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Opinion: Brent O'Leary for NY City Council

By **editor** - Posted on **17 March 2009**

From Gail Giunta

In June of 2008, I started the Long Island City Friends Meetup group (at www.meetup.com) because I recently moved back to LIC after living on Long Island for a year and out west since 2000. I wanted to reconnect with people in the community to make new friends and to build partnerships with and for local community supported organizations and businesses involved in the arts & culture, politics & environment.

How I met Brent:

One of the many free local events I organized in LIC last summer was the Gantry Park Live Music Performances every Tuesday at 7pm. This event is right on the pier at Gantry State Park off of Centre Blvd. During the performance, Brent (pictured here) sat next to our group. LIC Friends members and myself began speaking with Brent about the Irish band in-between sets. Well before the end of the performance I invited Brent to join LIC Friends because he was (is) a very sociable, friendly and interesting guy. As Brent began attending events, I asked if he'd like to be an assistant organizer, especially for the Live Music on Tuesdays as he lived right there! He accepted, and members of our group enjoyed his company as Brent really takes an interest by listening and getting to know diverse groups of people.



Brent O'Leary for City Councilman!

Brent O'Leary is running for City Councilman for the 26th District and the primary election is set for the September 15, 2009. The neighborhoods that District 26 district include are: Long Island City, Sunnyside, Woodside, and small areas of Astoria and Maspeth.

Brent's personal connection to the local area began two generations ago when his grandparents immigrated from Ireland and settled in Sunnyside which is where Brent's father was raised. Brent was born in Jackson Heights, Queens and then his family migrated to Roslyn, Long Island.

For info on Brent's Bio go to: brentoleary.com/bio

As a friend, and co-organizer of the LIC Friends meetup group, I asked Brent if I could interview him for The LIC Times. I believe in what Brent stands for and support his campaign. As a Queens native, I feel his campaign best represents residents concerns and issues of the area. It is my pleasure to educate the public on who Brent is and how he can help our community.

G: As an interviewer and educator, I'm always curious to know who were the inspirational, influential people, the heroes in the early years of a person's development. Who inspired and influenced you as a child? And did you have any interest in politics at a young age?

B: Naturally, JFK and Bobby, they were the big topics around the house. As a kid, I read everything I could about them. My political inspiration today is FDR. I believe he may be the greatest president considering how he got us through both WW II and the Great Depression. It took a lot of courage and toughness to get his economic program accomplished and set America back on the road to recovery and there are

CURRENT WEATHER

Long Island City



- Overcast, mist
- Temperature: 64.4 °F
- Wind: South-Southwest, 5.8 mph
- Visibility: 6 mi

Reported on:
Thu, 06/18/2009 - 5:51pm

LIBRARY UPDATES

[The Friends Group for the future Queens Library at Hunter's Point seeks seat at the library planning table. Read more.](#)

THE FUNNIES



POLL

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- All of the above
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My great grandmother Nellie Dunn was a major force in the Massachusetts Democratic Party and my Grandfather took part in the Easter Rebellion of 1916 in Ireland but as he came to the US and was a New York City Policeman, he did not talk much about his revolutionary youth.

G: In college, you studied Japanese culture and mastered the language. You taught English in Japan for a year, received your law degree at Boston University and studied International Law at Oxford. From there you lived and worked in Tokyo as a business lawyer for 10 years. During this time, you were the Chair of the American Chamber of Commerce Japan Corporate Counsel Committee; the Chair of Democrats Abroad Japan; translated for the Civil Liberties Union in Japan. In addition, you organized charity events for Make-A-Wish and the Christina Noble Foundations. How do you think these experiences in Japan will help you be the best candidate for City Council here in Queens?

B: My work as a business attorney will be invaluable because the three most important tools for a New York City Councilman are knowledge of business, law and negotiation. Business because a healthy economy is the foundation of our city and because with our present economic situation we need to make the city able to keep offering its services in an efficient manner at a low cost to the taxpayer with much less funds than we planned on having. Law because that is the tool a councilman has to implement his or her ideas and negotiation because you have to be able to work with the mayor and other city councilman to get things done and protect your district.

