit to speed and reliability improvements as quality-of-life goals and install more protected bike lanes

Agenda Statement: "Every child deserves a first-class education regardless of their zip code, their race or their parents' income. Social justice is near and dear to my heart. Every night I go to sleep, I pray that my boys do not become the next Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner or George Floyd."

Key Endorsements: BLM of New York; I199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East; NY State Senator John Liu; and former NYC Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito



Rita C. Joseph

Background: Mother of four sons; career educator; community activist and "proud" union member.

Policy Priorities: Education, affordable housing, social justice, and police brutality

Agenda Statement: "Every child deserves a first-class education regardless of their zip code, their race or their parents' income. Social justice is near and dear to my heart. Every night I go to sleep, I pray that my boys do not become the next Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner or George Floyd."

Key Endorsements: BLM of New York; I199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East; NY State Senator John Liu; and former NYC Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito



Vivia Morgan

Background: Community service chair for the 43rd Assembly Kings County Committee; Chair for Community Board 9 Parks, Recreation and Culture; owner of C. Morgan Construction Inc., a MWBE Company; Shop Steward for Local 79 Laborers union; licensed real estate salesperson; registered building department filing representa-

Agenda Statement: "Every child deserves a first-class education regardless of their zip code, their race or their parents' income. Social justice is near and dear to my heart. Every night I go to sleep, I pray that my boys do not become the next Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner or George Floyd."

tive; expeditor, and a notary public. Co-founder (with son) of Friends of Wingate Park, a youth empowerment group that addresses such issues as gun and gang violence. Helped secure funding for the renovation of Wingate Park Playgrounds.

Policy Priorities: Criminal justice reform, community safety, improved education, youth empowerment, eradication of homelessness, elder care, and small business development

Agenda Statement: "I'm committed to a new way of leadership. Together we will tackle gang and gun violence with criminal justice reform. Community safety with improved police relations."

Key Endorsements: LiUNA! NY



Blake Morris

Background: Husband, father of a daughter; commercial and retail litigator for nearly 30 years; 20-year resident of Ditmas Park; his family traces their Brooklyn roots back to the 1870s; and previously ran for state senate.

Policy Priorities: Affordable housing, quality healthcare, quality education

Agenda Statement: "When we moved into Ditmas Park in 2000, it was affordable. It was a much different place back then. But a lot of change has come to the district. As a city council member, I want to make Flatbush a lot more affordable and sustainable; make it a place where people can raise their families and have a life that you'd love to live."

Key Endorsements: Voters for Animal Rights



Josue Pierre

Background: Emigrated from Haiti with his parents at five years old; attended NYC public schools and earned an accounting and finance degree at Baruch College; became a senior financial analyst for the City Comptroller's Office, responsible for investing NYC pension fund in affordable housing; financed thousands of affordable housing units from the Bronx to East New York and is a founding member of the Shirley Chisholm Democratic Club.

Policy Priorities: Affordable housing, taxing the rich

Agenda Statement: "We need leadership that understands the issues, but also understands how to take the necessary actions to make it happen for us."

Key Endorsements: Communication Workers of America District I, United Federation of Teachers, Teamsters Local 237, Churches United for Fair Housing, LGBTQ+ Victory Fund, Shirley Chisholm Democratic Club, and Lambda Independent Democrats of Brooklyn



Edwin K. Raymond

Background: Whistle-blowing police lieutenant who exposed arrest quotas and racism in NYPD, leading to Emmy-award winning Hulu documentary; co-founder of Preparing Leaders of Tomorrow (PLOT), which mentors and advises vulnerable youth; son of Haitian immigrants and lifelong East Flatbush resident.

Policy Priorities: Criminal justice reform; housing, education, and mental health care

Agenda Statement: "After becoming a whistleblower, nearly 400 people told me 'Young man, you need to run for office; you have the integrity and courage that we've been missing.' I respectfully declined. But two years ago, I came to see that this is a natural calling."

Key Endorsements: Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, Voters for Animal Rights, Progressive Action TV, American Institute of Architects

Robert Thomason (continued from page 1)

Not only did Thomason keep a large number of journals, notebooks, maps and photos from his trips, he kept scrapbooks of newspaper articles about PLG's integration struggles.

One 1971 article recounts how brokers' sales tactics had reached such a frenzy that the New York secretary of state ordered a moratorium on broker solicitations in PLG. Any broker violating the order could lose their license for life.

Thomason's files have been bequeathed to the Brooklyn Room at the main branch of the Brooklyn Library.

A few years ago, Thomason said he was proud that PLG no longer suffers the racial friction of the past. But gentrification was no answer.

"I think gentrification is a big problem," he said. "Every day my neighbors and I are getting letters offering to buy our homes and some of my neighbors are selling. I tell them, don't sell! But some are and are going back to the Caribbean or the American South. Others are being priced out.

"But I'm not selling, and neither should you!"

In addition to Jane, Bob leaves two daughters, Katherine and Carolyn; granddaughter Melanie; and two great granddaughters, Anya and Kailyn.

After serving 20 of his 28 years in the NYPD as the Community Relations Officer at the 71st Precinct, Vinny Martinos, shown here uncharacteristically out of uniform, retired last fall.

He and his family were feted by his brothers in blue at the station house on Empire Boulevard. Martinos and the Lefferts Manor Association had developed a unique working relationship over the years, largely built on the friendship between Martinos and Ben Edwards, the late president of the LMA.

The Martinos clan is, left to right, daughter Sydney; Vinny; wife Christine; and daughter Madison.



For a stronger community, join the



Dues are \$25 per household or \$15 per senior citizen household

Dues cover January through December 2021.

Make checks payable to Lefferts Manor Association.

Send payment with your name, address and contact info to:

Kendall Christiansen, 151 Maple St., Brooklyn, NY 11225, or drop in the mail slot at 151 Maple St.

Online purchase also available at: <https://lefferts-manor-association.square.site> (link also posted on leffertsmanor.org)

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