



# DOWNTOWN DIALOGUE

## Lower Manhattan's Museum 'Smile'

BY LIZ BERGER

Uptown may have Museum Mile, but Lower Manhattan has a veritable Museum "Smile," an s-curve of history, art and design institutions wending its way through our one square mile.

It's no wonder that the Downtown Alliance's 2011 *Year in Review* report documents almost 10 million visitors to Lower Manhattan last year, more than double the number in 2005. Our museums, festivals and attractions are a big part of that story.

The long-awaited National September 11 Memorial opened in September, attracting a million visitors in just 3½ months. Summer 2011 was notable for the re-launch of the *River To River Festival*, Lower Manhattan's post-9/11 performing arts collaboration, by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, the festival's new artistic director and producer. And, Pace University continues to attract world-class artists for programs at the Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts.

This year started off with the blockbuster re-opening of the South Street Seaport Museum, in partnership with the Museum of the City of New York. The Museum's incomparable historical and maritime collections are in full view, supplemented with temporary exhibitions on Occupy Wall Street and Eric Sanderson's unique *Mannahatta*. The Seaport Museum is a treat for locals and visitors alike, so grab a bite at one of the Seaport's restaurants and cafes, check out the shops, then visit the meticulously restored historic buildings and ships which house this important and exciting institution.

But why stop there? What's so exciting about Lower Manhattan is that you *can* get there from here. Hop on the Downtown Alliance's free Downtown Connection bus at Fulton and Water streets and ride four stops to Old Slip, home of the New York City Police Museum. Continue down Water Street to Bowling Green and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in New York, which offers a powerful and comprehensive new permanent exhibition—*Infinity of Nations*—featuring 700 works of Native American art in the extraordinary 1907 Beaux-Arts Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House.

Or, detour by foot down Wall Street to visit the Museum of American Finance, a Smithsonian affiliate and a must-see for anyone interested in financial markets and the national economy, in other words, most of us.

The Downtown Connection also stops in Battery Park City on Battery Place, near the Skyscraper Museum and the Museum of



Jewish Heritage, where a new exhibition—held in conjunction with the 125th anniversary of the dedication of the Statue of Liberty—celebrates Emma Lazarus, the poet and social activist whose famous sonnet, "The New Colossus," is forever identified with the Statue of Liberty.

You know the most famous last lines:

"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

And, the latest addition to Lower Manhattan's museum roster also celebrates a woman whose words changed the world: The Anne Frank Center, with the mission of promoting the universal message of tolerance through exhibitions, workshops and special events, will open in March at 44 Park Place.

There's more, too, from the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, a short ferry ride from Battery Park, to the Frances Tavern Museum at 54 Pearl Street, where Gen. George Washington bade farewell to his officers. But the point is this: Whether you work, live or are visiting in Lower Manhattan, there's 400 years of history and innovation to discover and explore.

*Liz Berger is President of the Downtown Alliance.*