

# Long Island Traditions

## NEWSLETTER

www.longislandtraditions.org

Vol. 10 No. 4 Fall 2003

### Honoring Traditions

Long Island Traditions will hold its 7th annual "Honoring Traditions" concert on Sunday, December 7th at 2:00 PM at the Hillwood Commons Auditorium, C.W. Post College in Brookville. The event will feature performances by the 2003 honorees: Rathi Raja and The Young Indian Culture Group of Manhasset, Dominican composer and musician Luis Cordero, along with film presentations about Jewish activist and author Evelyn Pike Rubin and Liz Grossmann Rung of the Grossmann Family Farm.

Manhasset resident Rathi Raja founded the Young Indian Culture Group in 1993, and has devoted herself to teaching Indian American children, as well as public school students, about her rich Indian culture and its many traditions. Freeport resident Luis Cordero, a prolific bachatero and popular merengue musician from the Dominican Republic, formed his band "Los Amigos Del Amargue" in the 1980s and has composed over 400 songs about his culture and the immigrant experience in

see **Honoring Traditions** on page 2



*Photo by Martha Cooper, 2003.*

Luis Cordero will be among those recognized at Honoring Traditions on December 7.

### South Shore Estuary Survey

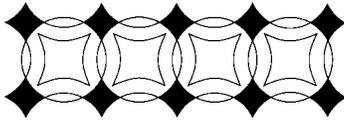
Long Island Traditions has received a grant from the Preservation League of NY/NY State Council on the Arts to conduct a maritime historic sites survey in the Oakdale-Brookhaven region as part of the South Shore Estuary's regional plan and cultural heritage trail development. Architectural historian Jackie Peu Duvallon and director Nancy Solomon will be examining such sites as the Weeks Yacht Yard in Patchogue, summer bungalows, 18th and 19th century baymen's homes and other cultural resources that reflect the region's maritime origins. The year-long project will form the basis of the estuary's cultural "bayway" trail where motorists, cyclists and pedestrians can learn about the region's maritime heritage. Driving tours, outdoor signage and various publications will result from the survey. This grant is one of two to be awarded to Long Island organizations. A total of 11 grants were awarded state wide.

If you know of any maritime related sites in this survey area please contact Long Island Traditions at (516) 767-8803. ■

### Ethnic Folk Arts Programs

During the coming months Long Island Traditions will be presenting three ethnic folk arts programs at area libraries. They include:

- Sunday, November 2: Mexican Mariachi music with Jose Luis Torres at the LI Museum at Stony Brook. 2 pm. Free with museum admission. Call 631-751-0066 for more information.
- Saturday, November 15: Colombian music with Juan & Eugenio Ortega of Los Macondos. Island Park Library. 2pm. Free admission. Call (516) 432-0122 for more information.
- Sunday, December 7: Honoring Traditions program (see accompanying article). ■



## Long Island Traditions Inc.

Dedicated to the documentation and preservation of Long Island's living cultural heritage.

**Executive Director:** Nancy Solomon

**Staff Folklorist:** Jill Gellerman

**Board of Directors:** Dorothy Jacobs, Mirna Cortez-Obers, Ken Maltz, Robert Pachas, Addie Quinn, Linda Scholl, Michael Scully & Wayne Wink

**Advisory Board:** Paul Bentel, John Eilertsen, Dave Opatow & Jean Ritchie

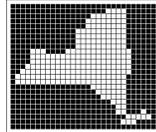
**Newsletter Designer:** Barbara Koelbel Bange

LI Traditions is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization registered with the NY State Board of Charities.

For more information call: (516) 767-8803, fax: (516) 767-8805, write to us at: 382 Main St., Port Washington, NY 11050, E-mail: [litrad@i-2000.com](mailto:litrad@i-2000.com) or visit us on the web at: [www.longislandtraditions.org](http://www.longislandtraditions.org)

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State of the Arts



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## Honoring Traditions continued from page 1

addition to recording several tapes and CDs. Jericho resident Evelyn Pike Rubin is the author of Ghetto Shanghai, a book about her childhood growing up in Germany, her struggle to survive the war years in Japanese occupied Shanghai during the Holocaust, and her subsequent life on Long Island dedicated to telling her story. Liz Grossmann Rung is a fourth generation farmer, whose mission is to preserve the last working farm on the south shore of Nassau County, the Grossmann Family Farm in Malverne.

