

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORS

SUMMER/FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER

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From Morningside Heights to the Moon



Growing up, Columbia PhD candidate Daniel Yahalomi would peel through the pages of books like *The Hidden Reality* and *Cosmos*, sparking his curiosity for the world of astrophysics. Attending STEM-focused summer camps in high school and interacting with mentors would deepen his affinity for the field.

Now, through the creation of the **Columbia Student Training in Astronomy Research (STAR) Mentoring Program**, launched in 2024, he's on a mission to ensure local youth have access to the same learning

opportunities. Cognizant of the dearth of STEM education programs in New York City, Yahalomi and a collective of other PhD students from Columbia's Department of Astronomy are using Columbia STAR to fill the gaps.

Rooted in discovery and mentorship, the community-driven initiative offers paid research opportunities for high school students in Morningside Heights. Students participate in projects that cover a wide range of topics, from asteroids to astrophysical simulations.

You can learn more about the program at neighbors.columbia.edu/star-mentoring.

You're Invited: Look Skyward!

Once or twice a month, Columbia Astronomy hosts Public Astronomy Nights on the Morningside Heights campus, where guests hear from a lecturer on a variety of topics, followed by a Q&A and stargazing through the department's many telescopes.

You can find upcoming dates at outreach.astro.columbia.edu.



A Lens on Local



From pop-up markets to public celebrations, recent events brought together neighbors, nonprofit leaders, and small business owners on Columbia's campuses. Each moment reflects the power of partnership and the vibrant community spirit that animates Uptown. Clockwise from top left:

Columbia Community Service Grantee Reception | June 12, 2025

In 2025, donations from 477 Columbia, Barnard, and Teachers College faculty, staff, and retirees funded \$240,000 in grants to 47 local nonprofits, and the community came together to celebrate.

Manhattanville Community Day | June 7, 2025

Saturday Science activities were a hit at the annual celebration of community on Columbia's Manhattanville campus.

State of New York Women | April 30, 2025

The New York Women's Chamber of Commerce hosted its annual State of New York Women in Business event at the Lee C. Bollinger Forum.

A'Lelia Bundles Community Scholars Mixer | April 10, 2025

The Incite Institute hosted a mixer for the A'Lelia Bundles Community Scholars of current and previous cohorts.

Meet a 2025 Columbia Grad from Inwood: Jordana Suriel

For Inwood native Jordana Suriel (School of Social Work '25), growing up on Dyckman Street gave her a nuanced lens into how socioeconomic complexities can shape the human experience.

In the shadows of the neighborhood's cultural vibrancy, she witnessed the impacts of intergenerational cycles of poverty and crime. Seeking a better understanding of the intricacies of the incarceration system and its disproportionate impact on communities like the one she calls home, she decided to embark on a path in social work.

"A lot of my motivation comes from my culture and community," Suriel said. "Staying connected to where I'm from reminds me of my purpose. I do this work for myself, my family, my community, and to lend a hand to other people."

Through her journey at Columbia School of Social Work, where her studies have taken her from lecture halls in Morningside Heights to Medellín, Colombia, she's been able to work on international projects that center youth



advocacy, economic empowerment, immigration, and justice for system-impacted communities.

You can learn more about her experience at neighbors.columbia.edu/jordana-suriel.

Scholarships for Local Students

Dyckman Institute Scholarship

Each year, the Dyckman Institute provides financial support to four outstanding undergraduate students who live in the Upper Manhattan neighborhoods of Washington Heights and Inwood.

neighbors.columbia.edu/dyckman

Thompson-Muñoz Scholarship

Each year, Columbia University provides a scholarship fund to financially assist up to 40 aid-eligible undergraduate students who are admitted to Columbia College and/or The Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science.

neighbors.columbia.edu/thompson

George Van Amson Fellows Who Made an Impact with Local Nonprofits

Every summer, Community Impact at Columbia provides stipends and summer housing resources for Columbia and Barnard undergraduate students to participate in New York City-based, unpaid nonprofit or service-learning work. The fellowship program is named for George Van Amson (Columbia College '74), a trustee emeritus and longtime Wall Street executive.

Meet two fellows who recently made a difference in their community-driven internships.



Obse Abebe | The Bronx Defenders

Obse Abebe (Columbia College '27) believes addressing human rights requires an intersectional approach—a perspective shaped by her family's immigration from Ethiopia, her exploration of identity in high school, and her work at The Bronx Defenders (BxD).

