



## Art in the heart of Rockland

BY KATHY ROBERTS

**W**hen Robin Rosenberg came to Rockland to take a look at 55 Railroad Ave., she knew right then and there that she had found her calling.

Her family had a financial interest in the Garnerville Holding Co. When a board seat opened up, her father, who also sat on its board, asked if she'd come up and take a look.

"I fell in love immediately," said Rosenberg, who has been guiding the former textile factory-turned-arts center through good days and bad since first laying eyes upon a 200-year-old factory complex in the heart of Haverstraw. Today, she is the president/CEO and part-owner of the former industrial complex, as well as president of the Garner Arts Center, a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit that Rosenberg formed in 2003.

The 365,000-square-foot factory is on 14 acres in the hamlet of Garnerville. Now on the National Register of Historic Places, it's a unique mix of artists and artisans, its towering chimneys and crooked corridors decidedly Dickensian but welcoming. Rosenberg said the former mill has about 120 tenants and is in the midst of a capital campaign to raise \$135,000 toward a matching grant from the New York State Council for the Arts to open Building 35. "That was the former cafeteria for the Mill," she said. "We plan to have regular exhibitions – small performances, film events and classes. We are doing that now, but having a dedicated area will make it much more accessible to the public."

During Covid-19's lockdown, the center kept going, despite the challenging times. "It's been very tough on everyone. We struggled and so did our tenants. Fortunately, we have some strong anchor tenants here and some in the food and beverage industry, so fortunately for them and for us, we were considered 'essential businesses' and remained open. Right now, all we can do is just keep moving forward and keep running our businesses...that's all we can do."

Rosenberg and the Garner Arts team is actively working with Rockland schools to foster a love for the arts and the art community. "We run our 'Encounter with the Arts' program with the school districts. For example, North Rockland School District 5th graders all come in to get hands-on experience in the arts. We also welcome arts honors classes at the high school level and do some team-building with teachers. Students can tour the artists' studios and talk to real artists; it is a wonderful eye-opening experience for kids."



Welcoming then Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul to Garner Arts Center: Town of Haverstraw Supervisor Howard Phillips; Garner Arts Center President/CEO Robin Rosenberg; Gov. Kathy Hochul; Chef Peter Muller of Hudson Mill's Tavern; and Robert D'Amelio, mayor of West Haverstraw.

With restrictions on dining and entertainment somewhat lifted, the Garner Outdoor Short Film Festival was held recently, showing nine films in the courtyard outside Industrial Arts Brewing's new tasting room.

"We're now in our fifth year and we have been reinventing it as we go along. We were able to host the film festival last year because we hold it outdoors. We issue laurels now and have some fabulous curators. This year, Orange & Rockland was one of our sponsors. Hudson's Mill Tavern offered indoor dining and outdoor seating. The films each tell a story about how people are feeling, pandemic and post-pandemic."

If she doesn't seem busy enough, Rosenberg is on the Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council, one of 10 councils in New York that work to help small and medium-size businesses apply for funding opportunities.

"We're a very committed, diverse and interesting group of professionals from

the seven counties that form the Hudson Valley region. This year, Sabrina HoSang Jordan is our newest member, and she's also from Rockland. Al Samuels (president of the Rockland Business Association) and I are thrilled to have a third voting member from our county."

But the Garner Arts Center remains her first love.

"It's a fascinating place with a fascinating history. At one time, this plant produced enough cloth to dress everyone in America. The Garner family's daughters left to marry aristocrats in Paris and London...there are so many stories that go along with this place.

"Whenever we have art center activities and visitors come in for events, I have never seen so many happy people in just one place. It's exciting to experience the complex and its architecture; there's something new around every corner – something completely unexpected. It's a wonderful experience."

