

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORS

SUMMER/FALL 2026 NEWSLETTER



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UPTOWN HISTORYKEEPERS

As the nation marks its 250th birthday, few places carry the weight of American history more deeply than Upper Manhattan. From the Revolutionary War battlegrounds of Washington Heights to the cultural renaissance that elevated Harlem's global voice, this corner of New York has been shaped (and continues to be shaped) by the people who live here.

That history isn't preserved on its own. It takes community members, scholars, artists, historians, and storytellers who believe the past is worth passing on. Meet three neighbors who are doing exactly that.

Art as an Archive: Pierre Voltaire, Harlem Public Arts Project

For Pierre Voltaire, murals are memory. Growing up on the border of Harlem and the Upper West Side, he came to see creative expression as a form of empowerment and, eventually, as a way to preserve the history of the neighborhood he calls home.

Voltaire founded the **Harlem Public Arts Project** in 2016 with a straightforward mission: make the visual arts accessible, amplify local creative work, and use art to connect generations. Today, he looks back on a decade of murals, workshops, and exhibitions that document who occupied these streets and what they built for the community.



"We're in a space in society where history is currently being rewritten," Voltaire told *Neighbors*. "The work we do at the Harlem Public Arts Project is all about letting young people and the people who might want to keep them down know about the true history."

Two recent exhibitions at Columbia's Lee C. Bollinger Forum, *Icons of Activism* and *Celebrating 300 Years of Black Inventors*, brought that mission into a public, accessible space. For Voltaire, the Forum's open, street-facing design is the point: history should be visible to all walking by.

As the country marks 250 years, he's adding to the historical record one mural and one workshop at a time. Read more at neighbors.columbia.edu/pierre-voltaire.

Revolutionary History in Our Parks: Gail Addiss, Bundles Scholar

Architect and **A'Lelia Bundles Community Scholar**

Gail Addiss is on a mission to amplify awareness of Northern Manhattan's significance during the American Revolution.

"We're at a really critical time," Addiss said. "We're all Americans, and our area played an important part in our country's founding. This origin story is part of our fundamental shared narrative, and I think it will help to unite us as a community, and hopefully as a country."

Through her Bundles project, Addiss is organizing local walking tours, communal exhibitions, and public forums highlighting parks and sites in Northern Manhattan that are connected to the Revolutionary War.

Read more at neighbors.columbia.edu/gail-addiss.



Community Oral History: Melvin McCray, Harlem Through My Eyes

Award-winning journalist, filmmaker, and educator Melvin McCray III began by documenting the matriarchs of his own family, discovering a calling along the way. After a career telling stories for Time Inc. and ABC News, and teaching at Columbia Journalism School, McCray turned his lens on the Uptown community.

Through his **Harlem Through My Eyes** oral history initiative and **Family History Community Workshops** at the Lee C. Bollinger Forum, he empowers Harlem residents to preserve their own generational legacies, whether through a family photo book or a short documentary.



Launched through McCray's Digital Media Training Program, a local youth initiative he founded in 2013, Harlem Through My Eyes sits at the intersection of education and community-driven storytelling.

Learn more at neighbors.columbia.edu/melvin-mccray.

Columbia University Welcomes Jennifer L. Mnookin as Its President

After a thorough search, Columbia’s Board of Trustees appointed **Jennifer L. Mnookin**, who served as the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is a nationally recognized legal scholar whose core areas of focus include wrongful convictions and forensic evidence, as president of the University beginning July 1.

“Whatever your connection to Columbia—student, faculty, staff, alumni, neighbor, parent, friend—I thank you for caring about this institution and for the ways that you contribute to its strength,” Mnookin said. “I cannot wait to work alongside you to help write the next chapter of Columbia’s nearly three-centuries-long story of purpose, impact, and contribution to the greater



good, through world-class education, research, and public engagement.”

You can keep up with Mnookin’s first days and months at the University at president.columbia.edu.

Community Impact’s 2026 Public Service Awards Recognize Local Leaders

Community Impact at Columbia University marked 45 years of service with one of its most inspiring rosters of Public Service Award honorees, including the longtime director of Columbia Community Service, **Joan Griffith-Lee**.

At the Public Service Celebration and Awards Breakfast on April 17, Griffith-Lee was honored alongside an outstanding class of fellow community leaders: New York City Council Majority Leader **Shaun Abreu** (CC’14); Deputy Mayor for Housing and Planning **Leila Bozorg**; Robin Hood Foundation CEO **Richard R. Buery Jr.**; **Gerrard P. Bushell** (CC’83), partner and chair of CAG, the Carlyle Airport Group; departing Union Theological Seminary President **Serene Jones**; and the **Literacy Assistance Center**.

Community Impact connects Columbia students, staff, and faculty to the neighborhoods of Harlem, Morningside Heights, and Washington Heights with services, including the Ford Hall Food Pantry, ESOL and high school equivalency programs, and service work.