"If you face charges and turn to BxD, in addition to being supported by a criminal defense attorney, you can also be supported by one of their benefits specialists if you have a qualifying need," Abebe said. "This approach stood out to me because it acknowledges how an individual's identity traits interact to shape their lived experiences."

Learn more at neighbors.columbia.edu/obse-abebe.

Eloise Benoit | The Fortune Society

Eloise Benoit (Barnard College '25) has witnessed how restorative justice drives social change. From seeing the impact of grassroots programs making the arts accessible in her hometown of New Haven to her work at The Fortune Society's Bronx office, the transformative efforts of dedicated changemakers at the local level sparked her passion for social justice.



"When it comes to restorative justice, The Fortune Society practices what it preaches, a large part of its workforce are formerly incarcerated individuals," Benoit said. "It feels like a well-rounded space because of that. It was amazing to be part of an organization that emphasizes community building."

Learn more at neighbors.columbia.edu/eloise-benoit.

A Cinematic Celebration of Heritage

The African Diaspora International Film Festival has a fruitful partnership with Teachers College.

For Afro-Cuban educator and film enthusiast Dr. Reinaldo Barroso-Spech (Teachers College '02), cinema is a universal language that builds cross-cultural bridges.

Growing up in Cuba—during an era when there was a dearth of diverse stories on the silver screen—watching films like the Cuban drama *Maluala* and the American romance *Carmen Jones* illustrated multilayered narratives across the Black diaspora and became a source of education and empowerment for Barroso-Spech.

Now, through the **African Diaspora International Film Festival** (ADIFF), which he and his wife Diarah N'Daw-Spech (Columbia Business School '92) co-founded in Harlem 33 years ago through their **ArtMattan Productions**,

Barroso-Spech hopes to conjure that same sense of pride and discovery by celebrating culturally relevant films that center the human condition.

The film festival, with screenings in New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Paris, has partnered with **Teachers College** for 30-plus years, utilizing the campus for open-to-the-public screenings.

“The Harlem audience has been very supportive of what we’ve created,” Barroso-Spech shared. “They don’t hesitate to come and ask us about titles they’d like to see. The interaction we’ve had with the Harlem audience is different from other cities. It’s all about proximity.”

Learn more about the history of the festival at neighbors.columbia.edu/adiff and find the next film festival dates at nyadiff.org.



McDonald's Makes a Highly Anticipated Return to West Harlem



McDonald's made an exciting return to West Harlem in April 2025, opening on the ground floor of Columbia University's new residential building at **125th Street and Broadway**—the same location where it previously operated before construction began.

The restaurant is owned by Fonseca Group, a family-owned franchise that owns and operates 35 restaurants in the New York metro area. The group is committed to giving back to the local community through food donations, sponsorship of local school programs, and mentorship opportunities.

"We are thrilled to open a new location in West Harlem, and look forward to providing an enjoyable dining experience for the local community," said PJ Fonseca, owner of the McDonald's West Harlem location.

The restaurant's hours are 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., Sunday through Thursday, and 6:00 a.m. to midnight, Friday and Saturday.

Learn more at
neighbors.columbia.edu/mcdonalds.

Calling All Local Vendors!

Columbia's commitment to local hiring crosses all aspects of our work, including the businesses we contract with, retail tenants we lease to, and the workforce of our construction contractors and vendors.

From locally helmed pop-up markets at the Lee C. Bollinger Forum to our renowned CU Grow: Vendor Development Program, you can learn more at cufo.columbia.edu/content/locally-owned-vendors and cugrow.columbia.edu.



IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Community School District 5 Superintendent Sean L. Davenport

Harlem Community School District 5

Superintendent Sean L. Davenport's deeply rooted passion for education stems from a storied journey of self-discovery and service. Growing up, he rarely saw himself reflected in his learning environments, from the pages of his textbooks to the people he was surrounded by.

Now, sitting at the helm of Harlem's District 5—a collective of 23 schools throughout Central Harlem and Morningside Heights—Davenport is cultivating culturally responsive learning spaces where local youth can feel seen, heard, and celebrated; schools that center the neighborhood's rich history and empower young scholars to be active participants in building its future.

Columbia Neighbors spoke with Davenport, a proud Norfolk State University alum, about his path in the education space, his foundational contributions to Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School, engaging the local community through education, and his key priorities and vision for District 5.

"When this opportunity to serve as the superintendent of Harlem Community School District 5 [presented itself], I saw it as a chance to help change the mindsets of families and speak to the greatness of Harlem through education," Davenport said. "Coming back, my message was to let the kids know how great they are, and where they live is probably the most important community in the whole wide world."

