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## Bully for Bulbach: Block Association Honors Outgoing Leader

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After more than 25 years of leading the West 15th Street 100 and 200 Block Association, longtime Chelsea resident Stanley Bulbach has stepped down as its head.

“I want to be a good neighbor and I want to help the block association, but it’s time for new leadership, new blood, new enthusiasm,” Bulbach told *Chelsea Now* by phone last week.

Last month, the block association honored Bulbach with a certificate of appreciation for his work and community activism.

“He’s been an invaluable resource and will continue to be, though not as active as one,” Kimon Retzos, a member of the block association, said. “We’re going to do the best we can to continue his legacy.”

Retzos moved to the neighborhood in 1989, and has lived on W. 15th St. btw. Sixth and Seventh Aves. since 1995. As a board member for his building, he started working with the block association in 2005, and became more active since 2011.

He explained in a phone interview that Bulbach knows how to put issues in context; for example, the idea to ban cars on 14th St. during the MTA’s shutdown of the L line.

“When you have that kind of historical knowledge and perspective, the block and the city knows what works going forward and everyone benefits,” Retzos said.

Interestingly, it was the reconstruction of 14th St. in the early 1990s that spurred Bulbach to join the block association.

In late 1966, Bulbach moved from Irvington, New Jersey to the city to attend New York University, he explained. He lived in the East Village for a time before finding an apartment on W. 15th St. btw. Seventh and Eighth Aves., and moved there in February, 1969 — and still lives there today.



Stanley Bulbach, seated, shows the certificate given for his tenure as head of the West 15th Street 100 and 200 Block Association. At left, Kimon Retzos of the block association. Photo courtesy Steve Starosta

Bulbach called Chelsea a “backwater at that time.” But, the neighborhood was also home to many families from the Levantine — Lebanese and Syrians — and after obtaining a bachelors degree in the history of religion, Bulbach worked on a masters and doctorate in Near Eastern studies.

Bulbach cut his teeth on tenant organizing for his building, which had no hot water or heat, he said. Bea Lopez founded the block association in 1982, but he didn’t get involved then, as he was focused on the tenant association, and spending time in housing

court. “It was really learning by doing,” he said of the organizing.

Soon, those skills would again come into play. Lopez retired, and then one morning in June 1990, “We all woke up to find all of the westbound 14th St. traffic dumped on narrow residential 15th Street,” Bulbach recalled. “Ultimately that led to the resurrection of the block association.”

The city rerouted traffic to 15th St. while the reconstruction of 14th St. went on for years, and Bulbach and his neighbors had to contend with a substantial uptick of traffic, which brought air pollution and noise.

“The heavy traffic was shaking all the street and our building and our gas pipes,” he said. “Our main complaint was a stupid traffic plan was forced on a residential community.”

Bulbach said the current proposal to ban cars on 14th St. is something “the block association vigorously opposes.”



At an Oct. 19, 2016 CB4 Transportation Planning Committee meeting, Stanley Bulbach (standing) made it “perfectly clear” that his residential neighborhood does not support a plan that would detour vehicles to their side streets. Photo by Dennis Lynch.

“We want to know why we’re not at the table discussing these plans. We should be part of the planning process,” he said. “We know what the liabilities are — why aren’t they talking to us? Our streets are already wildly overcrowded. We know it’s going to put more traffic on 15th Street.”

The block association is told studies are being conducted, but Bulbach says that by the time they’re completed, “it will be a fait accompli, and a repeat of 1990.”

The block association has tackled other issues as well throughout the years under Bulbach’s leadership — weighing in on the number of entrances and exits while the city renovated the 14th St./Eighth Ave. train station, opposition to automatic after-hours variances, and pushing to restore crosswalk markings

at major intersections to increase pedestrian safety, to name a few.

“We’d finish one battle and a new one would arise,” Bulbach said.

Sometime around 2001, the block association expanded to W. 15th St., btw. Sixth and Eighth Aves., and since then, it has been actively working with Bill Borock, and the Council of Chelsea Block Associations (CCBA), he said.

Borock, the president of CCBA, told Chelsea Now that Bulbach will be missed at meetings. Bulbach has represented the block association for many years, attending almost every monthly meeting, Borock said.

“He was very determined in his work related to the community,” Borock said in a phone interview.

It will be hard to replace Bulbach, who has been involved with a myriad of issues, including the push to plan infrastructure concurrent with new development, Borock said.

“He was giving up something of his self to do all this community work,” Borock said. “On one level, I’ll miss his participation, but on another level, I’m glad for him that he’ll have more time to pursue his artistic endeavors.”

Bulbach said he turns 70 in April, and would like to focus more on his artwork. The medium he works in is traditional Near Eastern flat woven carpet, and he creates flying, prayer, and bed carpets.

After earning his doctorate in Near Eastern studies, Bulbach traveled through Morocco and fell in love with the art form. The flat woven carpet “speaks to me. It draws upon all my training in science, tech, philosophy, religion [and] writing,” he said.



“I’m unusual in the field because I prize the natural colors of the wool,” said Bulbach, shown here holding handspun wool. Photo courtesy the artist.



Bulbach says New York is heavily referenced in some pieces, such as "Gotham" (a flying carpet, seen here). Photo courtesy the artist.

Bulbach works with special US sheep breeders to obtain his wool. He then processes the wool — cleans, cards and spins it. He said he prizes the traditional dye palette, using vegetable dyes for his designs.

"The artwork I do is very time consuming," he explained. "I strive to complete two pieces a year."

The genesis of his work was his studies and travels, and it has blossomed under the influence of Chelsea and the city. Pieces — such as "Sixth Avenue," a prayer carpet that evokes the street with long gray lines punctuated with dots of green, red and white; and "Gotham," a flying carpet resplendent with reds and yellow highlights — heavily reference New York City, Bulbach said.

This past summer, from July 14 to Sept. 9, Bulbach's work was shown at the Guild Gallery II at the Fulton Center. Jim Furlong, director of arts for Hudson Guild, said Bulbach had approached him, and "when I saw his work in person, I thought it would be a good fit for us."

Furlong said in a phone interview that the response to the exhibition was overall positive.

"It was great to have a local artist with a such a high level of skill sharing his work with our community," he said.

For more information about Bulbach's art, visit [www.bulbach.com](http://www.bulbach.com)

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Bulbach said that he has been creating and weaving works like "Sixth Avenue" (a prayer carpet, seen here) his entire adult life. Photo courtesy the artist