See photos from the celebration at neighbors.columbia.edu/awards26.

A Lens on Local



A flurry of community events and activities took place at Columbia last winter and spring. Here's a snapshot of just a few incredible events filled with lively conversation and education, clockwise from top left. Follow [@columbianeighbors](https://www.instagram.com/columbianeighbors) on Instagram for more photos.

A'Lelia Bundles Book Talk at the Forum: Dec. 12

Community members, students, and local scholars gathered at the Lee C. Bollinger Forum to hear from A'Lelia Bundles and Eric K. Washington as they discussed Bundles's new book, *Joy Goddess: A'Lelia Walker and the Harlem Renaissance*.

CU Grow Mentor Matching Ceremony: Feb. 25

The CU Grow: Vendor Development Program kicked off its year with a matching ceremony at the CUIMC Faculty Club, bringing together mentors from Columbia and the construction industry with local and small business owners seeking to strengthen capacity if this gets construction industries on the same line. in the architecture, engineering, and construction industries.

State of the New York Women in Business: March 11

The New York Women's Chamber of Commerce convened a gathering at the Forum to address critical priorities, including building generational wealth, breaking systemic barriers for women-owned businesses, and expanding access to public- and private-sector contracts.

TCIONY's 'Weather or Not' Youth Event: March 31

Focused on centering women in STEM and building equitable climate solutions, this youth-led climate justice event hosted at the Forum by The Community Initiatives of New York (TCIONY) created a space for young people to engage directly with science, storytelling, and environmental advocacy.



Columbia and MTA Partner to Improve Accessibility of 125 St. Subway Station

Columbia University and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority have announced a provisional agreement to modernize the 125th St. 1 subway station, bringing major accessibility upgrades to the transit hub beside Columbia's Manhattanville campus.

The planned improvements include three new elevators, widened escalators, platform enhancements, and additional system repairs aimed at improving the commute for the station's roughly 6,500 daily riders.

Under the agreement, Columbia has committed \$33 million toward the project, which remains subject to final approval by public agencies. Construction contracts are expected to be awarded in 2028.

One elevator will connect the street level to the mezzanine, while two others

will connect the mezzanine to the northbound and southbound platforms. Escalators will also be widened to improve pedestrian flow and accessibility throughout the station.

"The success of Columbia and the success of the surrounding neighborhoods are closely linked—when one does well, the other does too," said Columbia University Senior Executive Vice President Robert Kasdin. "That's what drives investments like this."

The station upgrades were included as part of the land use approval process for Columbia's Manhattanville campus expansion. University leaders say the investment reflects Columbia's ongoing commitment to supporting surrounding neighborhoods and improving local infrastructure. Read more at neighbors.columbia.edu/accessibility.

Columbia Business Students Build Community Through Service

When Leticia De Mattei Goncalves (BUS'26) and William Szczecinski (BUS'26) arrived at Columbia Business School, both were looking for ways to translate classroom lessons into real community impact.

That shared drive inspired them to co-lead the Community Impact Club, a student-run organization that partners with local New York City nonprofits to provide financial literacy, mentorship, and career guidance to Harlem youth and adults.

"When the people we support leave our sessions, we hope they'll carry some of that spark with them and spread that to their classmates or their communities," said Szczecinski.



Started in 2011, the club recently hosted its first Spring Service Week, drawing over 100 student volunteers for events with AHRC NYC, TEAK Fellowship, Figure Skating in Harlem (pictured here at the Business School), and City Harvest. Learn more at neighbors.columbia.edu/service-club.

MANHATTANVILLE RETAIL

New Community-Focused Fitness Space



Local women-owned fitness co-op Method Collective has expanded at Columbia's Manhattanville campus with a new indoor cycling studio in Henry R. Kravis Hall. Founded by Leah Roth, Patricia Ruiz, and Dani Zuccheri, the welcoming wellness space offers cycling, yoga, Pilates, and community-focused fitness classes for neighbors. Located at 2289 12th Ave., between 130th and 131st Streets.

neighbors.columbia.edu/method-collective

Columbia Programs Expand Food Access Across NYC

Across Columbia University, students, faculty, and staff are working to combat rising food insecurity in New York City through food pantries, meal programs, research, and community partnerships. As food pantry visits surge across the city, Columbia-supported programs are helping thousands of neighbors and students access nutritious meals and essential resources.



PROGRAMS SUPPORTING FOOD ACCESS

Community Impact's Ford Hall Food Pantry: Serves more than 33,000 New Yorkers annually through free grocery distribution and hot meal programs in Morningside Heights. Student volunteers help distribute food and prepare meals for our neighbors across Manhattan.

The Food Pantry at Columbia: Operated through the Center for Student Success and Intervention, the pantry provides no-cost food and essentials to 11,000 Columbia students annually in Morningside Heights and Washington Heights.

