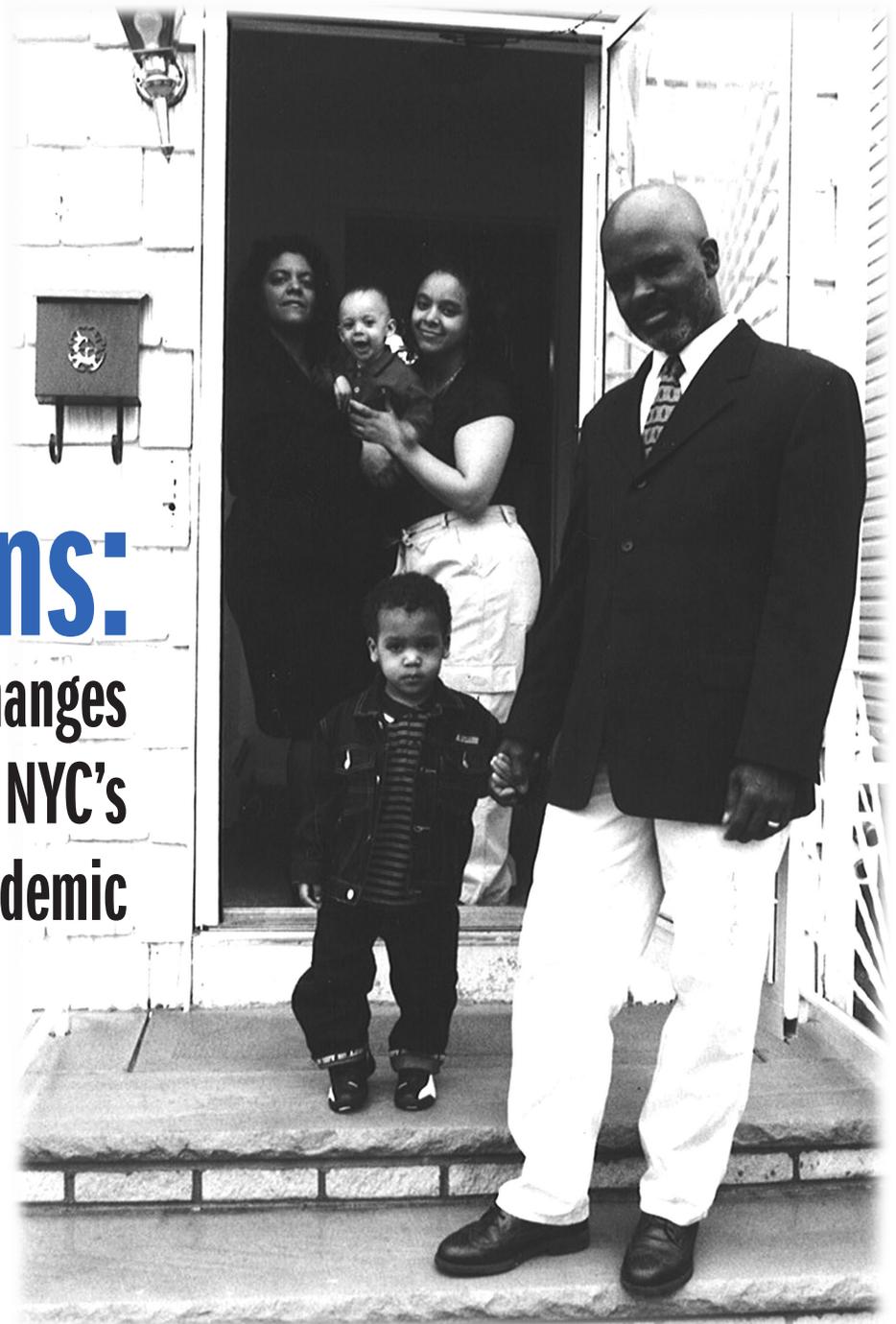


# Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Winter 2011

## **Solutions:** Smart Policy Changes Can Stem NYC's Homeless Epidemic



# On Homeless Policy, Andrew Cuomo Wrote the Book

On January 1st, Andrew Cuomo took office while 40,000 homeless New Yorkers, including nearly 16,000 children, will bed down in New York City's shelter system. Thousands more homeless men and women sleep in our freezing streets.

