

Mayor: As Good a Group As Any Half-Dozen of City's Best Honored With Sloan Awards for Service

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AND THE WINNERS ARE



The Chief-Leader/Michel Friang

AND THE WINNERS ARE: The Sloan Public Service Award winners, from left to right: Traffic Manager Cheryl Hodge, Director of Nursing Stanlee Richards, Assistant Commissioner for Waste Management Phillip Gleason, Director of Payments Linda Pantages, Managing Librarian Jeanine Thomas-Cross and Deputy Director of Facilities Joseph Lazarus.

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By DAVID SIMS |

City employees from every aspect of government, from a “guru of landfill engineering” to a librarian and a traffic supervisor, were honored at the Sloan Public Service Awards May 8, which pay tribute to six city workers who exemplify municipal service.

The awards, held annually at the Cooper Union by the Fund for the City of New York, come with cash prizes of \$10,000. Mayor Bloomberg, noting that this would be the final ceremony he presided over, said he was proud to be “part of the 280,000 people who work together to make this city what it is.”

Struggles to Stay Ahead

Joseph Lazarus, a Deputy Director of Facilities at the Department of Education, oversees 50 public schools in 30 buildings in upper Manhattan, making sure they run smoothly and keeping in constant contact with staff, from Principals to Janitors.

“You deal with all different emergencies. Every day is different on this job; nothing’s the same,” he said. “The average age of these buildings is 80 years old, so things break down. It’s like owning a house, just a really big one. Every day something’s breaking. Every day you think you’re ahead of the game, you’re behind the game.”

Mr. Lazarus has worked in city schools for 14 years, starting at the bottom as a Cleaner. He’s now working to make schools more energy-

efficient to reduce electricity use 30 percent by 2017.

He also ran hurricane shelters on the Upper West Side during Sandy last November, taking in residents evacuated from lower ground in Harlem and near the crane that collapsed. "Everyone did a fantastic job," he said.

An Oasis With Books

Jeanine Thomas-Cross, the Managing Librarian at the Mott Haven Branch in The Bronx, has worked for the libraries since 1981 and has helped turn her branch, located in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods, into a central resource for the community.

"It's a community space," she said. "We have a lot of men's shelters and domestic-violence shelters, a lot of drug rehab, so we have a lot of people who come in who need assistance, whether it's job training or schools or they need drug-treatment books or places to go, homeless shelters."

The job can be stressful, she admitted, but she relishes the challenge. "I knew it was going to be challenging," she said. "I knew the neighborhood was going to be challenging, but I love the neighborhood. People know me as I walk down the street and say hello."

The library is so popular that people line up two hours before it opens, every day from Monday to Saturday. Ms. Thomas-Cross has worked at various locations around the city, but this is her final stop, she said. "I'm happy where I am. That's where I'm going to retire; I'm not going anywhere."

Knowing How to Delegate

Stanlee Richards, Director of Nursing at Coler-Goldwater Hospital on Roosevelt Island, is another longtime city employee who has worked her way up the ranks, starting as a Nurse's Aide 45 years ago.

A retired Army Reservist, Ms. Richards is in charge of more than 200 employees and 27 hospital or nursing units. Delegation is key to keeping everything in order, she said.

"It can be stressful, but you have to be organized and know how to manage," she said. "The important thing is to be a good listener and communicate well. It makes your job easier. If you communicate well to your leadership people, you have no problems."

Phillip Gleason, the Assistant Commissioner of Waste Management Engineering, is responsible for all of the city's landfills, dealing with 12,000 tons of refuse every day. His job requires intricate knowledge of reams of regulations surrounding the disposal and transport of waste, made even harder by his desire to minimize any impact on nearby city residents.

She Unclogs Streets

Cheryl Hodge, a Traffic Manager in the Police Department, has 25 years of experience and commands 365 agents and is renowned for her encyclopedic knowledge of the city streets. She first gained recognition for her work after Sept. 11, working 14-hour days for six months to clear paths around the wreckage.

Linda Pantages, the Director of Payments in the Department of Youth and Community Development's contracts division, provides funding to more than 1,300 community-based organizations that provide youth and family services. She has worked for DYCD for more than 30 years and received praise for her objectivity, willingness to help, and in-depth knowledge of government accounting rules.

The city's employees are "as good a group as anybody's ever put together," the Mayor said in his speech, although he noted that for the 11th straight year he had been denied an award.

"We could change the city law again and run for a fourth term, but no, I'm not gonna do that," he joked. "Hopefully the next administration does an even better job...I plan to live here for the rest of my life, so I'll always have a vested interest."

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