



DOWNTOWN DIALOGUE

WHAT DAVID ROCKEFELLER BEGAN, A NEW GENERATION CONTINUES

BY LIZ BERGER



David Rockefeller congratulates Sheldon Silver, who received this year's David Rockefeller Lower Manhattan Leadership Award from the Downtown Alliance

Al fresco dining on Stone Street and at the World Financial Center. A fifth public elementary school announced for the Seaport area, and a new private one, too. Condé Nast on its way, and 61 media tenants already here. A new Battery, new East and Hudson River waterfronts and 26 million square feet of prime, "green" commercial and residential space—built, planned or in construction. Eight museums, six ferry landings, 18 hotels, Patti Smith coming to the River To River Festival and an extraordinary new park plan for Governors Island.

What a difference a few decades make, and what a difference David Rockefeller and the heirs to his vision have made to Lower Manhattan.

A half-century ago, Rockefeller formed the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association. The D-LMA, then as now, was a voice of Downtown business, dedicated to civic activism through visionary planning. Concerned that Wall Street was losing ground to Midtown, Rockefeller envisioned a new kind of central business district—with housing, cultural institutions, a developed waterfront and parks—for the birthplace of American financial services. And over time, he inspired and persuaded a new generation to join him in making it a reality. Key to Rockefeller's vision were enduring partnerships between the public and private sectors.

The seeds of this transformation had already been planted in the early 1980s, when I first moved here. By then, Lower Manhattan was famous for Wall Street and Creative Time's Art on the Beach, but rarely the twain did meet. There were 10,000 of us living below Chambers Street, but it was not yet a community. Rather, it was a CBD where a few people lived and tourists flocked to see the latest happenings and the iconic landmarks of our nation's history. There was more to be done, by a new generation of leaders.

Today, that beach is the bedrock of an extraordinary residential and business address:

Battery Park City, built on landfill taken from an early project endorsed by Rockefeller's D-LMA, the World Trade Center. And, Lower Manhattan is a whole new kind of central business district: a sustainable, global model of a round-the-clock community with 306,000 workers, 8,400 businesses, 56,000 residents and nine million annual visitors.

What David Rockefeller began over 50 years ago, the new generation has continued. Inspired by his legacy, last year the Downtown Alliance created the David Rockefeller Lower Manhattan Leadership Award. The first recipients were City Planning Commission Chair Amanda Burden and NYC Economic Development Corporation EVP (and former CB1 Chair) Madelyn Wils, for their groundbreaking work in creating East River Waterfront Park. This year, on the eve of the 10th anniversary of 9/11, it was my deep privilege to watch as David Rockefeller bestowed the award on State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, right here in his "hometown" of Lower Manhattan.

We all know how essential Shelly's leadership has been to making Lower Manhattan, as he often says, "a great place to live, work and raise a family." Since the first days of the Downtown Alliance, he has been a tremendous catalyst—in the best Rockefeller tradition—for Lower Manhattan's renaissance, championing economic incentives that have been vital to our pre- and post-911 recovery. As he has often said, "the reconstruction of Lower Manhattan transcends partisanship and rises to the level of a moral obligation."

That's a sentiment we all can share. Thanks to David Rockefeller for his distinctive brand of leadership that has done so much to inspire others, and to Shelly Silver, Amanda Burden and Madelyn Wils—and all their colleagues and supporters in government, business and the community—for continuing the tradition.

Liz Berger is President of the Downtown Alliance