

**What Every Long Islander Should Know:
Bricks and Mortar Won't Stop the
Brain Drain**

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

John McNally had a most interesting reaction to the recent Nassau County "youth summit," aimed at finding out what it would take to keep 18-35 year olds from leaving Long Island. John, a thirtysomething himself, is the Rauch Foundation's Program Officer for the Environment. I've asked him to write this month's column.

I just got back from vacationing in the Pacific Northwest with some old Long Island friends who had relocated there. The very folks that the summit was concerned about. As I read the recommendations—affordable housing and downtown redevelopment—something bothered me. I agree with them, wholeheartedly, yet I couldn't help feeling that something was being overlooked.

The problem is not just about buildings. It's also about culture.

Simply put, my friends find Long Island unstimulating. One Portland friend said she wanted "to be someplace interesting, exciting, and full of culture . . . to meet and live amongst many new people and different types of people."

Young people are looking for vitality, diversity, a thriving arts and music scene. Instead on Long Island they see monotonous, segregated neighborhoods, long drives to get anywhere, and few places worth getting to, only malls, strip malls, and eroded downtowns.

Perhaps worst, they see Long Island as unwilling to offer anything else. As one friend put it, Long Island "sometimes feels trapped by its own stereotypes and clichés—an island isolated with a bit of that small town narrow mindedness."

Harsh judgments? Maybe. But widespread . . . among people we need if our economy is once again to prosper.

I can hear some people's response: "We don't want Long Island to be a city." Honestly, I don't think that's an imminent danger. The danger lies in trying to stay frozen in time.

We should think through the notion of keeping Long Island just as it is. What Long Island was—a place where returning GIs could buy inexpensive houses and go to work in the aerospace or some other manufacturing industry—that's gone.

What Long Island *is*, is a place that is losing its young people, its most dynamic businesses, its high-paying jobs. Who wants to keep that?

We need to change, and that will require more than real estate development. You can build it, and they still won't come, if we don't build a vibrant culture to go with it.

That means pushing back at the naysayers who have dominated the public discourse for decades and offering a new, positive dialogue.

With that in mind, I've started a Facebook page for the Foundation, where I hope to keep this conversation going. I'll keep you posted on what's going on around the Island and how you can weigh in on important issues.

Facebook is a place to "connect and share"—Long Island could use that. If you're of the camp that wants something different for the Island, come visit our page. (Search "Rauch Foundation.") I hope to see you there.

Nancy Rauch Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation, a Long Island-based family foundation. The "Long Island Index" provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. For more information visit our Website: www.longislandindex.org