

# **Memoirs: Betsy Dubovsky, executive director of the Staten Island Foundation**

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For the Staten Island Advance

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Betsy Dubovsky was in elementary school when she decided she'd devote her life to others.

She never wavered from her aspiration: She's been serving as a social worker in a number of agencies, as a fundraiser and public relations professional, a board management volunteer, a director of management services, and a director of another agency, all of which helped her toward her current position at The Staten Island Foundation.

Betsy has certainly earned the title she has designated herself: A not-for-profit lifer.

## **When did you come to Staten Island?**

Our family came to Staten Island from Brooklyn when my brother Marty and I were 3 years old. It was a return home for my mother, a native of the Huguenot, and a relocation for my Brooklynite father.

## **What college did you attend? What was your major and what degrees did you obtain?**

I have an honorary doctorate from College of Staten Island that entitles me to be called "Dr.," a master's degree in social work from Rutgers University and from Columbia University School of Business. I have certificates in nonprofit management leadership and coaching.

## **What was your first job? Where have you worked since?**

I began as a social worker and director of social work at Eger (Lutheran Homes and Services Inc.). After that, I worked as the first social worker of the Staten Island Visiting Nurse Association. I then served at the Community Agency for Senior Citizens as a fundraiser and public relations professional and at the YMCA as a board management volunteer for 16 years. I worked for the CEO of the American Red Cross of Greater New York as the director of management services and as director of the Staten Island ARC Chapter.

**What is your position now? When did you obtain it?**

This October, will be my 20th year as the first executive director of the Staten Island Foundation, where I manage its operations as a \$78 million philanthropic organization, and its \$3 million in annual giving for program results that benefit the least advantaged Staten Island people in education, health, arts and community services.

**What is the best things about your job?**

Right now, the foundation is working to help organize the Staten Island community around the success of our children. Our work from the past seven years has been bringing a collective impact approach for systems change in addressing root causes of serious community problems in health and education, with an equity lens. It's widely agreed that complex problems require a collective leadership and that the leadership of single dominant personalities is not only outmoded but it just doesn't cut it. We have many self-aware leaders with collaborative spirit in Staten Island and my hope is to see and help many more! My valued partners in the work include Laura Jean Watters, program officer, and Marie Payne, grants manager, along with our board of directors, chaired by Allan Weissglass.

**Have you ever won an Award or been recognized?**

In 20 years, I have been fortunate to receive so many awards from our nonprofits and schools on behalf of the work/support of the foundation that they fill a couple of rooms.

**Who do you admire?**

I admire our local nonprofit and community leaders whose passion and dedication to the people they serve inspires and strengthens my commitment to their success

**What do you think of what is going on in the world today?**

It's heartbreaking when we have hate and so much polarizing self-interest. I am blessed to be in an extraordinary position doing work every day to help change the world from within the circle of control of The Staten Island Foundation where we bring people together and empower them to learn to generate community solutions. We support the collaborative culture here and have heard many times that this borough leads the city in this way of working to improve lives.

**What is the one thing you would change?**

None of us succeeds alone. I think we all know how challenging life can be and how important it is to have people who care about us and believe in us. Unfortunately, it will come as a surprise to many people who read this that there are many children in Staten Island who are desperately in need of the single caring adult who will be their lifeline to a successful life. Too many of these children are poor, black and Latino. The disparities are alarming. Imagine if we had a community that recognized with individual open hearts and minds that when we help others succeed, we succeed too. We are all connected. We need to ask ourselves what we can do to help and we need to act.

**What are your plans for the future?**

I have to find more and different ways to serve, including as a grandmother.

**GET TO KNOW BETSY**

**Her perfect day:** "A perfect day for her would be in a beautiful place filled with calm beauty and a feeling of connection to nature."

**She's a twin:** Her brother's name is Marty.

Her work: The work that she has done over the last seven years she describes as "the most difficult work I ever loved."

**Her family:** "This August, my husband, Bill, and I are married for 43 years. Bill is an educator at heart and teaches at CSI and Wagner College's Schools of Business. ... We are so proud of our children, Neal and his wife Kristin, a native of Canada, and Allison and her husband Stefano, a native of Italy. Neal and Kristen are expecting our first grandchild at the end of September."

**What makes her happy:** I love dancing, walking our Greenbelt trails and doing Pilates and yoga.

**What she wants you to see:** The newly re-designed Staten Island Foundation [website](#), which tells nonprofits what our work is, how to reach us and how to apply for funding.