As for the Charity, it is not something that will help me its more why I am doing this. I believe that politics should be public service so I am doing this to try to help others.

As for living and traveling in many countries and being exposed to many cultures and ideas, I think that will be a great asset in our neighborhood which is the most diverse county in the world and in bringing innovative ideas to help solve our problems.

G: In 2004 and 2008, you were involved with the Democratic National Committee as a strong advocate of the 50 State strategy. Also in 2008, you were asked by the Obama Campaign to coordinated Irish Americans for Obama in NY. How have these experiences influenced your interest in running for City Councilman for District 26? When was the deciding moment for you?

B: I think the experiences showed me the real disconnect between the government and its people and meeting such great people on the journey made me want to help more so when this seat opened up I thought it would be the best way for me to help, so I stepped up.

G: In all of the positions you have held, how do you believe you have inspired others to participate in and make change for themselves, their community and country?

B: I have found that people want to make positive change, however, they get frustrated when they don't have an organization or anyone to listen to their concerns. So rather than inspire them I see myself more as empowering them. Once people realize someone is there for them, they will come out and make a difference. I want to help people see that the government is a tool to improve their lives. That government is here to help us and we need to take advantage of it, and participate.

G: Speaking of jobs: What is your plan of action to create quality jobs, keep the cost of living low and to ensure our education and social services are maintained?

B: My plan of action includes utilizing the stimulus money coming down to us to create quality sustainable jobs such as green jobs retro fitting buildings and re-training workers for solar and other alternative energies. Helping small business, which are the top employers in our district, get set up and cut through the bureaucracy. Keeping down the cost of electricity, transportation and necessities, and making the government more efficient so we can maintain the social services with less.

G: As an educator, I am very interested in how will you implement better resources for teachers for them to better do their jobs?

B: The first thing I would do is fight to reinstate parent involvement in schools. We need to empower parents to become more involved in the education of their children. This would assist teachers and be a valuable added resource. The teacher's union supports mayoral control of the school as I do but we can adjust the system to give more powers to the community education councils to be more involved in the decision making processes of our public schools.

G: What are some of your innovative ideas to find new sources of revenue and make the government more efficient?

B: Some ideas are instead of raising MTA rates, I'd work to bring back the commuter

tax for out-of state residents who work in New York City. Also, the MTA can lease out land that is being underutilized.

G: How will you motivate corporations and the public to see that going Green is cost efficient and an affordable alternative?

B: I will work to help get corporations tax incentives to invest in the first place. This will motivate them to make changes and realize that they will make the money back in the energy that was wasted. The tax incentive would enable them to use the money up front and implement new technologies that are better in the long run. We have to make it profitable for them to make the change.

G: What about the housing crisis, such as the development in neighborhoods such as LIC? Some believe that the character of the neighborhood is being destroyed, if not already?

B: One program that I support and want to see happen is the creation of a website for the community and developers. Developers who are interested in the LIC area would need to submit their development plans to this website where community members can see and understand and ask questions on the projected development. Developers would need to put up plans ahead of time so the community can discuss and bring objectives and suggestions. They can vote on plans and bring up issues to the community board for their chance to object or voice any concerns. This program is good for developers because they can work with and get the approval of community members and feel good about moving forward. It is a win-win situation.

G: As City Councilman, what do you hope to accomplish in long run?

B: To make government an honest, efficient resource for the people which listen and responds to their needs.

G: Is there anything else you would like the people of District 26, communities of Long Island City, Sunnyside, Woodside, Astoria and Maspeth to know?

B: If the people of the district would allow me to work for them and be able to devote my life to public service by helping them solve their problems, I would feel blessed and will do my best.

For more information on Brent O'Leary for City Council, visit: brentoleary.com

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Great article Gail! Thanks

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Sat, 03/21/2009 - 4:43pm.

Great article Gail! Thanks for the info. I would also be intersted in a similar article about other people in this race.

[reply](#)

thanks for the introduction

Submitted by Anonymous on Thu, 03/19/2009 - 5:44pm.

so, who's this guy running up against?

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