

FRONT PAGE



Former Met outfielder and gala honoree William Hayward "Mookie" Wilson, Michelle Charlesworth, co-anchor of WABC-TV's "Eyewitness News," and HKSB President Fred W. McPhilliamy.

Photo by Joe Vericker, PhotoBureau

Helen Keller Services President Says Goodbye After 18 Years

Mookie Wilson Also Honored

By Caitlin McNamara
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DOWNTOWN — The annual gala and fundraiser for Helen Keller Services for the Blind, attended by 200 guests last Thursday, was an evening to remember, complete with dinner, dancing and two deserving honorees.

At Steiner Studios' Stage 6 in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, with a panoramic view of the industrial harbor front at dusk, the 33rd Anniversary of Sound and Light was a glamorous and festive affair as in years past.

However, it was also bitter-sweet because outgoing president and gala honoree Fred W. McPhilliamy is stepping down after 30 years of service to HKSB,

including an 18-year tenure as president. Honored with President McPhilliamy was former Met outfielder William Hayward "Mookie" Wilson.

McPhilliamy was surrounded by his family, sitting at dinner with his wife of 54 years, Vivian; his son and daughter; and four of his five grandchildren. Mention was made through the evening of McPhilliamy's capability in leadership and the financial stability he brought to Helen Keller.

"I was glad to see Fred McPhilliamy's financial prowess recognized because he once told me, 'A nickel ain't worth a dime any more,'" joked Gala Chair Thomas DeMartino.

Prior to becoming president,

McPhilliamy had a long career with Brooklyn Union Gas, holding positions ranging from senior vice president of human resources to treasurer of banking.

"He left as [Union Gas] vice president to be president of a small non-profit," said DeMartino, describing a move that might have seemed odd to some at the time. He says he considered McPhilliamy to be his mentor as well as his boss when they both worked at the utility.

DeMartino said HKSB then had a portfolio of \$8 million, and that much of the operating costs were drawn from it. McPhilliamy, who holds a degree in business from St. John's University, focused on improving the organization's primary weakness: finances.

"The portfolio today is worth \$30 million, and best of all, client services have never been stronger. Comforts and lives have improved."

"This is not a joyous occasion for me," said McPhilliamy, indicating that it is due to his age, and not by choice, that he is stepping down. "The experience has been wonderful in each of the three positions I've held."

McPhilliamy has served on numerous boards of directors, including Brooklyn Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, St. Joseph's College, and Helen Keller Services for the Blind before his tenure as president.

The gala raised \$120,000 despite the economic downturn, although, not surprisingly, this is less than was raised last year. Deborah Rodriguez-Samuels, director of resource development, said that as of press time donations were still pouring in.

Other Stars of the Evening

Mookie Wilson's significant community outreach includes holding free clinics to reconnect city youth with baseball. Wilson is perhaps best known for his

winning play known as the "Buckner Blunder" in Game 6 of the '86 World Series. He coached the Mets from 1997 to 2002 and later managed the Brooklyn Cyclones.

"What you do is more important than any base I've ever stolen," said Wilson as he accepted his award. "Sports is [about] trying to pacify people. You cater to people who can't leave their troubles behind. I'm proud of my efforts, but they are dwarfed by what you do."

Wilson held the Mets' record for stolen bases until 2008. After dinner several people asked for his autograph, including McPhilliamy's grandchildren.

Michelle Charlesworth, co-anchor of WABC-TV's "Eyewitness News," returned for the fifth year as mistress of ceremonies, despite being 10 days from giving birth to her second child. She encouraged everyone to be as generous as possible, but joked that she was prepared to throw elbows if anyone else bid on the shawl she was eyeing.

Items for auction included pieces from Brooks Brothers, Luxotica jewelry and signed sports photographs. Credit for the array of items went to Auction Chair Debra Del Vecchio, who has served on the Helen Keller board of trustees for more than a decade, and who with her husband, Claudio, owns Brooks Brothers.

Services of HKSB

One of many local HKSB services is the Low Vision Clinic, headed by Dr. Ira Price. Most of his clients live in Brooklyn, but the clinic serves the whole city and Long Island. A moment speaking with Dr. Price illustrates the value of their services.

He describes a man who had hydrochloric acid thrown in his face after 9/11 because he looked like a terrorist. Dr. Price saw him just two weeks ago, and says he is "a very productive member of our society" and holds no grudge.