Homelessness in New York City has reached the highest levels since the Great Depression, a crisis that is the result of the recession, New York's chronic lack of affordable housing, and years of failed policy decisions by the city and state. But Governor Cuomo can reverse this tide of destitution by reinstating the proven, cost-effective solutions he himself laid out in a groundbreaking report during another period of rising and seemingly intractable homelessness.

Eighteen years ago, the Governor-elect served as Chairman of a commission – now referred to as the “Cuomo Commission” – set up to study the homelessness crisis during Mayor David Dinkins' administration. His landmark report laid out much of what has become widely-accepted wisdom of homeless policy. Cuomo's report helped close New York's mass-scale “congregate” shelters, which bedded as many as 1,000 people together in cramped, unsanitary, and often dangerous conditions. Cuomo also boldly argued that moving the homeless

into stable, permanent, and supportive housing could effectively reduce the homeless population – and potentially save taxpayer money.

The dirty secret of homelessness policy is that we know what works. Dozens of studies since the Cuomo Commission, plus the experience of cities across the country, have proven Cuomo right: by transitioning homeless Americans into housing that they can afford and giving them the support and the services they need, hundreds of thousands have successfully rebuilt their lives.

Unfortunately, New York's former Governors have too often ignored Cuomo's tried-and-true recommendations. Governors Pataki, Spitzer, and Paterson all abdicated the state's critical and legally-mandated job of ensuring the effectiveness of New York City's homelessness policy. Each looked the other way as Mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg moved away from Cuomo's proven findings in favor of failed ideas that have exacerbated homelessness and simultaneously wasted taxpayer dollars.

Under Mayor Bloomberg, New York City ended the longstanding and remarkably successful practice of giving homeless families priority for scarce federal housing support (“Section 8 vouchers”) and for apartments in New York's large public housing system. Since the 1980s, tens of thousands of formerly homeless families and individuals had used these two routes to successfully transition out of city shelters and into permanent homes.

Instead, the Bloomberg administration closed off priority access to federal housing programs in favor of “Advantage,” a city-financed program of short-term rental subsidies with unrealistic, one-size-fits-all time limits and onerous requirements that disqualify more than four-fifths of the current homeless

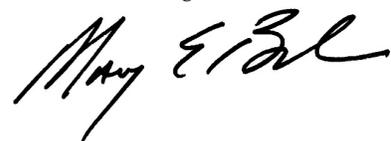
population – including many gainfully employed homeless families and individuals. New data on the Advantage program this December revealed that over one-third of the program's participants end up seeking shelter again when their rental subsidy runs out. Fully a quarter wind up back in shelter. In essence, the city's main program to help people leave the shelter system has become an expensive revolving door back to homelessness, even for the few people who qualify.

New York's taxpayers are victims of Advantage, too. By failing to use successful housing programs largely paid for by Washington, and by driving too many families back into the costly shelter system financed by City and State taxpayers, the Bloomberg administration has exacerbated both City Hall and Albany's budget deficits while doing nothing to mitigate the suffering of those trapped in homelessness.

Governor Cuomo now has the power to get New York's homeless policy back on track. Programs like Advantage are supposed to be overseen and approved by State regulators in Albany. But under successive Governors, Albany bureaucrats have rubberstamped nearly every change in the city's homeless policy – even when the city's own data clearly demonstrate the failure of its flawed approach.

By restoring the State's role in New York's homelessness policy, the Governor Cuomo will have an enormous opportunity to use the proven methods he championed and pioneered. Mr. Cuomo knows how to do it – after all, he wrote the book.

Thanks again.



Mary E. Brosnahan  
Executive Director

## Safety Net

is published by

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As we go to press, Governor Cuomo just released his budget, which eliminated \$35 million in funding for the City's flawed Advantage Program. Given that this program costs NYC taxpayers more in the long run, *we applaud the Governor's fiscal acumen and hope the Bloomberg Administration seizes this opportunity to restore Section-8 priority for homeless New Yorkers.*

# ARTWALK NY Raises Over \$800,000

By Rachel Edelman

More than 800 guests joined Co-chairs Alec Baldwin, Richard Gere, and Carey Lowell at the 16th annual ARTWALK NY held at Skylight Studio on November 4, 2010. More than \$800,000 was raised for the Coalition's programs and services.

