

THE REHEARSAL CLUB Founded 1913

Alumnae Newsletter

"To tell the story of The Rehearsal Club, to preserve its legacy and inspire the future generations of aspiring artists."



2008 NYC Street Fair

*Pictured left to right: Judith Curcio, Judy Thelan, Judy Jenson, Rise Clemmer & in front, Terry Baughan
Thank you to Judith Curcio & Terry Baughan for all their hard work in putting together our 1st cookbook in time for the NY Street Fair. Thank you to **everyone** – and especially those who braved the rain – for supporting our first fund-raising effort!*

GIVING THANKS!

With turkey time around the corner, we give thanks for the growth our fledgling club has seen this past year. We have by-laws to live by, a website to keep us connected and recently gained marker recognition (see donation from Broadway Cares & tribute from the Episcopal Guild). We hope each of you are enjoying the connection we are attempting to create. If you're in the New York area, we look forward to seeing you at our next . . .

GENERAL MEETING - Sunday, November 23rd

3:00 pm Registration & meeting (social afterwards)

Metro Baptist Church

410 West 40th St. (west of 9th Ave.)

Along with the business of the biz (like elections & collecting dues), we have a guest speaker (pg. 2) and a surprise performance in store. Join us. Help us organize our efforts with a focus on the Centennial in 2013. Be an active part of our growth. And don't forget to bring winter donations to the church!

EPISCOPAL ACTORS GUILD to carve "The Rehearsal Club"

among the names of other New York theatrical organizations currently displayed on the oak beam of their main hall. Special thanks to Mart Hulswitt, their now-retired Executive Director, for this dedication. It's a first step in gaining awareness for us. We encourage you to support them whenever and wherever you can!



**BROADWAY CARES
& DANCERS OVER 40**
Lend their SUPPORT



Broadway Cares, through the not-for-profit organization, Dancers Over 40, has generously donated \$1,000 in support of our fledgling efforts to continue growing together. THANK YOU BOTH!

HOLIDAY PARTY - December 7, 2008

Featuring: Radio City Ballet Corps

PREVENTION – THE BEST MEDICINE

Knowledge is power – and Linda is ready to share her wealth with us at our next meeting!

Linda Rose Iennaco - LRIDANCEFITNESS@AOL.COM

We're pleased to announce that personal trainer Linda Rose Iennaco will be speaking at our November 23 meeting. *Where's your pain? Hips, back, knees? To move comfortably and feel better able to talk with your healthcare professionals, you need some factual, anatomical information. Knowing how the muscles and joints of your feet, knees, hips, shoulders, back and neck interact will help you function pain-free to dance through your life. Linda Rose Iennaco has been training trainers, teaching Functional Anatomy at the college level for 14 years, wellness coaching the general public and focusing on older adults and those with special needs for 16 . . . and dancing her whole life!* We look forward to Linda's advice!

Credentials:

LRI Dance & Fitness, Inc. owner/instructor

MMC Certified Personal Trainer/Group Instructor.

Consultant: J.Pagano's 15 minute/Total Body Workout (1/08) DVD; 15 minute/Abs Workout (1/09) DVD.

Most recent performing credit: Enchanted - Disney film (11/08)



DUES ARE DUE!



Hard to believe, but it's been over a year since we organized forces, passed by-laws and started building our dues-paying membership.

Your \$10 is primarily helping us sustain our website and provide a base from which we have been able to "brand" our organization with pins and t-shirts using Terry Baughan's exclusive logo design. We encourage you to visit our website often, send us your news and/or pictures, get involved and show your support with whatever it is we're attempting to make happen. None of us are doing this alone. We need and appreciate your help, suggestions and support.

