

FUND FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

2011 SLOAN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARDS





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WINNERS

SUSAN W. DALMAS

RAMON M. GONZALEZ

HENRY D. PERAHIA

ELVA RODRIGUEZ

GABRIEL TAUSSIG

EMMANUEL THINGUE



For 38 years the Fund for the City of New York's Public Service Awards Program has honored outstanding civil servants whose work performance and commitment to the public transcend not merely the ordinary but the extraordinary—day after day and year after year. In honoring these winners, we also acknowledge the contributions of the many thousands of dedicated public servants who, with integrity and devotion, perform the work that keeps this complex city running.

This year's winners, and the 246 winners from previous years, were selected from among more than 250,000 eligible workers in the mayoral agencies, the Transit and Housing Authorities, the Health and Hospitals Corporation, The City University of New York, district attorneys' offices and the public libraries.

Winners come from all levels and ranks of New York City's government.

Sloan Public Service Award Winners demonstrate some or all of the following: extraordinary service delivered with ingenuity, energy and compassion; responsiveness to public needs by cutting through red tape or developing more effective methods of service delivery; outstanding and reliable performance both under the pressures of daily routine and in times of crisis; willingness to take risks, if that is what is needed, to improve services or correct abuses or inequities; the ability to adapt to change and provide a continued high standard of service to the public and upholding the public interest amidst competing interests, pressures and demands.

The Fund for the City of New York is grateful to the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for its support of this program for the past 26 years.

2011 SLOAN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD WINNERS



“To Susan, nothing is impossible—she has a level of dedication and passion for her work that is rarely matched.”

SUSAN W. DALMAS

Director of Adult Literacy Programs, Queens Library

Susan Dalmás has made a career of helping people learn to speak and read English, with more than 25 years of experience in adult learning, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), civics learning, curriculum development, professional development and teaching. From her roots as a teacher in the Philippines and the United States, Susan has risen to her position as Director of Adult Literacy Programs at Queens Library, the largest library-based literacy program in the nation.

Ms. Dalmás oversees a wide array of free programming with more than 6,000 learners a year. Programs include adult literacy, family literacy, ESOL, health literacy, computer literacy and support for disconnected youth. The breadth of these programs is a testament not only to Ms. Dalmás's skill in expanding and managing existing services but also to her ability to create new ones.

According to Diana Chapin, Executive Director of the Queens Library Foundation, since joining the library in 1989, "Susan has worked tirelessly to develop new and innovative programs for adult learners that are recognized and imitated by libraries throughout the U.S." Even more remarkable is that Ms. Dalmás has expanded the Library's offerings in the face of significant budgetary constraints. "This woman is the energizer bunny," says former Queens Library Chief Operating Officer Maureen O'Connor.

Ms. Dalmás has become a sought-after expert in her field. The real measure of her success, however, is the effect her program has on its participants. One former student, who couldn't speak English when she came to America, puts it best when she says simply, "It changed my life."



“What he has achieved at Middle School 223 makes real the vision of public education.”

RAMON M. GONZALEZ

Principal, MS 223, the Lab School of Finance and Technology, the Bronx

Ramon Gonzalez has raised the bar for middle school education, demonstrating how innovative programming that provides a wide range of opportunities for disadvantaged students can yield remarkable academic achievement. In 1995 Mr. Gonzalez joined the New York City school system as a school teacher and soon developed strong ideas about how a middle school should be run. He saw his chance when he was offered the opportunity to be founding principal at Middle School 223 and transform what was one of the most dangerous and academically struggling schools in the city. Through his vision, the Lab School of Finance and Technology was born.

The school provides hands on, real world learning opportunities in technology, personal finance and the arts, but most important to Mr. Gonzalez is the school's underlying focus on literacy. Each classroom has its own library. Mr. Gonzalez has incorporated the community in his efforts through The Community

Reading Initiative, which has instituted lending libraries at local bodegas. He also runs a longstanding monthly 'Principal's Book Club' with his students. His efforts have dramatically turned around literacy rates at the school.

Others have tried to recruit Mr. Gonzalez for higher leadership positions in the City's public school system, but he believes his work at MS 223 is not yet finished. "I love this job because every day we get a chance to change lives," he says. Mr. Gonzalez is now looking to expand his school to include grades 9 through 12 and hopes eventually to establish the City's first public boarding school.



*“His mindset is to build for
the ages.”*

HENRY D. PERAHIA

Chief Bridge Officer, New York City Department of Transportation

Henry Perahia has spent nearly three decades as a highly regarded engineer, revered for his technical acumen and problem solving ability. As Chief Bridge Officer, a position he has held since 1999, Mr. Perahia is responsible for the planning and administration of all aspects of design, construction and maintenance of approximately 850 City-owned bridges, tunnels, and culverts.

In 1988, more than 65 of the New York City's bridges were reported to be substandard. Today, the number is four—and each is currently under repair. Mr. Perahia implemented programs that have led to the significant reduction in the number of ailing structures. Though he prefers to share credit for the ambitious bridge rehabilitation program, Wilbur Chapman, former Commissioner of DOT, differs, saying: “The success of that initiative was solely the result of the dedication, intelligence and management skills of Henry Perahia.”