The annual live and silent art auction and cocktail party honored renowned artist James Rosenquist for his tremendous contributions to contemporary art, and longtime Coalition supporters Gail and Al Engelberg, for their invaluable philanthropic efforts.

The live auction brimmed with excitement as guests clamored to listen to remarks from Baldwin, Gere, and Lowell. Auctioneer Aileen Agopian presided over the lively crowd, as works by Francesco Clemente, Gregory Crewdson, Nan Goldin, Wade Guyton, Leonard Rosenfeld, Jenny Holzer, Jeff Koons, Kim McCarty, Vik Muniz, James Rosenquist, Andres Serrano, and Andy Warhol were auctioned off.

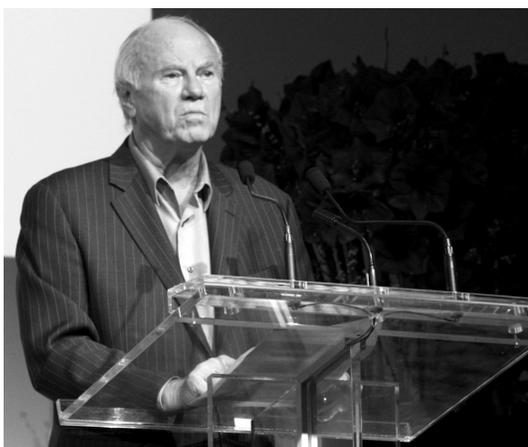
More than 100 works were featured in the silent auction, with highlights including a custom-made FENDI handbag, and works from artists including Christo, Shepard Fairey, Roxy Paine, Richard Philips, and Ed Ruscha.

After browsing the auction and bidding on a few works to take home, guests were able to mingle in the FENDI VIP Lounge hosted by title sponsor FENDI, and sample dishes from Betel, Ed's Lobster Bar, Indochine, Michael's, Osteria il Paiolo, and Macao Trading Co. Dessert sponsor Lulu Cake Boutique served cupcakes and attendees sipped wine, beer and champagne courtesy of Sud de France Wines, Stella Artois, and Nicholas Feuillatte.

The Coalition for the Homeless is grateful to the many sponsors, artists, and Benefit Committee members who made the event a great success!



Carey Lowell, Richard Gere, Mary Brosnahan



James Rosenquist



Alec Baldwin

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# Cuomo's Potential: Reduce Homelessness

By Shelly Nortz

On January 1, 2011, Andrew M. Cuomo was sworn in as the 56th Governor of the State of New York at a time of deep financial deficit and equally deep voter skepticism about elected officials and government at every level. Governor Cuomo brings to his office an impressive record of public service in his roles in the non-profit sector, and with the City, State, and Federal governments. He is in a position to not only reign in the deficit, but to restore faith in government by addressing the most pressing needs of New Yorkers in his first term.

Andrew has an impressive career, first as founder of Housing Enterprise for the Less Privileged (HELP), Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and most recently New York Attorney General. In these positions, Cuomo has helped homeless people with shelter, housing, jobs, and effective policing of sham charities. Of particular note are his records in support of humane sheltering, rental assistance programs, and supportive housing. Policies outlined in his recommendations as chairman of the New York City Commission on the Homeless in its 1992 report for then Mayor David Dinkins: *The Way Home: A New Direction in Social Policy* are instructive. They included recommendations to:

- Expand investments in permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals living with mental illness, and affordable rental housing for homeless families;
- Reform and improve the homeless services system by eliminating large, warehouse-style armory shelters and moving to smaller, services-enriched shelters, and by linking permanent housing and supportive services; and
- Eliminate street homelessness by targeting permanent supportive housing resources to help unsheltered homeless people, and by enhancing access to shelter for those sleeping on the streets.

Nearly two decades later, New York has sought to build on the forward-think-



Mr. Cuomo and his father in 1982

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ing reforms endorsed by the Cuomo Commission – but it has not done nearly enough. Investments in permanent supportive housing and affordable housing for homeless New Yorkers have fallen far below the actual need. The homeless shelter system still needs improvements, particularly for those with mental illnesses, and thousands of vulnerable men, women and unaccompanied youth still sleep on our streets.

