



## **A Thanksgiving Honor Roll: NYC's Unsung Heroes Lauding the oft-overlooked people in a city of celebrity**

By Tom Robbins

Published: Tuesday, November 24th 2009

**This is a story about the other New York. Week in and week out, the city is dominated by spectacles of celebrity and scandal, of politicians and moguls squandering vast fortunes on self-promotion. The other New York—the one inhabited by ordinary citizens who plug away day after day doing small good deeds, by those who fight the good fight regardless of the odds—forever gets short shrift.** Even if the spotlight found these unheralded heroes, they wouldn't stand a chance in a cyber-media world where the language of snark and smirk has become the prevailing idiom.

This deters these folks not in the least. Fame and applause is not their goal. But it is their hard work that keeps this city from becoming nothing more than a harbor for the elite. They provide daily injections of decency into a society often running on empty.

This is a Thanksgiving tribute to some of those whose work makes a difference. The idea comes from Jack Newfield, the late Voice writer who was beloved of lists: "Worst Judges" and "Worst Landlords" were two of his creations. He even offered an end-of-year rundown dubbed "Remember the Greediest." But he started publishing what he called his "Honor Roll" on Thanksgiving week back in 1976. He said it was his favorite task and it's not hard to see why. As much as our chief duty may be to smoke out wrongdoing, the bigger reward is always found in hailing those who do right. Here are just a few of those who richly deserve a Thanksgiving toast:

*Nancy Biberman* was a tenacious lawyer defending tenants being booted around in Manhattan's old single-room-occupancy hotels when she decided she could do more by building housing herself. With the help of a Revson fellowship to study at Columbia in 1985, she mastered the intricacies of housing finance (I know because I watched her do it). She put the knowledge to good use, first by conceiving and building a project on Manhattan's West Side that housed both homeless adults and young families. She followed up by rehabilitating 23 abandoned buildings in the High Bridge section of the Bronx. In 1992, she founded the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation, which turned the old Morrisania hospital into 132 affordable homes, plus a Head Start program and a job-creating commercial kitchen. Working together with



Davon Russell, a youth leader, this year, she opened her latest venture, a 128-unit building on Intervale Avenue. "It's the largest 'green' affordable housing project in the country," she says with pride.

To read about the other unsung heroes read the full article here:

<http://www.villagevoice.com/2009-11-24/news/a-thanksgiving-honor-roll-lauding-nyc-s-unsung-heroes-in-a-city-of-celebrity/1>