Read more at neighbors.columbia.edu/sean-davenport.

Remembering Two Community Pillars

Columbia University joins community members in honoring the impact and influence of Hazel N. Dukes and Charles B. Rangel.



Hazel N. Dukes

Dr. Hazel N. Dukes, a fierce advocate for civil rights and a fixture in the Uptown community, passed away on March 1, 2025, at 92. Dukes, a longtime Lenox Terrace resident, leaves behind a legacy built on the pillars of equality and empowerment.

Coming of age in the Jim Crow era in Montgomery, Alabama, propelled her to pursue a path in activism. Throughout her storied career, she sat at the helm of organizations dedicated to social

justice, including serving as the national president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and leading the nonprofit's New York State conference from 1977 until her passing.

While she made an indelible mark nationally, her dedication to grassroots community organizing shaped the neighborhood of Harlem. She served on Manhattan Community Board 10 until February 2024.

Read more about her legacy at neighbors.columbia.edu/hazel-dukes.

Charles B. Rangel

Charles B. Rangel, a Harlem-born political powerhouse who blazed a monumental path on Capitol Hill, passed away on May 26, 2025, at 94. Rangel, one of the longest-serving members of the U.S. House of Representatives, was a champion for community empowerment and civic engagement.

Although Rangel—often called the Lion of Lenox Avenue—used his political prowess to effect global change, he never strayed from Harlem. In 1994, he founded the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, which officially became a nonprofit a year after its launch and is dedicated to economically uplifting under-resourced communities.

Inspired by his commitment to addressing socioeconomic barriers to healthcare, the Rangel Community Health Center, staffed by Columbia doctors, opened in Harlem in 2015.

Read more about his legacy at neighbors.columbia.edu/charles-rangel.



A Free Clinic's 20 Years of Service

Columbia Student Medical Outreach (CoSMO) recently celebrated a major milestone—20 years of operating as a free clinic serving uninsured patients in Washington Heights and Northern Harlem.

The student-run free clinics help fill a gap in the Washington Heights neighborhood, which has the second-highest rate of uninsured adults in New York City. More than 20% of adults in Washington Heights lack health insurance, compared to the citywide average of around 12%. The clinic offers a wide array of services, including checkups, chronic condition self-management education, nutritional care, behavioral health care, and physical therapy.

The first and largest student-run free clinic at **Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons (VP&S)**, CoSMO is a team effort, staffed by volunteer medical and physical therapy students and faculty from the medical school, and students from the School of Social Work, Mailman School of Public Health, and the School of Nursing. NewYork-Presbyterian provides the physical space for the clinic and medical staff while it's in operation.

In a small clinic setting, student volunteers provide one of the most valuable and scarce resources of all in healthcare—time.

“For many of our patients, there just hasn’t been someone to sit down and explain what’s going on, why they feel ill, and what they can do to help,” says Kishan Bhatt, CoSMO co-chair and fourth-year medical student at VP&S. “As medical students, we have the time. I think it fills a niche for those patients, and it makes them really motivated to help themselves and continue to come back to the clinic.”

Learn more and watch a video about CoSMO’s history of service at neighbors.columbia.edu/free-clinic.





Programs and Resources Directory

To find details on more than 100 public programs, resources, and services at Columbia University, visit our directory at neighbors.columbia.edu/resources, which includes everything you need to know about programs like these:



English for Speakers of Other Languages

12-week classes are held by Columbia Community Impact in September, February, April, and July.



The ElderSmile Program

by the Columbia College of Dental Medicine offers prevention and treatment services for seniors in northern Manhattan through mobile van visits to senior centers.



The **Girls Who Code** chapter at Columbia is dedicated to closing the gender gap in the technology and engineering sectors and runs classes for local K-12 students on Saturdays.



Graduate Scholarships for Elementary School Teachers

are awarded to qualified elementary school teachers either currently teaching or interested in teaching elementary school within Community District 9.



Host Your Community Event at Columbia

Did you know local nonprofits based in or serving Manhattan Community District 9 (Morningside Heights, Manhattanville, and Hamilton Heights) can rent space at Columbia for special events?

The University has committed to making a range of facilities, services, and amenities available to local nonprofits through its In-Kind program at no charge!

Columbia University, West Harlem Development Corporation, and Community Board 9 host an online application that is made available to nonprofit applicants every first week of the month.

[Learn more and begin your in-kind space request at neighbors.columbia.edu/in-kind.](https://neighbors.columbia.edu/in-kind)

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