Even the much-needed renewals of Governor Mario M. Cuomo's historic New York/New York Agreement to create permanent supportive housing (the last of the most recent 9,000 units will soon be in development) have ultimately been insufficient to meet the rising number of homeless people living with mental illness and other disabilities.

In addition to an ever-worsening housing picture with a net loss of affordable housing, misguided, ideologically-driven policies advanced by the Pataki, Giuliani and Bloomberg administrations have actually contributed to worsening homelessness and harsher conditions for homeless families and

adults, in disappointing contrast to the proven, housing-based solutions espoused by the Cuomo Commission.

As a result, homelessness is now worse than at any point since modern homelessness began in the late 1970s. New York City's homeless shelter population constitutes 85 percent of the statewide total and is now 63 percent higher than it was when the Cuomo Commission report was released – and, the costs of the shelter system in the City have more than quadrupled in that span of time. In City Fiscal Year 2010, an all time record 113,553 different homeless men, women and children (42,888) slept in the NYC municipal shelter system.

Fortunately, as Cuomo's Commission and subsequent experience has shown, cost-effective solutions can achieve sharp reductions in New York's homeless population. Governor Cuomo and his incoming administration can successfully accomplish what the last three New York governors have failed to do: Reduce the number of homeless families and individuals.

## How Andrew Cuomo Can Reduce Homelessness in New York

### •Invest in multi-family housing development, including supportive and accessible housing for people with disabilities.

In the first Gubernatorial term, Andrew Cuomo should propose \$1 billion in housing bonds and establish a meaningful housing pipeline. More affordable, accessible and supportive housing is needed to accommodate an aging population, working New Yorkers who can't afford to buy homes in a tight economy, the increasingly independent population of people with disabilities who need accessible apartments, and homeless households for whom housing, even with onsite support services, is more

**By following our seven recommendations in his first term, Gov. Cuomo has the potential to reverse the record of his recent predecessors and make major strides in reducing homelessness and housing New Yorkers.**

cost-effective than shelter. Modest debt service costs would be offset in the coming years by savings and avoided costs in tax-payer funded Medicaid for costly but often unnecessary institutional care.

### •Use Federal housing programs in a smart, efficient way to address homelessness.

In 2005, the Bloomberg Administration put in place a policy that effectively denies Federal housing assistance (both public housing and Section 8 rental vouchers) to homeless families and individuals. As a consequence, State and local taxpayers are financing a rapidly expanding shelter system. The State should condition its reimbursements for shelters on a new performance requirement that New York City and the counties prioritize available housing resources to move eligible homeless households into permanent homes.

•**Reform rental assistance programs aimed at homeless and at-risk New Yorkers.** Thanks to Pataki-era regulations, the City of New York limits City rental assistance to two years in lieu of

allowing the homeless access to the successful Federal housing programs, and the strategy is not working. At least one in four homeless families who exited shelter with the time-limited Advantage program subsidy has since returned to the shelter system. The State should model all rental assistance programs for homeless households on the proven Federal housing voucher programs.

•**Undo Pataki era policies that hamper access to shelter.** Governor Pataki's homeless policies promote massive shelters of greater than 200 beds, and force localities to evict homeless families and individuals from shelters for even the most minor infractions of administrative

rules. These regulations are widely regarded as more harmful than helpful – often targeting the most disabled homeless clients for ejection from shelter – and should be repealed.

### •Maximize Access to Federal Benefits.

Coalition for the Homeless and other groups help homeless people with disabilities obtain Federal disability benefits like Social Security Income and Veterans benefits. Complicated applications, extensive medical documentation, and appeals procedures act as barriers to these Federal programs and applicants require expert advocacy assistance to secure these subsistence benefits. Government assistance to help cover staff costs has been intermittent at best: A steady source of State funds to support benefits advocacy and appeals would help move thousands of disabled homeless New Yorkers out of costly shelters and off the streets into permanent homes – at a net savings to the State.

