

Elsbeth Reimann is a founding member of the Alliance of Condo & Co-op Owners, & serves as an ACCO Director. We congratulate Elsbeth on receiving Our Town's coveted OTTY Award, & we salute her service!



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By [Isha Dandavate](#)

OTTYS COMMUNITY BUILDER: Retired, But Not Retiring

'Bulldog' advocate still fighting to preserve affordable housing

"I have more than one accent," says 76-year-old Elsbeth Reimann. "I speak German better than French, but when I speak French I was told I have an American accent." Born and raised in an orphanage in Switzerland, Reimann had two dreams—to see the world, and to be educated. She achieved both on her own and has also dedicated her life to supporting the social progress of New York City.

Reimann came to New York City in 1968, and put herself through high school equivalency training, followed by college at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She met Assembly Member Pete Grannis in 1975, the year after he was elected, and began volunteering at his office. Ten years later Reimann went on the payroll as Grannis' community liaison, listening to the concerns of community members and bringing them to his attention. Reimann worked for Grannis until 2007, when she retired, but her work in the community didn't end there. She maintained her level of involvement with housing issues, and continued to attend community meetings.

"People would come from all over the district to get her to help them," Grannis said. "She was like a bulldog—once she got going with someone's problems, she wouldn't let go until she was finished. She never took no for an answer."

Elsbeth Reimann volunteers her time to fight for tenants. Photo by Andrew Schwartz

Reimann has been volunteering for State Sen. Liz Krueger the last few years. "She never ever turns down a request for help with anything—helping out at an event, attending meetings," said Alice Fisher, Krueger's director of community outreach. "She has more energy than 20 of me!"

Over the years, one of Reimann's specialties became affordable housing and tenant rights. "The basic human needs are food, shelter and health care," she said. "If you don't have decent housing it's a social problem."

She has been involved with Alliance of Condo/Co-op Owners and the East Side Housing Coalition, which fight to build and preserve affordable housing.



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Reimann lives in a Mitchell-Lama building. As she explains it, “The purpose of the Mitchell-Lama program is to provide affordable housing to people not poor enough to qualify for public housing, but not rich enough to invest in the private sector.”

And she has fought for the building to remain affordable—in 2008, the shareholders wanted to explore privatization because of the booming housing market. Reimann wrote a series of letters to her fellow shareholders about the risks involved for moderate and middle-income residents. “Fortunately, shareholders voted against the attempt and only a few months later the real estate bubble burst,” Reimann said.

Edline Jacquet, policy analyst for Krueger, said the housing movement was not prevalent on the East Side for many years and “Elsbeth restarted that. She’s been a force with the East Side Housing Coalition.”

Reimann’s passion about social issues is only matched by her humility—when asked about her accomplishments she can only talk about the importance of the social issues she has dedicated her life to. “It’s a long struggle—you don’t make progress all at once,” says Reimann. “You are part of each little progress in society by helping people to become aware.” Reimann has spent almost half of her life pursuing this progress, and even in her free time she continues to advocate.

When she’s not busy “doing millions of things,” Reimann enjoys spending time with her friends. “Sometimes we go different places,” she said, “and sometimes we’re so bogged down.”