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Queens Memory helps residents share life experience



By Gina Martinez
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Queens Memory, a project documenting life in the borough, will make it easier for residents to share materials with its new website and app.

The innovative project, supported by Queens Library and Queens College, is a time capsule designed to collect stories, images and other aspects of life in the borough of Queens. Submitted records get archived and are featured in the gallery where newly added materials connect with historic artifacts. Queens Memory also provides training and materials for anyone wishing to contribute interviews, photographs, or other records of their neighborhoods, families and communities. Queens Memory empowers residents from diverse backgrounds to document the personal histories that together tell a more complete story of life in the borough, according to the project.

The entity began in 2010 at Queens Library as part of a community oral history project by Natalie Milbrodt

while she was conducting independent study and earning her master's degree in Library and Information Science at Queens College. The program was initially supported by a grant from the Metropolitan New York Library Council, the only project of its kind among the three New York City public library systems.

Milbrodt was hired by the Queens Library in 2012 to oversee Queens Memory as a permanent program. The project is encouraging immigrants, newer residents and Queens natives to participate. The new mobile app will make it more convenient for participants to send personal materials.

“This community involvement leads to a heightened appreciation of shared experience and the value of history and preservation,” Milbrodt said “At the heart of this work is the idea of democratizing the process of history-making — empowering people to contribute to and define their local history.”

The project has now collected more than 300 oral history interviews, from teens to residents in their 90s, hailing from 23 countries and now living in more than 50 Queens neighborhoods. 17,000 digitized items are available for viewing on the library's digital archives website.

Jongbu Sherpa, Andy Yu and Aniqah Wahid, three interns from the NYC Tech Talent Pipeline's TTP Residency at Queens College, helped to redesign the website and mobile app.

“This internship was a great learning experience,” Wahid said. “Giving Queens Memory a portable aspect — the ability for patrons to send personal histories, photographs and other records from smart phones — allows them to conveniently contribute to the library's permanent archival collection.”

Anyone wanting to submit material through their phones, the Queens Memory app will be available for Android and iPhone through Google play and iTunes store. Queens Memory accepts any Queens-related materials, including scanned photos, along with printed materials, manuscripts and even audio files.

One example of a recent submission was a sound recording that was made during an entire Queens bus route. The different languages heard as passengers boarded along the way reflected the changing ethnicities of the neighborhoods through which the bus traveled.

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