•**Replicate Effective Policy from the first Cuomo Administration.** NY Homes should issue an Emergency Order to set aside twenty percent of new vacancies in Mitchell-Lama developments for homeless families and homeless people with disabilities as a condition of any additional State financing. A similar program administered by the NYS Division of Housing and

Community Renewal housed over 2,000 homeless families in the first Cuomo Administration. The State, in an effort to preserve this valuable affordable housing, is investing significant funds in these private developments, and should benefit by accessing a modest number of apartments to house the homeless as a condition of its financial support.

•**Extend SCRIE/DRIE.** The Cuomo Administration should establish a tax abatement program that would freeze the tenant contribution to rent for the most vulnerable very low income populations in exchange for tax abatement credits for owners. Abatements should be extended to a broader array of housing options than those currently included in the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) programs which serve well over 50,000 households in more than 16 localities. A reasonable goal would be to extend this benefit to another 50,000 households over four years. It is notable, for example, that 40 percent of people with disabilities applying for DRIE were denied because their housing units did not qualify under the guidelines for the program, even though they spend as much as half to 90 percent of their meager incomes on rent.

## Cuomo's Potential

Governor Cuomo has a tough road ahead, with massive deficits, an entrenched recession, and a growing need for public services. By following our seven recommendations in his first term, Gov. Cuomo has the potential to reverse the record of his recent predecessors and make major strides in reducing homelessness and housing New Yorkers. He can invest limited state funds in cost-effective, humane solutions that build upon his own record of smart investments, save tax dollars, and provide permanent homes to New York's most vulnerable homeless and disabled men, women and children. Coalition for the Homeless stands ready to assist in these efforts and is eager to get to work with the Cuomo Administration.

# Community Events Support the Coalition's Efforts

This winter was a busy events season at the Coalition, as numerous individuals and organizations held a variety of special events to support our efforts. The Coalition would like to thank all of those that held events to raise funds and awareness for the Coalition.

Volunteers from New York Cares organized a successful 'Happy Hour' fundraiser on Friday, November 12, at Stitch Bar & Lounge. More than 100 guests and Coalition supporters attended the event, which raised more than \$6,000 for the Grand Central Food Program.

Robert Dvorkin, the Coalition's IT Director and classical pianist, held a piano recital on December 19th at the First Unitarian Church in Brooklyn, raising \$2,300 for the Coalition. The recital featured the works of Chopin, and was attended by 100 guests.

Additional events in December and January included a holiday party hosted by

BoConcept and Kōl Design on December 14th, which featured a silent auction that raised \$1,000 for Coalition programs. Artist Antonella Parenti organized a silent art auction at Katra on January 18th. More than 100 guests attended the auction, with works from 20 artists. Panache PR & Marketing held the 1st Annual Layer New York

Drive on January 18th, collecting donations and winter clothing for homeless New Yorkers.

The Coalition was the charity partner for Winter Fest NYC on February 5, hosted by Adrien Fraise and Jonathan Joory. On February 16th, we partnered with Consilience Productions, at the Consilience Awareness Concert Series, where we presented guests with information about the Coalition's volunteer opportunities.

Thank you again to everyone who helped to organize events this year. Your added support makes it that much easier to provide food, clothing, and hope to thousands of New Yorkers every day.



Courtesy of Mikhail Kofman Photography

Robert Dvorkin performing at piano recital.

To organize a benefit on behalf of the Coalition, please contact Manager of Special Events Rachel Edelman at [redelman@cfthomeless.org](mailto:redelman@cfthomeless.org) or 212-776-2056.



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Patrick McMullan, Niki Cheng, and Shaokao Cheng at the BoConcept and KōlDesign Holiday Party.



Shantavia Butler, Owner/Founder of Panache PR & Marketing, at 1st Annual Layer New York Garment Drive

# Tell Albany: Renew and Strengthen Rent Laws

By Patrick Markee

Can you imagine how, on a single day, a decision by New York officials could cause housing costs to skyrocket for more than 2.5 million New Yorkers and threaten many of them with eviction and homelessness? Well, that day is June 15th,

**On June 15th, rent and tenant protections for half of all New York City renter households, as well as thousands more in Long Island and Westchester County, will expire.**

and it involves the single most important affordable housing issue in New York this year.