Bring your check payable to the Rehearsal Club to the next meeting or send to:

TERRY BAUGHAN - 23 West 73rd Street #606A, NYC, 10023

ELECTIONS

We are looking to fill the following positions:

Chair

Vice-Chair

Recording Secretary

Corresponding Secretary

Newsletter Editor

Webmaster

Plus "active" Steering Committee members

If interested, submit your name to Kathy Conry – kathleenconry@cavtel.net



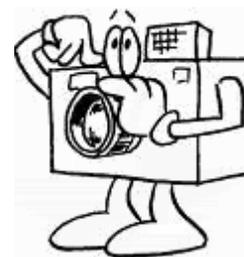
WINTER COAT DRIVE

The NYC homeless desperately need your gently worn and mostly HUGE men's pants, sweaters, coats & shoes.
Contact: Kathy Conry, Metro Baptist Church, Clothing Closet Coordinator - kathleenconry@cavtel.net



EXCLUSIVE REHEARSAL CLUB HEADSHOT BARGAIN

New Yorkers: Ron Rinaldi has agreed to a major discount if we can organize a full day shoot for his studio. His usual fee is \$695 plus \$150 for hair & make-up – which usually runs about \$1,000 investment when all is said and done. HOWEVER, if we get at least 3 women to commit, he is offering us \$350 for a full session and \$100 for hair & make-up. My girlfriend, Joanne & I are committed. If anyone else among our RC gals is interested in obtaining new color, digital headshots from one of the best in the biz, contact Denise at deboocks@aol.com. We hope to schedule sometime in November.



Our great virtue lies in our ability to correct our mistakes and to continually make a new person of ourselves. – Wang Yang-Ming

BOOK PROJECTS

The House on West 53rd Street (working title) is the first full history of the Rehearsal Club ever written, covering its humble but prestigious beginnings in Progressive-Era New York to its closing during the fiscally devastated 1970s.

Kathleen (Kathy) Vestuto's ongoing documentary research for the book has thus far taken her to nine onsite archival resources, and has given her the opportunity to personally interview nearly 30 individuals. She is especially grateful to the 20 former Club residents – from the 1930s through the '70s – who have to date generously shared their stories. If you haven't yet spoken with Kathy, she looks forward to including you in this remarkable and loving adventure. Email katves@aol.com. All interviewees will sign a standard interview release guaranteeing their approval of interview material prior to submission for publication. A percentage of any profits generated by the book will go to The Actors Fund.

The Rehearsal Club: Untold Stories of the Real Stage Door is also still in the works. This collection of personal memoirs written by former residents in their own voice and arranged by decade (1930s-1970s) requires submitting copyrighted material, *retaining your individual rights*, as part of this collection. Each contributing author will share equally among all contributing authors upon publication.

Inquiries or full, copyrighted stories (*preferably no longer than twenty pages*) should be submitted to **Lee Kelley** at msleekelley@msn.com or **Denise Pence** at deboocks@aol.com. If you cannot, for whatever reason, submit a story written and copyrighted in your own words, we encourage you to contact Kathy Vestuto. Preserving our individual histories is the main goal.



MADD
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JOEL'S STORY

Marion O'Connor Ragsdale ©2008

Anyone who thinks the mother of a victim of a drunk driver doesn't need acting ability isn't paying attention.

First, that phone call. Ours came at noon on a lovely Sunday in October; I'd just returned from church. Three of my children were in the house, watching me, wide-eyed and mute, as I listened in disbelief to the doctor on the other end of the call. We were in our Philadelphia suburban home, he was across the continent in a California hospital, saying terrible things like, "had to operate", "massive brain injury", "hematoma" and "deep coma". I tried to take notes -- an accident on the highway; Joel in passenger's seat; friend Colette driving, suffered minor neck injury. Other driver, nineteen year old inebriated male, not hurt.

My daughter Amy took the pen from my hand.

It was thirty years ago, but the bewildered expressions on the faces of my youngest children, Julia and David, are as vivid in my mind as if it had happened yesterday. They had lost their father three months earlier. Now their oldest brother was in danger of dying? For their sakes, I pretended it was not all that serious; I acted as if I was under control. I would not let them see me cry.

It was the first of many acts to follow. In reality, my insides were forming a knot that would last more than a dozen years while Joel lay motionless in a Bucks County, Pa. nursing facility, completely unresponsive, kept alive by three cans of Ensure each day. It's called PVS. It is a nightmare – and a crime.

