

## GUEST OP-ED

# Fiftieth Anniversary of An Imaginary Bridge



This Harbor Ring route map shows the Verrazano Bridge as the missing link. A street-level detail can be seen on line at [www.harborring.org](http://www.harborring.org). Map courtesy of Paul Gertner

By Paul Gertner

Special to Brooklyn Eagle/Extra

On Nov. 23, 1964, the *New York Times* covered opening day of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. While many were enthusiastic, the *Times* noted: "The lack of a pedestrian crosswalk caused most of the complaints about the bridge."

And so began the history of an imaginary bridge, one with a scenic pathway to cross New York Harbor. Calls for this imagined bridge have continued, while the existing bridge grows old, gets refurbished and lives on.

Organized calls coalesced in the 1990s with the Verrazano Lifeway proposal, which received many political endorsements. In 1997, the bridge's designers, Ammann and Whitney, were hired to assess the feasibility of a combined bicycle and pedestrian path. Interestingly, the Department of City Planning funded this study, not the MTA, which took over bridge operations in 1968.

The study showed how the existing structure and access ramps could accommodate a pathway without any impact on traffic lanes. The cost estimate at the time was \$26.5 million, roughly \$47 million today, including maintenance costs. Nothing happened following this study.

According to a recent New York University study, a pathway is a matter of public safety. Fuel shortages limited travel to and from Staten Island during Hurricane Sandy and even the ferry was inoperable for a time. A path would appeal to tourists, much like the iconic Brooklyn Bridge. New York bike and pedestrian activity has surged, prompting the Port Authority to build new access to all of its bridges, including planned upgrades to the George Washington and Bayonne Bridge Paths, as well as a path slated for the Goethals Bridge.

The New York Wheel will soon be attracting millions from the Staten Island Ferry. Wouldn't it be great if they could rent a bike and check out the view from the adjacent bridge? Or, if Staten Island and Brooklyn residents could cross without a \$15 toll?

The Harbor Ring Committee contends that a Verrazano pathway is the missing link in an integrated bi-state route around the entire harbor. This route would include New Jersey's Hudson River Walkway, Manhattan's West Side path and the Brooklyn Greenway that passes directly under the Verrazano.

In December 2013, the MTA signed a contract with Parsons Brinckerhoff to again assess the feasibility of a path, according to a benefit-cost cal-



Paul Gertner is the chair of the Harbor Ring Committee. Photo courtesy of Paul Gertner

ulation. It is wonderful that the MTA recognizes the importance of this issue. However, the Harbor Ring Committee's calls to open the planning process to public input have gone unanswered.

The bridge pathway cannot be reduced to a standard calculation of projected usage and cost. More subtle, but no less significant, reasons must be considered: public safety, lower automobile dependency, improved public health, increased tourism and economic development, to name a few. We believe the only way to ensure that this will happen is to open the process to organizations and individuals who have valuable information on these benefits. So, dear MTA, as we approach the 50th Anniversary of the Imaginary Bridge please understand how real it is and how much it calls out to you too!

Paul Gertner is the chair of the Harbor Ring Committee, [www.harborring.org](http://www.harborring.org). He is a native of Brooklyn and President of Starborn Industries, a hardware distribution company founded in Brooklyn in 1961.

# Only in Bay Ridge

By Charles F. Otey



## Remembering Maureen On Our Last Trip Down Third Avenue



Chuck Otey (rear) and Maureen Stramka travel the 2014 St. Patrick's Parade route in a stylish 1931 Ford Roadster, driven by antique car aficionado Evans Georgopoulos.

Eagle photo by Paula Katinas

One of the most vivid and caring people to grace the stage of civic life in Bay Ridge — the lovely **Maureen Stramka** — was seen off by hundreds, including family members, friends and others at Our Lady of Angels Church on Tuesday morning, May 20. She had passed away a few days earlier after a four-year battle with cancer.

To know Maureen was to admire her charm and her tenacity. To have had the privilege of working with her on a number of events over the past 20 years was to love her for her remarkable charm and commitment to her family and community.

Her courage set a standard that very few of us could meet. Shortly after her illness began to take a visible and disturbing toll, someone remarked that she was dying. To the contrary, she was living, truly living, until the end.

The accompanying column, which shows, in part, how lovingly she was regarded, appeared in the March 28, 2014 edition of "Only in Bay Ridge."

*"If you really want to draw cheers from the thousands of spectators who line Third Avenue during a parade, you should ride with the wonderful Maureen Stramka in a 1931 Ford Roadster driven by antique car aficionado Evans Georgopoulos. Especially as part of a St. Patrick's Day Parade!"*

*I had that pleasure last Sunday — from the perspective of a Model T Ford's romantic rumble seat — and heard the "Yea, Maureen!" and "Go, Maureen!" choruses ring out for almost an hour, until she was escorted to the reviewing stand and warmly welcomed by St. Patrick's Parade Chair Frankie Marra.*

*What makes Maureen so special? Well, for the past few decades she has devoted herself to some of the best Bay Ridge causes, which have become true traditions as they define and sustain the community's unique volunteer spirit.*

*Maureen has been a leader of Ragamuffin Inc. (now led by President Colleen Golden), as well as a true force in preserving historic Fort Hamilton Army Base from the Pentagon chopping block. She's handled a dozen or more worthwhile endeavors of the Bay Ridge Community Council and, just a few years back, was honored with the Merchants of Third Avenue Pioneer Civic Award.*

*And going back just a few years more, she*

*was one of the founders of the Greater Bay Ridge Clean-Up Campaign, which ignited a tradition of neighborhood clean-ups in the spring of 1992 that carries on to this day."*

### Verrazano Lifeway a Vital Link In Historic Harbor Ring Initiative

For more than 20 years, our Verrazano Lifeway<sup>®</sup> Committee has worked steadily to help us all win the right to walk, trot, bike, or wheelchair across the mighty, 300-foot-high Narrows span. The Lifeway offers an incredible view of Manhattan and a fun and healthy way to travel between our two linked boroughs.

We've won the support of 10,000 petition signers, various newspapers, planning boards, former Mayor **Mike Bloomberg**, U.S. Sen. **Chuck Schumer**, state Sen. **Marty Golden**, Assemblyman **Peter Abbate**, Councilman **Vincent Gentile** and scores of other legislators.

Working with the East Coast Coalition back in the 1990s, we were part of a team that was successful in sparking a study by Ammann & Whitney — the bridge's original designers — to conduct a feasibility study regarding the Lifeway. The results were impressive!

As **Paul Gertner**, head of the Harbor Ring Committee, notes in his accompanying Op-Ed this week, the renowned design firm found that building a Lifeway was not only feasible, but it had been contemplated when the plans were first drawn up, back in the 1960s!

Sure to put the Lifeway back in the spotlight is the imaginative and well-orchestrated Boro Ring project launched by Mr. Gertner, which suggests that the Verrazano crossing is essential to embracing the entire ring concept, which will provide us with an inspiring route of individual travel.

Gertner has the enthusiastic backing of the Verrazano Lifeway Committee and is currently working with community planning boards and other officials. It's no longer a question of whether the Lifeway will be installed; the question now is when it will be installed.

(Columnist's Note: Thanks to District Manager **Josephine Beckmann** and Community Board 10 Chair **Brian Kieran**, a "display" offering a brief history of the Lifeway Committee Campaign can be seen at Community Board 10 headquarters, 8119 Fifth Ave.)