

## Arlene S. Harrison Biography

Arlene S. Harrison, known as the “Mayor of Gramercy Park”, is a Trustee of Gramercy Park and Founder/President of the Gramercy Park Block Association (GPBA).

Harrison formed the GPBA in 1993 after her son was brutally beaten by a random roving gang of about 20 youths outside their home on Gramercy Park. She quickly organized a large group of determined neighbors dedicated to public safety, crime prevention, historic preservation, and quality of life of Gramercy Park and the GPBA was born. Under Harrison's leadership, the GPBA has grown into a powerful, highly respected organization of 2,000 members, which serves as Gramercy Park's voice for all neighborhood interests. The GPBA serves as the liaison between the Gramercy Park community and city agencies, elected officials, historic preservation groups, local BIDs, businesses, institutions, local first responders, and works with residents to make sure neighborhood concerns are addressed.

Harrison is a proactive advocate, fierce protector and ardent preservationist of Gramercy Park. She never hesitates to take on real estate developers and other private interests to defeat plans for bars, nightclubs and harmful developments that threaten Gramercy Park's unique historic residential character, quality of life and property values. When opposition to a developer became a First Amendment issue in 1994, Harrison led a successful nationwide campaign to defend the First Amendment rights of 32 groups around the country. She testified before Congress hearing, and the issue was covered by 60 Minutes.

Harrison has created a close-knit, small town atmosphere around Gramercy Park through a network of relationships she has cultivated. She organizes annual events that bring residents of all ages together, including Chanukah Menorah Lighting and Christmas Eve Caroling. A major focus of Harrison is organizing the community's charitable efforts through the GPBA's Neighbors Helping Neighbors program, in which Gramercy Park residents work together to give back to less fortunate neighbors. Annual drives for food, clothing, household goods, educational supplies, holiday gifts and toys have supported homeless in city shelters (including battered women and

children), formerly homeless, veterans, people living with HIV/AIDS and other disabilities, and homebound neighbors. For unforeseen events such as Hurricanes Sandy and Katrina, she mobilizes the community to provide aid to affected areas.

Harrison's longtime support for first responders was recognized on a national level when for many months after the 9/11 attacks, she mobilized a round-the-clock relief effort at the 13th Precinct to support first responders at Ground Zero. Her "Kids Helping Kids" program allowed children across the country to reach out to the children of first responders who were lost on 9/11, and she continues to organize a nationwide communication network of 56 first responder groups to honor those who died that day and continue to die from 9/11 related illnesses. Since then, Harrison commemorates those who were lost on 9/11 through an annual Remembrance Ceremony. At an annual event held at the National Arts Club, she leads the community in honoring NYPD who lost their lives in the line of duty. Harrison also organizes year-round support for troops and veterans.

Arlene Harrison spent the first thirty-three years of her career as a dedicated special education teacher in New York City's public school system. She began her career in the South Bronx in the notoriously crime ridden 41st Precinct known by its nickname "Fort Apache." When the Board of Education was setting up their new Special Education District in the 1970s, Harrison, highly regarded for her effective tough love philosophy, was selected to be the model teacher for it. She was later recruited to set up programs for severely disturbed children at Children's Center (troubled teens), Children's Day Treatment Center and St. Vincent's Hospital locked psychiatric ward. She had to retire in 1997, after suffering a traumatic brain injury when a storekeeper opened a sidewalk cellar door as she walked on it. Since then, Harrison has become widely known for carrying her trademark clipboard, which helps her compensate for deficits relating to the injury. Harrison is a graduate of Cornell and Columbia Universities. She has been a member of the National Arts Club since 1984, where over the years she has brought in several hundred new members.