Think grief, guilt, anger, frustration, confusion, loneliness, helplessness; but hope, too, and promises of a 'cure' (they didn't work), faith that there would be a miracle (there wasn't) and finally, resignation that nothing would change for Joel. Nothing left, then, but the dreaded visits to see him that way week after week, all the time acting the part of a strong mom. I prayed God would take him.

Finally, the decision to let him go -- you can't imagine the range and depth of that feeling, unless you've been on stage in the supporting role yourself.

I never knew why Collete waited five years to send me Joel's things. I'd moved back to New York City by then; when the box arrived, I shoved it, unopened, under a floor-length tablecloth and phoned Alice. Alice Middleton Anderson and I go way back, to our days at the Rehearsal Club. When I told her the reason for my call, she said, "Put on the kettle; I'll be right there. We'll have a cup of tea and open it." Add gratitude for the loving support of good friends to that list of emotions.

For more info: Mothers Against Drunk Driving:

http://support.madd.org/site/R?i=Hnd6P4_y3UeYk3qlgotxQ.

Get Local: <http://support.madd.org/site/R?i=k808QuGp9cbF152v2t-ZLA>

Marion O'Connor Ragsdale lived at the Rehearsal Club from 1947 until she married in 1951. She has remained lifelong friends with a number of her fellow Club girls, many of whom gave her a bridal shower at the Club and attended her wedding. Marion is a writer, retired Montessori teacher and past spokesperson for Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). The widow of mechanical engineer Martin Ragsdale, Marion has six children and thirteen grandchildren. She currently tutors English as a second language to adults and produces readings of her plays.



UNBEATABLE
A BOLD NEW MUSICAL
EVERY MOMENT COUNTS



"THE SHOW MUST GO ON.....sometimes...." –

Unbeatable Meets Hurricane Ike

Houston, TX Sept 2008 - by Kathy Conry

After a successful run in Phoenix, AZ, our cast of the original musical, "Unbeatable", was looking forward to another uneventful, and equally successful month in Houston at the Stages Repertory Theatre. None of us counted on, however, the whimsical alteration of Hurricane Ike's path north through Galveston Bay and into Houston. My three roles, a breast cancer surgeon, a breast cancer patient and a high-powered business woman were put on hold while we fought to survive this uncontrollable force of nature.

None of us had any idea how much devastation would result from a category 2 storm. We managed to make it thru the night of the storm but once we realized we had no power or water and knew it might be weeks before it was restored, our theatre decided to move us to safer housing. Until power could be restored, I transferred to my cousin's home in Austin, Texas, while many other cast members either returned home or went to San Antonio for several days. We really didn't know what to expect upon our return.

Ultimately, our theatre sustained more damage than other places, leaving us in limbo with no power. That's when the Hobby Center generously offered us Zilkah Hall -- FREE OF CHARGE! We were to perform in rep with 'ALWAYS, PATSY CLINE', the other Stages Rep's current offering. We did an amazing turn over there and played to bigger and bigger audiences every night until we closed. On October 7th, we finally returned to our theater to play one final week.

With all the losses of life, property and jobs in the area, somehow doing a show -- at first -- seemed a bit trivial. But as the audiences slowly returned, we realized that even with natural disasters, people continue to need to be entertained and challenged and moved. I feel our show was able to at least start that process again in Houston thanks to so many generous people. Our show DID go on and I am confident, Houston will also GO on . . . and what . . . "get out of show business?????" In any event, it's good to be home.

Actress, director and choreographer Kathleen (Kathy) Conry (RC 1966) is Honorary Chair of the Rehearsal Club alumni group.



Speaking of “show biz,” don’t forget our goal! **CENTENNIAL 2013!** Seeds have been planted for The Rehearsal Club gals to participate in *Equity’s 100th Anniversary* which just happens to fall in *SAME YEAR as The Rehearsal Club! 2013!* Stay tuned to see if there might be a way for YOU to participate in YOUR regional arena.

