

## BIG TOWN BIG HEART



Volunteer Rochelle Sherreff (left) with Janice Hohenstein, one of Project Open's founders. (Left) Project Open participants head out for a group trip to Fairway Market.

# Project Open builds

# community



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**L**incoln Towers, a community of eight co-ops and approximately 11,000 residents located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, is much more than a series of buildings. The 41-year-old cooperative, which encompasses 20 acres of land along West End Avenue, understands the concept of community.

One example of this is Project Open, which was founded in 1991 by activists Janice Hohenstein, a former president of the Lincoln Towers Tenant's Association who headed the negotiation committee during Lincoln Towers' conversion from a rental property to a cooperative in 1987, and Selma Arnold, who died three years ago at the age of 96, having devoted her life to social justice as a lawyer. The non-profit was created to provide services to help residents, especially over the age of 55, live in comfort and dignity in their homes at Lincoln Towers.

Twenty-two years later, Project Open is thriving. It serves as a testament to the two strong

women who founded it. Subsidized mainly by contributions from residents, co-op boards and fundraisers, the initiative has a number of loyal volunteers and two social workers who are noted as the heart of the association.

"People avail themselves of the services whether they are 50 years old or 101 years old," says Rochelle Sherreff, who started working with the program over 13 years ago and has been a resident of Lincoln Towers since 1968. "I got involved in the mid 1990s. When we moved our mother from Ohio to New York, I was referred to Marilyn Ferber, the social worker at Project Open. I found Ms. Ferber to be very helpful, compassionate and knowledgeable about programs and facilities in New York. When I was made aware of the initiative for the elderly at Project Open, I decided that when I was available, I would volunteer."

So when Sherreff, an English teacher for 25 years at a high school in Manhattan, decided to stop teaching, she put her energy into the non-profit. Her first project, as a representative for Project Open's Advisory Committee, was to help develop more exciting

programs for the community.

"There are trips to places like the Bronx Botanical Garden, the Brooklyn Museum and Naguchi Gardens in Queens," Sherreff says. "Lunches are included at some of New York's most interesting restaurants. The last four New Year's Eves, we have organized an early dinner at a local restaurant so people don't need to be alone."

Other popular activities include laughter yoga, a class taught by Jonathan Applefield, a certified laughter yoga leader and resident of Lincoln Towers. Project Open also provides meditation, art and exercise classes and weekly bridge meet-ups. Additionally, its drama group presented "It's a Matter of Life and Death!" in June.

And then there's the well-attended monthly Greek classics class. "The teacher is brilliant, enthusiastic and enjoys teaching the 30 to 50 residents of Lincoln Towers who participate in the discussion," Sherreff says.

"Project Open continues to have new and diverse activities, which keep our elderly residents young," Hohenstein adds.

Its services, which are either

free or easily affordable, include counseling and referrals for older adults and their children; escorts to doctor's appointments; weekly blood pressure testing; and assistance in securing home care or long-term care. A free weekly bus trip to Fairway Market at 125th Street in Manhattan is also provided to Lincoln Towers' residents — plus, participants get a 10% discount on purchases.

The non-profit also gets younger residents in the community involved. For example, one high school student is helping with the computer work as part of her community service requirement.

"The younger people have been especially interested in our shredding and electronic recycling initiatives," says Sherreff, who says Project Open hires a shredding truck that comes to Lincoln Towers once a year. It

charges a small fee: \$10 for a cartload of paper. The bonus? It's right after tax time. The initiative has also installed textile recycling bins for items like clothing, towels and blankets.

Reminiscing about the days when she traveled, Hohenstein says people would ask her where she lived. "When I told them, 'Lincoln Towers in Manhattan,' they always knew about us. It's like being the president of a small town. We are not a closed society."

Sherreff says the initiative just keeps getting better and better. "How fortunate Lincoln Towers is to have Project Open as part of its community. And how lucky I am to be a part of Project Open."

For more information, call (212) 721-8708 or visit [projectopenlincolntowers.org](http://projectopenlincolntowers.org)

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