There are many folk artists on Long Island who carry on important everyday cultural traditions that make the region unique. LI Traditions documents these tradition bearers in order to educate the public on their significance in history and contemporary culture. "We hope that people of all different cultures and backgrounds will appreciate the tremendous legacy that is passed down to us from our families and within our communities, so that folk traditions are preserved for future generations," says folklorist Nancy Solomon, executive director of Long Island Traditions.

Tickets for "Honoring Traditions" can be ordered by sending a check to Long Island Traditions, 382 Main Street, Port Washington, NY, 11050, or by calling (516) 767-8803 during regular business hours. Tickets for this event are \$15/individual, \$25/couple. LI Traditions members receive a \$5 discount. Further information is available at [www.longislandtraditions.org](http://www.longislandtraditions.org). ■

## Arts in Education Programs

Long Island Traditions continues its arts-in-ed programs in area Long Island schools. We will be continuing our work with the Finley Middle School in Huntington on an architecture curriculum for 7th grade social studies teachers. In Freeport we've expanded our ethnic folk arts programs to include all four elementary schools, and a 20-week after school program with the Steel Sensations steelband at Dodd and Atkinson middle schools. Also continuing will be our maritime folk arts programs and ethnic folk arts at Dodd Middle School. Joining our maritime school partnerships will be the Guggenheim elementary school in Port Washington.



**Brad Reminick of Finley Middle School gets the hang of colonial cooking during a workshop with culinary historian Alice Ross as part of LI Traditions architecture curriculum program.**

Continuing will be the Clinton and Norwood elementary schools in Port Jefferson and the Meadow Drive elementary school in Albertson. If you know of a school interested in ethnic or maritime folk artists, tell them to contact us and we'll get them started. ■

## Become a Member Subscribe to the Newsletter!

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# Rathi Raja and the Young Indian Culture Group: Indian American Educator & Storyteller

by Sydney Hutchinson

**R**athi Raja was born in Ambala, India in the northern state of Haryana to parents from the southern state of Kerala. The family moved frequently since Rathi's father was in the Air Force. Rathi grew up fluent in three different languages-Tamil, Hindi, and English. The experience of living in so many different parts of India gave her a "bigger perspective" on her country as well as a lifelong interest in its diverse cultural traditions. Although Rathi attended British schools where she read more Milton than Mahabharata, at home she read and reread the great Hindu epics, also listening to her father recount the classic tales.

Rathi came to the United States with her husband in 1981. With an MBA in Finance and Information Sciences, she worked on Wall Street for several years before relocating to Manhasset. She quickly became aware that American-born Hindus like her own children were in danger of losing important cultural and religious knowledge through acculturation, just as many Indians of her generation had done through their British schooling. Rathi began to tell stories from the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Panchatantra to engage children's interest in their culture and to teach them to be proud of their traditions:

*That, I think, came from my dad. My dad when he talks about his country or his traditions there is so much pride, and I think that pride is transmitted. It's so important when you teach children about culture, their own culture which is really a minority, that they develop a sense of pride. So more important than technique is actually you, the storyteller, give them the sense of pride. You become the role model for them. They learn from that, and it is a very precious thing to transmit.*

Soon Rathi decided to dedicate herself full time to teaching Indian children on Long Island about their religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage. In 1993 she founded the Young Indian Culture Group (YICG) to accomplish that goal, with the help of Drs. Urmila Shivaram and Runi Ratnam. Twenty-five students registered in YICG's first year; today over 120 children ages 4 to 18 attend Saturday classes at the Herricks Community Center. The group's 14 dedicated teachers offer a wide variety of 28-week courses at minimal cost, including Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati, yoga, Indian cooking, Vedic scriptures, Indian history, mehendi (henna body painting), rangoli (mandala painting), folk dance, classical dance and singing. Vedic Heritage students follow a rigorous syllabus based on traditional teaching methods: "There's a method to the teaching, the reading of the verses from the scripture, and at the end of it they do have an understanding. It's a very ancient tradition of teaching; there are certain prescribed texts and you follow them."