In Memoriam
GAIL ROBINSON
1946-2008
by Kathy Vestuto

We were saddened to learn of the untimely death of Metropolitan Opera star and former Rehearsal Club resident Gail Robinson on Sunday, October 19, in Lexington, KY. Gail, who suffered from complications due to rheumatoid arthritis, was 62 years old.

In 1966, at age 19, Gail won the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and became a member of the Met’s roster in 1970. Her big break came four months later when she substituted for an ailing Roberta Peters in a Met touring production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* opposite Placido Domingo – at age 24! For more than fifteen years, Gail made over 200 appearances with the Met, including Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and Juliette in *Roméo et Juliette* among many other leading roles. She also starred in several opera films in Germany in the 1980s.

Health problems led to her early retirement in 1987, but she was in demand as a guest artist in opera and concert. She also served on the Met’s Young Artist Development Program and the National Council Auditions for more than 12 years. Gail’s love for nurturing young performers led to her position as chair of the vocal department of the University of Kentucky, from which she retired some months ago.

Gail is survived by her husband, writer Henno Lohmeyer; her mother, two children and three grandchildren. The University of Kentucky will host a gala celebration of Gail’s career at the Lexington Opera House in March 2009.

Club girls from the late 1960s still fondly recall hearing Gail’s beautiful soprano voice floating throughout the residence from the practice room. You can hear Gail and her astounding, seemingly effortless command of coloratura cadenza in a concert rendition of “Ah, je veux vivre” (“I want to live in this dream...”), Juliette’s aria from Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2IPRcyMqoA>

For more information: *Opera News*:

<http://www.metoperafamily.org/operanews/news/pressrelease.aspx?id=1545>; *New York Times*:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/21/arts/music/21robinson.html?ref=arts>; *Lexington Herald-*

Leader: <http://www.kentucky.com/219/story/561321.html>



OBAMA MAMA

by Sara Louise Lazarus (RC '70-'73)

Grassroots Correspondent for HuffPost's OffTheBus.

Making "the Great Schlep" Saturday to Tampa, I chatted with my New Jersey cab driver on the way to the airport. He was a well-spoken British black man, and although he was well aware of how popular Barack Obama is in Europe, he seemed highly skeptical that the American public would embrace and elect this black candidate. I did get a sense that he was surprised and elated to have a white, middle-aged female passenger who was flying all the way to Florida to work for Obama.

The three men at the car rental company in Tampa were also intrigued by the fact I was down here to volunteer. I asked them for whom they were voting, and one happily pointed to my Obama button and said, "I'm with you. My wife and I couldn't get off from work to vote early but will go to the polls Tuesday." The other two were silent. On my way to the car, I spoke with the young man in the elevator with me. He was from Ohio, and had voted early there before heading on his vacation. He told me that McCain had been at a rally near his home last week, and his mother was thrilled to have been seen on TV standing behind him. I said, "So you're a McCain supporter?" He said, "Yes, but I don't think he'll win."

I chose to go to Tampa because my friend Kim, who plays the opera diva in the national tour of Phantom Of The Opera here, is as obsessed with the election as I am, and invited me down to stay with her and work. I've been volunteering in Pennsylvania often over the last few months, and know that lots of volunteers are being bused from New York and New Jersey to PA, so after calling Florida, I thought they were more in need of people to help out. I also intend to spend time with relatives here.

My first decision was where to go to in town to make the biggest difference. With early voting continuing in some counties through Sunday, there are several groups actively at work. The local Democrats, focusing on candidates all the way down the ballot, are canvassing, making calls, and organizing people to drive people to the polls. The Obama campaign is sending groups out to work door-to-door, and others are phonebanking. But on my first day, I chose to help out at a statewide voter hotline.

I found it to be a challenging, frustrating, and ultimately very satisfying job. I liked the fact that we were committed to helping all people, regardless of party affiliation, to be able to vote.

Far too many people called asking if they could still register. Although in a few states they can register up until Election Day, in Florida registration ended October 6. I had to break them the bad news that they couldn't vote, and urged them to register immediately so they could be eligible for the next election.