According to Russell Holcomb, Deputy Chief Engineer, Bridge Maintenance, Inspection & Operations, Mr. Perahia is even tempered and thorough, though he adds, “Among the few things that upset him is when someone suggests a quick fix that will become someone else's problem down the road. He possesses a long term look on his work. His mindset is to build for the ages.”

When asked which bridge is his favorite, Mr. Perahia demurs. While he greatly admires the structure and beauty of the Brooklyn Bridge, he insists that “all the bridges—they are all my children.”



*“Elva epitomizes the
delivery of community health
services at their best.”*

ELVA RODRIGUEZ

Women's Health Nurse Practitioner, Segundo Ruiz Belvis Diagnostic and Treatment Center, HHC

Elva Rodriguez epitomizes what it means to deliver the best in community health care. For more than 23 years, she has provided nursing services and been an integral part of the Segundo Ruiz Belvis Diagnostic and Treatment Center, often being the person who turns on the lights and the last to leave.

Growing up in the projects, Ms. Rodriguez knew she wanted to be a nurse since she was 14 years old. In 1987 she joined the Center and began a long career that continues today. As an Ob/Gyn certified nurse practitioner, she provides direct patient care and counseling, assisting patients with a range of issues including family planning, obstetrical and gynecological services. She often serves as a confidante and friend to her patients, helping them through difficult circumstances. "My heart is in patient care," Ms. Rodriguez explains.

Her care goes beyond patients' bedsides, however, as she continually works to improve the Center's standards and processes. Her ingenuity is a quality especially prized in resource-challenged neighborhood health centers like Belvis and she has played a key role in improving systems and implementing standards that have raised the bar for care at the Center. As Health and Hospitals Corporation Chief of Staff Joe Schick says, "Using resources in a new way, thinking outside the box, and pulling teams together on a moment's notice and on a shoestring budget is an Elva-specialty, and getting the job done is her trademark."



“Gabe is a walking think-tank—the best resource on administrative law in the city.”

GABRIEL TAUSSIG

Division Chief, Administrative Law Division, New York City Law Department

Gabriel Taussig has developed a distinguished reputation in the public and private sector as a renowned litigator and mentor. He joined the Law Department in 1974 and now heads the Administrative Law Division, overseeing a wide array of cases that are as diverse as the city. From the defense of approvals for the biggest private development projects to the enforcement of building and fire safety laws to the regulation of restaurants, nightclubs, taxicabs, commercial waste haulers, and street activities, his cases range from easily resolved small matters to major cases that make headlines.

He remembers early on, “several experienced lawyers advised me to work for the City for a few years and then move on.” He came to the realization, however, that other career options could not compare. He says, “What other job could give me the chance to tackle the legal challenges of dealing with a TB outbreak, a building that was built twelve stories too high,

whether bloggers on the internet are to be considered journalists entitled to NYPD press passes, or how to make sure that catastrophes like the Happyland Fire don’t happen again?”

In his many years of service to the City, Mr. Taussig has demonstrated qualities that make him special—decency, experience, intelligence, adaptability to change, devotion to the public interest, respect for the law and for the rights of the regulated community and an appreciation for the need to balance creative thinking and risk-taking with caution. “He’s everyone’s favorite lawyer,” says one attorney with the City. Mr. Taussig’s counsel has played a significant part in shaping countless programs and policies that yield better outcomes for every citizen of this city.



“Emmanuel is a Renaissance man whose ability to transform public space is one reason why New York has great parks and a green future.”

EMMANUEL THINGUE

Senior Designer, Brooklyn Team, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation

Emmanuel Thingue has changed the landscape of the city through his elegant and thoughtful designs for many of its signature public parks. In 1990 he joined what was, at the time, a new in-house design program at the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). Twenty years later, he still loves being able to design a park from beginning to end. When asked how he would describe his signature look, he says, “I try to feel how it would be to live in the space.”

Mr. Thingue is unparalleled in his ability to work with communities to make the most of his technical skill and design aesthetic to create both beautiful and functional spaces. He designs two to three parks per year and uses his vast creativity even when dealing with small spaces. “His work has a signature,” explains David Carlson, Deputy Chief of Design at DPR, “whether a spray shower, wall or other ornamentation—his creative detailing is contemporary, playful and beautiful.”

As he did the first time he walked through the broken lot on South Oxford Street in Brooklyn, Mr. Thingue must often look beyond spaces, often strewn with rubble and weeds, to envision the parks they will become. Parks are practical urban amenities. “Urbanites don’t have backyards,” explains Mr. Thingue. More than that, his designs lift the imagination beyond the grid patterns and bricks of surrounding streets. The fact that thousands of residents and visitors have made his parks destination spots in the city is a testament to his vision and ability.



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Credits:

Kathryn Weinstein, *Design*

JoJo Whilden, *Photography*

Panoramic Group, *Printing*