On June 15th, rent and tenant protections for half of all New York City renter households, as well as thousands more in Long Island and Westchester County, will expire. These essential rent laws have served for generations as the foundation for affordable rental housing for middle-class and low-income New Yorkers. And if Governor Cuomo and the New York State legislature don't act, we could see our homelessness and housing crisis spiral even further out of control.

## Background on Rent Laws

New York City is overwhelmingly a renter city, with two of every three households living in rental apartments. But due to extremely low apartment vacancy rates – below five percent citywide, and under two percent for low-rent units – New York instituted a system of rent regulation more than 60 years ago. The rent laws now protect tenants from eviction except in cases of just cause, and limit annual rent increases to modest levels.

Contrary to myths propagated by the real estate industry and opponents of rent regulation, the vast majority of

rent-regulated tenants are middle-class and low-income. Half of all rent-regulated households have annual incomes below \$38,000, and more than one in five have incomes below the poverty line. Indeed, more than twice as many poor New Yorkers live in rent-regulated housing (225,000 households) than live in public hous-

ing (93,000 households).

Simply put, the rent laws are essential to maintaining New York City's stock of affordable rental hous-

ing. And they are equally essential to stemming even further increases in homelessness. That is why Coalition for the Homeless is working in tandem with tenant organizations, organized labor, housing advocates, and others on a campaign not only to renew the rent laws but to strengthen them.

The last two times the rent laws came up for renewal (in 1997 and 2004), the real estate industry and its allies in the Legislature and the Governor's office managed to weaken the laws substantially. Most damaging, the rent laws were amended to include a provision called "vacancy decontrol." This means that rent and tenant protections are eliminated when an apartment's monthly rent exceeds \$2,000. Vacancy decontrol

has caused the loss of an estimated 300,000 rent-regulated apartments over the past decade, and even more could be lost in the coming years. That's the reason that the Coalition and the Real Rent Reform campaign are pushing for the elimination of vacancy decontrol, as well as other enhancements to the rent laws.

Weaker rent laws are one of the major factors behind the steady erosion of affordable rental housing in New York City. And the shrinking affordable housing stock is the primary cause of record homelessness in New York. Further weakening of the laws – including a renewal of the current laws in their weakened state – will only lead to more homelessness. Worse, the outright elimination of the

**Weaker rent laws are one of the major factors behind the steady erosion of affordable rental housing in New York City. And the shrinking affordable housing stock is the primary cause of record homelessness in New York.**

rent laws would lead to an unprecedented wave of evictions and homelessness and make it virtually impossible for middle and low-income families to live here.

## What You Can Do

Please join us in urging Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature to renew and strengthen our rent laws. To find out more, please visit the Coalition's website and [www.realrentreform.org](http://www.realrentreform.org).

# Toy Drive and Holiday Carnival a Major Success

This year's toy drive surpassed all expectations, with over 3,000 gifts! Generous toy donations from schools, businesses, and individuals around the city, as well as over \$9,000 in financial contributions allowed us to host an amazing Holiday Carnival for girls and boys living in shelters, as well as distribute presents to thousands of homeless kids this holiday season.

We'd especially like to thank the United Federation of Teachers, Shleppers Moving and Storage, Robert & Joanne Hytner, Missy Farren & Associates, Chloe Malle, and FGI Finance for their exceptional gifts. Another thank you to Charles Ferri, Judas Priestess, The Shalitas, and XMental for hosting events to benefit this year's drive.

Dear Santa's Helpers,  
The Holiday Party was great! I love the face painting and the graffiti drawing, and there were lots of kids to play with. The food and the music were AMAZING. I also loved the gifts that I got.  
- Jay

Dear Santa's Helpers,  
Thank you for the presents and the yummy, yummy food! The cake was SO good. I really thank you for everything you gave us.  
- Emily



On Saturday, December 18th, 200 girls and boys living in shelters joined us and the UFT for a special Holiday Carnival with entertainment and games, a visit from Santa, and presents.

## WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS LUNCHEON

SAVE THE DATE

Thursday,  
April 12, 2010

The Pierre Hotel  
2 East 61st Street,  
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Honoring:

**Bumble and bumble.**

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**Paul Neuman  
Neuman's**

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All proceeds from the Women Mean Business Luncheon benefit the First Step Job Training Program. To purchase tickets or tables, please visit: <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wmbtickets>