Columbia Community Service: Since 2019, CCS has awarded nearly \$350,000 in grants to Uptown nonprofits fighting hunger, including soup kitchens and food pantries serving Harlem and Morningside Heights.

Food FARMacia at CUIMC/NewYork-Presbyterian: This health-focused program delivers nutritious groceries to food-insecure patients and families. Since 2023, it has distributed 2.5 million pounds of groceries to 5,000 households.

Learn more about how you can support and access these programs at neighbors.columbia.edu/food-insecurity.

From the Feed: Bundles Scholars' Favorite Uptown Nonprofits



Community Healthcare Network, WE ACT for Environmental Justice, Bruce's Garden, and Goddard Riverside Law Project are just four of the Uptown nonprofits where the current cohort of A'Lelia Bundles Community Scholars find inspiration. Learn more at instagram.com/columbianighbors.

A Groundbreaking BMCC Partnership

In April, Columbia University and Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) formally marked a significant expansion of educational access in New York City with a signing ceremony establishing the BMCC–Columbia NYC Scholars Program.

Held in the historic Low Library on Columbia's Morningside Heights campus, the event brought together institutional

leaders, including Columbia Acting

President **Claire Shipman** (CC'86, SIPA'94); BMCC President **Anthony E. Munroe** (MPH'03, TC'07); and Columbia School of General Studies Dean **Lisa Rosen-Metsch** (GS'90), to commemorate the groundbreaking partnership.



Launched in 2024, the NYC Scholars Program creates a clear pathway for high-achieving BMCC students to complete their associate's degrees and seamlessly transition to Columbia GS for their bachelor's. During their second year at BMCC, students are enrolled at both institutions, receiving coordinated advising to support a smooth academic progression.

Learn more at neighbors.columbia.edu/bmcc.

Cohorts of the CU Grow: Vendor Development Program



The Columbia Facilities and Operations-led CU Grow: Vendor Development Program graduated its ninth cohort in a ceremony on Jan. 28. The program is designed to help small and local vendors, as well as socially and economically disadvantaged individuals, grow their businesses.

The CU Grow program supports business owners in building their management, financial, marketing, and back-office skills. Over the course of the 11-month program, business owners are matched with a mentor who supports them through a curriculum developed by the Columbia University School of Professional Studies.

Learn more at neighbors.columbia.edu/cu-grow.

Community CHAT, Direct-to-You Health Conversations

Columbia University Irving Medical Center's Community Columbia Health Awareness Talks (Community CHAT) program is bringing free health education directly to community organizations across Upper Manhattan and the Bronx.

Launched in fall 2025 by the Office of Community Health at Columbia's Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons, the program connects

CUIMC faculty with local residents through talks on topics including oral health, diabetes, mental health, hypertension, and healthy aging.

Hosted at trusted neighborhood organizations and offered in English and Spanish, Community CHAT sessions focus on health concerns identified by community members themselves. Live AI translation tools also help make the presentations accessible in additional languages.

Since launching, the program has hosted 10-plus talks, reaching more than 300 community members. Organizers report that 96 percent of attendees said they better understood the health topics presented, while 90 percent said they planned to improve health habits after attending. Read more at neighbors.columbia.edu/chats.



New 'Boca Sana' Initiative Launched

The Columbia College of Dental Medicine has been awarded a new grant from the Dalio Center for Health Justice to launch "Boca Sana: Keeping Northern Manhattan Children Healthy at Home," an ambitious, community-centered initiative designed to break the cycle of untreated dental disease among low-income children in Washington Heights and surrounding neighborhoods.



Led by Richard Yoon, professor of dental medicine at Columbia, Boca Sana (Spanish for "healthy mouth") will embed community-based prevention and navigation services directly into the College's Pediatric Dentistry Clinic at 722 W. 168th St. Learn more at neighbors.columbia.edu/boca-sana.

RESOURCES



Programs and Resources Directory

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



Ford Hall Food Pantry at 616 West 114th St. is open Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and carries shelf-stable items like rice, pasta, beans, and canned vegetables.



In-Kind Space Benefits give the local community access to a range of existing Columbia facilities, services, and amenities. Applications for space reopen on the first Monday of the month.



Lenfest Kids is a monthly series of free films for the whole family, showing at the Katharina Otto-Bernstein Screening Room on the Manhattanville campus.



Reimagining Educational Achievement Coalition of Harlem aims to improve students' educational outcomes in a group of high-need Pre-K-12 schools in Harlem.



Discover Earth Science | Oct. 17, 2026

The annual Columbia Climate School Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory Open House returns this fall on Oct. 17 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.! LDEO welcomes aspiring young scientists and science enthusiasts of all ages to its picturesque campus in Palisades, New York.

Activities include talks with climate experts, opportunities to learn about the latest discoveries in climate science, and dozens of hands-on science activities for kids and families. Free shuttle buses are available to and from New York City.

Stay tuned for more updates at openhouse.ldeo.columbia.edu.

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neighbors.columbia.edu
neighbors@columbia.edu

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