Many aspects of early voting are confusing in Florida. Recently, Republican Governor Charlie Crist extended the days and times, which was a welcome decision, but has created a bit of chaos. Some counties continued into Sunday, others ended Saturday. Hours varied per county. One good thing--the state has made it easy for early voters by allowing them to vote in any designated polling place in their county, as opposed to only one polling location for their traditional vote on Election Day.

With so many different options, voters are understandably confused. So was I--new at advising them--and overwhelmed by all the rules and regulations I'd had to absorb in a short time. I wasn't of much help to Jeannette from Jacksonville, who wanted to know where she could vote on Sunday. I hadn't understood that she could vote early in any of her county polling places, and spent far too long looking for an exact location for her. Ultimately, I had to have her call her County Supervisor, and hope she was able to get through.

I also couldn't do much for at least three women who were either out of state at the moment, or had to leave early Monday for last-minute business trips. If they didn't have Sunday voting in their counties, and couldn't get back to Florida on Monday or Tuesday, they were out of luck. Some mistakenly thought they could still send in absentee ballots, but the mail in option is no longer available by now.

Others had moved and wanted to vote in their new counties but didn't have picture ID there yet. They were going to have to find time to go to their old counties and polling places. Some could, some couldn't and would not be able to vote. Very frustrating.

The way I was really of assistance was with absentee ballots. I was able to assure Sheila in St. Augustine that even though she had to leave Monday, since she already had her absentee ballot, she could entrust it to a friend to bring to the Supervisor of Elections through 7pm Tuesday. She was relieved, and energized to find a friend who would help her out. I was also happy to be able to tell others who wanted to vote on Monday that they could go to their county Supervisor of Elections and get and hand in an absentee ballot there.

Sometimes calls were lost, sometimes after I'd talked with people for a while we were suddenly cut off. Computers with important information would freeze. Most people were patient and grateful, but a few were angry when we couldn't tell them what they wanted to hear.

Sunday, I made phone calls at Obama's downtown headquarters. They really need more volunteers to counter the large number of McCain supporters going door to door, and passing out flyers like crazy. There were about five of us on the phones. One of my calls was to Mary, a Hillary supporter who is still undecided. She let me talk with her for over fifteen minutes, and I have no idea if our conversation affected her choice at all. Essentially, she hopes that if Obama loses, Hillary can run again in 2012. She was clear that she wouldn't make up her mind until she's in the voting booth on Tuesday.

Overall, the feeling in Florida is that this will be a tight race here. The polls continue to be close. In Tampa, all I saw yesterday in my time circling downtown lost, in my car--I've never been here before and all the one-way streets can be maddening--were McCain/Palin signs. The tv is filled with dueling ads from both candidates. The night doorman at our hotel is constantly watching Fox news.

Most Obama workers I've spoken with are proud of the kind of campaign he's waged--calm, confident, and issue-focused, in stark contrast to what they see as the angry, erratic attacks of the McCain campaign.

Obama Tampa campaign headquarters downtown, at the phone bank on Sunday, November 2. I'm in the second row, center, on the phone.



Obama people feel they are part of an enormous movement for positive change. I see absolutely no over-confidence or complacency. Most are nervous, not sleeping, exhausted after months of work, and eager for it to finally be over.

As for me, I was climbing hills getting out the vote in Scranton, PA in 2004. When we started home around 5pm, all the national polls and pundits were declaring that Kerry would win. We were elated. In our car, the only coverage we could get was three separate stations broadcasting Sean Hannity. He was bereft, saying it didn't look good, but urging all voters out West that there was still time to turn the tide. But by the time I got home to my husband and son in New Jersey, George Bush had called the press in to the White House to demonstrate his confidence, and the results coming in were beginning to turn in his favor.

I know what it is to think your candidate is winning, and have your hopes dashed. All I can do at this moment, like everyone else deeply involved in this election, is to feel the knot in my stomach, continue to work... and wait.

No one has ever progressed to greatness and goodness but through great mistakes. – Frederick W. Robertson