



The New York City Bridge Centennial Commission

June 23, 2008 - Spotlights

It's been said that no one notices our infrastructure until it fails. Having spent two decades in New York City government I can attest to the fact that outside of engineers and contractors there's very little constituency for our public works.

Until the crises of the 1980s (Williamsburg Bridge shutdown, FDR collapse, Brooklyn Bridge cable snap, etc.) our bridges took a back seat to schools, police, health, and social services. While I'm not saying that we should set aside these needs for infrastructure repair, we must realize that paying too little attention to our physical structures ultimately leads to emergency demands at a very high cost that robs from all other needs. Simply put, we either pay now, or pay a lot more later.

This has been the genesis of my interest in celebrating the centennials of our bridges. Instead of waiting for a disaster, let's celebrate our spans and educate the public about these lifelines to city transport. A better educated public will hopefully lead to that constituency for upkeep of our infrastructure.

I am joined by many city lovers in this undertaking - engineers, historians, civic leaders but I would be remiss not to mention the two leading founders of the New York City Bridge Centennial Commission (NYCBCC) - Judy and Barry Schneider, the legendary upper East Side community leaders and advocates. They were the impetus for beginning a centennial effort for the Queensboro Bridge and provide the guidance and hard work necessary to make our commission a success. The NYCBCC is a 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit corporation.

We now have a wonderful chance to express our commitment to city works as a half-dozen of New York City's bridges turn 100 years old in the next two years. Educational programs, media events, galas and other activities are planned. To commemorate each bridge, a 3" bronze medallion with a relief of the bridge is being minted. We will also be having a cast made to develop models of the statues, Miss Brooklyn and Miss Manhattan, which used to stand at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge. We hope to have full-sized models restored to the bridge in time for its centennial. The six bridges and their centennial years are:

- * Borden Avenue Bridge 2008
- * University Heights Bridge 2008
- * Pelham Bay Bridge 2008
- * Queensboro Bridge 2009
- * Manhattan Bridge 2009
- * Madison Avenue Bridge 2010

For the two major bridges, the Queensboro and Manhattan Bridges, we plan large, week-long celebrations including bridge-lighting spectaculars, a parade of antique cars, band concerts, a film festival, NYC & Company banners and audio-visual presentations.

New York City is the owner of these magnificent structures and we appreciate the cooperation and

assistance we've received from the Mayor's Office, the New York City Department of Transportation and the Parks Department. Our partners include the borough presidents of Queens, Brooklyn, The Bronx and Manhattan. Our founding members include the American Council of Engineering Companies of New York, the General Contractors' Association and La Guardia Community College. We are joined by Charter Members Kiewit, HAKS and URS.

Please join us in these celebrations. For the most part they will be free and open to the public. As a not-for-profit corporation, however, we rely on the generous contributions of the organizations and individuals who have joined us. Please become a Friend of the New York City Bridge Centennial Commission by making a \$100 donation to NYCBCC, 611 Broadway, Suite 415, New York, NY 10012 or visit us at our website, www.nycbridges100.org.

Samuel Schwartz, P.E., is a board member of the ACEC New York/Metropolitan Region and is president and CEO of Sam Schwartz Engineering.

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