

*Please note that some information in this document has been redacted at the request of the organization.*

## **The Coney Island History Project, Inc.**

### **WHAT TYPES OF PROGRAMS DO YOU OFFER?**

Founded 16 years ago in 2004, the Coney Island History Project sponsors programs documenting Coney Island's legendary past and encouraging appreciation of the neighborhood of today. The CIHP records, archives and shares oral history interviews; organizes exhibitions, lectures, performances and cultural heritage events; and honors community leaders and amusement pioneers through the Coney Island Hall of Fame. Emphasizing community involvement, the CIHP teaches residents and visitors about local history. Year-round programming includes hosting visits from and activities at schools, libraries, museums, senior centers, nursing homes and other community groups. Admission is free to our exhibition center located next to the NYC landmark Wonder Wheel. In addition to hosting community groups year-round, our exhibition center is open free of charge to the public on weekends and holidays from May through September and for special events including our immigrant-themed History Day. The center is a popular destination for residents as well as visitors from across the country and around the world. We offer both fee-based and free walking tours of Coney Island to individuals and groups year-round and free themed-history weekends. For the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs' Immigrant Heritage Week and the Municipal Art Society's Jane's Walk, we offer free walking tours conducted in English and Chinese. Visitors may listen to excerpts from our oral history archive at the exhibition center via our SoundStik audio handset. Objects from our collection of 1,000+ plus artifacts (photos, art, maps, ephemera, and films) are organized into exhibits that tell the story of Coney Island. Exhibitions are curated by our executive director, Charles Denson, who is a Coney Island native, a noted historian, and the author of four books about Coney Island history, including *Coney Island: Lost and Found* (2002 New York Book of the Year, New York Society Library). Past exhibitions include *Land Grab: A History of Coney Island Development, 1823-2007* (2007), *Woody Guthrie's Coney Island Years* (2008), *The Astroland Archive Photography Exhibit* (2009), *Coney Island Icons: Local Landmarks* (2009); *Luna Park Revisited* (2010), *Dreamland Fire Centennial* (2011), *Abe Feinstein: 50 Years of Coney Island Photography* (2012), *The Curious Playland Arcade Art of Larry Millard* (2013), *Wonder Wheel Dreams* (2013); *The Face of Steeplechase* (2014), *The Astroland Rocket* (2015), *The 50th Anniversary of Fred Trump's Demolition of Steeplechase Pavilion* (2016), *Neptune Revisited: Terra Cotta Relics from the Childs Building* (2017), *Coney Island Creek and the Natural World* (2018) and *Salvation by the Sea: Coney Island's 19th Century Fresh Air Cure and Immigrant Aid Societies* (2019).

### **WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?**

Our multilingual brochure represents our organization's activities in 10 languages - Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, English, Haitian Creole, Hebrew, Korean, Russian, Spanish and Urdu. Public attendance at our free exhibition center is approximately [REDACTED] from Memorial Day Weekend through Labor Day, and represents the unique melting pot character of Coney Island. Our website had over [REDACTED] unique visitors in 2019, with over [REDACTED] page views, and has won awards from the Archivists Roundtable of NY ARTS Award for innovative use of archives (2008); the National Carousel Assn. Brass Ring Award for outstanding efforts in archiving, recording and preserving history (2014); and [REDACTED]. Among visitors to our website, [REDACTED] are from

the US with [REDACTED] from NY and [REDACTED] from NYC. In Southern Brooklyn, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] we have the opportunity to transcend language barriers by recording oral histories in Chinese and Russian in addition to English and Spanish. More than 360 audio interviews are available for listening at our online archive, including both short anecdotal stories and in-depth conversations. Both our narrators and our audience are people who live, work, or play in Coney Island (in the past or present) as well as adjacent Sea Gate, Bensonhurst, Gravesend, and Brighton Beach or have a special connection to these places. A selection of our oral histories is part of the NEH on the Road exhibition Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland touring the US from 2017-2022.

Since the NY State PAUSE order was announced on March 20, content consumption has grown significantly across Coney Island History Project social media platforms. Facebook page likes went up [REDACTED], post reach [REDACTED], post engagement [REDACTED], and page followers [REDACTED]. Twitter impressions went up [REDACTED] for a total of [REDACTED] impressions and profile visits went up [REDACTED]. For our website's oral history archive, the number of users, sessions and session duration increased by an average of [REDACTED] with [REDACTED] of our site traffic and high session duration from Facebook referrals. We anticipate that a new podcast series and virtual content will provide stimulating and companionable content and help us further expand our audience during these challenging and socially isolated times.

#### **HOW DO YOU MAKE AN IMPACT IN YOUR COMMUNITY?**

Our year-round cultural enrichment programs for the Coney Island community feature history activities at local schools, libraries, community centers, senior centers, rehab centers, and visits to the History Project by school and community groups to view our exhibitions. Residents learn about their neighborhood's rich history and foster their sense of community by sharing their stories with each other at slide-talks and through reminiscence groups and oral history interviews. These activities are offered free of charge.

Among our activities are walking tours and slide talks exploring the history of Coney Island and its diverse immigrant cultures and the ecology and environment of Coney Island Creek. Our multilingual oral history program includes interviews with residents in English as well as languages such as Russian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Turkish and Spanish, which require transcriptions and translations, and are posted on our website for online listening, reading and sharing with members of the community.

We developed our reminiscence program when we realized that most elders attending our events were more likely to share their stories as part of a group activity than record an individual oral history for our archive. We offer two reminiscence activities: The first is a stand-alone special event, the second is an art/reminiscence project that takes place in sequential sessions.

We bring our reminiscence box activity to senior centers, rehab centers and NORCs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities). The box, which looks like a treasure chest, contains artifacts, photos and memorabilia from the History Project Collection such as an antique stereo viewer with original slides and a "mystery object" which elicits guesses as to its use, as well as photographs and paper ephemera from the era of the participant's childhood and young adulthood. Our reminiscence facilitator unpacks

the items one by one and passes them around to facilitate a conversation among the elders. This enjoyable reminiscence activity encourages sociability, encourages new relationships, confirms a sense of shared identity among long-time residents and transmits knowledge and community history.

The art/reminiscence project is a weekly group that combines the telling of personal stories, sharing local history, and doing writing and collaging to make a communal Reminiscence Box as a culminating activity.

One of the goals of our oral history program is helping people realize their personal stories are a valuable part of history and worth preserving. In the case of Russian and Chinese speaking elders who are growing old in a second homeland, their translated stories make connections across cultural and linguistic barriers. When narrators return to our site to listen repeatedly, share on social media with family and friends who say, "you captured it all" and "I'm so proud of your interview," and refer others for interviews, we have succeeded. When a stranger approached me on the boardwalk (I was wearing a CIHP T-shirt) to say he listened to the oral history of a 94-year-old co-worker of 20 years and had not previously known his amazing story, I felt proud of our work.