Though YICG's main focus is on education, the group is also dedicated to public outreach. The students put on two shows annually which are open to the public. In addition Rathi has been a guest teacher in Long Island's public schools for the last six years and has developed a collection of materials on Indian culture for the Long

Island public library system. She recently received a Nassau County Community Service Award for her efforts.

Rathi Raja and the YICG will be among the honorees at Long Island Traditions' Honoring Traditions program. See accompanying article for more information and ticket ordering. ■

## West Meadow Beach Book

**N**eed a holiday gift? Currently in production is a new book about West Meadow Beach by director Nancy Solomon. This handsome book will have exciting stories, classic historic and contemporary photographs, along with a portrait of life at this historic summer bungalow community. The black and white publication is due out in early - mid December and will cost \$15/copy. To reserve your copy call Long Island Traditions at (516) 767-8803 or e-mail us at [litrad@i2000.com](mailto:litrad@i2000.com). A special event signing will be announced in November. Stay tuned for more details! ■



West Meadow Beach.

Photo by Martha Cooper, 2003.

## Smithsonian Maritime Festival 2004

**S**ave the dates June 23 - 27 and June 30 - July 4, 2004 now! That's when various Long Island maritime folk artists and fishermen will be down on the National Mall as part of the Smithsonian's Annual Folklife Festival. This 10-day extravaganza will focus on Mid-Atlantic Maritime Culture, including Long Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina. Guest presenters will include Freeport bayman Cory Weyant, boat builder John Remsen, Jones Beach lifeguard Reggie Jones and Brookhaven baymen Flo Sharkey and Bill Hamilton. The free event will feature demonstrations of fish smoking, killey trap and boat building, net mending and clamming techniques. In addition there will be narrative stages so that you can hear about the trials and rewards of being a commercial fisherman. There will also be plenty of music and children's activities, not to mention cooking demonstrations and plenty of great seafood. For more information visit <http://www.folklife.si.edu/>. ■

# EVENTS OF INTEREST

**PLEASE NOTE:** If you have a Long Island concert or program that focuses on some aspect of traditional culture, drop us a line and we'll put it in our "Events of Interest" column. The deadline is the 1st of October, January and April.

- Saturday, October 11 John Whelan and Flynn Cohen. 8:00 P.M. The Searing-Roslyn United Methodist Church, 134 I.U. Willets Road (between Searingtown Road & Willis Avenue) Albertson. Tickets: \$15 general admission, \$10 seniors, \$5 children under 12 (Sorry, no reserved seating. Tickets are available at the box office only.) For information call (516) 599 4749 or visit [www.biggrey.com](http://www.biggrey.com).
- October 18-19 NY State Barn Coalition conference. Best Western Hotel, Route 25, Riverhead. \$55 includes lunch and tours. Call 631-369-2200 or visit [www.barncoalition.com](http://www.barncoalition.com).
- Sunday, November 2 Mexican Mariachi program at LI Museum. 1208 Route 25A. Stony Brook. 2pm. LI Museum at Stony Brook. 2 pm. Free with museum admission. Call 631-751-0066 for more information.
- Saturday, November 8 Tina Lech, Dana Lyn, Ted Davis. 8:00 P.M. The Searing-Roslyn United Methodist Church, 134 I.U. Willets Road (between Searingtown Road & Willis Avenue) Albertson. Tickets: \$15 general admission, \$10 seniors, \$5 children under 12 (Sorry, no reserved seating. Tickets are available at the box office only.) For information call (516) 599 4749 or visit [www.biggrey.com](http://www.biggrey.com)
- Saturday, November 15 Columbian music with Juan & Eugenio Ortega of Los Macondos. Island Park Library. 2pm. Free admission. Call (516) 432-0122 for more information.
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