

Our History of Health and Care



The Pines Care Center (PCC) was certified as a non-profit organization by the State of New York in 1984. The initiative to establish PCC had come from the Fire Island Pines Property Owners' Association the previous year, and the early organization had roots strongly connected to the Fire Island Pines Volunteer Fire Department. Three physicians provided the driving leadership for PCC during its first 27 years: Dr. John Fenoglio, Dr. Robert Levin, and Dr. Ed Schulhafer. The fourth leader, Stephen Hayes, was elected President in 2011.

From modest beginnings in the basement level of the old Pines Community Center, PCC facilitates the ability to now serve over 700 Pines Residents and visitors per season from its modern facilities in the Freeman/Yeager Wing of Whyte Hall. The generous financial support from the community for almost three decades has enabled PCC to become an essential and firmly established part of the fabric of Fire Island Pines.

The Pines Care Center (PCC), established in 1984, was an outgrowth of the Fire Island Pines Property Owners' Association (FIPPOA). In 1983, the FIPPOA Board of Directors was concerned that a doctor had not been serving the Fire Island Pines community for about ten years following a malpractice lawsuit against FIPPOA. FIPPOA had provided a doctor's office and residential apartment in the old Community Center. The lawsuit had resulted from the unfortunate death of the wife of the owner of the old Ship n Shore grocery store (now The Pines Pantry) shortly after she had given birth to a child. After several years, FIPPOA was found not liable in the lawsuit but wanted to continue to separate itself from any potential future liability to protect its assets. Several officers and directors had been named individually in the lawsuit, and the experience before reaching a settlement had been difficult and painful.

In 1983, during a spring meeting in the home of Director Laura Eastman on Bay Walk, the FIPPOA Board decided to pursue providing medical service to the community through some new entity that could be created separately from FIPPOA. At that time, Ron Martin, Secretary of the Board, volunteered his partner, Dr. John Fenoglio, to lead a study of various options. Dr. Fenoglio was a renowned cardiopathologist at Columbia Presbyterian and a professor at Columbia Medical School. Larry Bonaguidi, a prominent New York City attorney and a FIPPOA Director, volunteered to join the task force and provide initial legal counsel.

Because Fenoglio and Martin had become friends of Robert and Marilyn Levin while serving in the Fire Island Pines Volunteer Fire Department, they asked Robert Levin, a physician with a successful medical practice, and Marilyn Levin, a Registered Nurse, to join the task force. The group first met in the early summer of 1984, with Fenoglio and the Levins joining Bonaguidi in the latter's Manhattan law offices. The four developed a plan and proposal submitted to the FIPPOA Board. With FIPPOA approval, the group began creating a new organization independent of FIPPOA, understanding that FIPPOA would become a landlord and rent space in the Pines Community Center for a doctor's office and apartment for \$1 annually.

The initial work was primarily legal and for that, Fenoglio and Martin recruited James Guyer, a young lawyer at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, who was also a Pines resident on Oak

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Walk. Guyer provided pro bono service in preparing and submitting the application to the New York Secretary of State to become certified as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The most difficult task was selecting a name for the new entity, and the first few submitted were rejected by the State because there is a surprisingly large number of groups in New York with “Pines” in their name. The words “Medical” and “Clinic” were always avoided since the nascent organization would protect itself from future lawsuits by only providing facilities and financial support with doctors contracted through a third party. The name “Pines Care Center” was eventually approved by the State.

Establishing governance was one of the essential first steps. A Board of Directors was strategically selected to represent the community, drawing heavily on connections with FIPPOA and the Fire Department. Fenoglio and Robert, and Marilyn Levin agreed to continue their leadership. Joining them from FIPPOA, were Martin, Secretary and Executive Committee member; Jim Cashel, FIPPOA Community Manager and former FIPPOA Treasurer, Joyce Reich and Dorothy Cambern, FIPPOA Directors and Co-Chairpersons of the Community House Committee, Brett Baccus, a FIPPOA Director and leader of the lesbian community, and Emile Riendeau, a former FIPPOA Director and Secretary. Cambern and Riendeau had been named as two defendants in the lawsuit a decade earlier. Dr. Fred Weber, a New York City dentist and the partner of FIPPOA Treasurer David Langer, was added to the Board. In addition, Guyer joined the Board to continue providing legal guidance, along with Robin Jacobsen, a leading New York City interior designer with the Bromley Jacobsen firm.

The first Pines Care Center officers elected were Dr. John Fengolio, President; Dr. Robert Levin, Chairman of the Board; Marilyn Levin, Vice President; and Jim Cashel, Treasurer.

Because eight of the 12 original Directors were volunteer firefighters (Fenoglio, the Levins, Cashel, Martin, Cambern, Reich and Jacobsen) many day-to-day operational decisions were made during Saturday morning fire department drills. It was also a way to partner with the Pines Fire Department to serve the community. Throughout the early years, the PCC Board was characterized by its informal, never contentious meetings – meetings that were often filled with what seemed to be almost non-stop laughter.

With some early fundraising success and FIPPOA’s benevolence as a landlord, PCC began providing doctors in the summer of 1984. The two doctors heading PCC were able to secure some essential medical equipment and used their own sources to find donated medical supplies. In addition to overseeing the finances, Cashel became a critical player since he worked daily at the Community Center and could provide a regular liaison with the doctors and troubleshoot whenever the need arose. Cashel would eventually become the longest-serving of the Founding Directors, continuing on the Board to this date. Reich proved to be a particularly valuable asset because of her daily interaction with the public in the Pines Hardware Store, which she owned with her husband, Walter.

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The first addition to the PCC Board of Directors came in 1985 when Ed Karlin, a CPA, was elected with responsibility for filing PCC's annual tax returns. Karlin later became FIPPOA's Office Administrator and served PCC until his retirement in 2009. In 1985, James Guyer died and was replaced by Ted Krulwich, another young Manhattan attorney, who served for two years until his death. Following Robin Jacobsen's death in 1986, he was replaced by another famed interior designer, Michael Schaible.

Martin and Baccus took on the responsibility in 1984 for an annual fundraising drive. That first fundraising season was launched with a cocktail party open to the community on the night of the FIPPOA Spring Membership Meeting. This first social event on the annual Pines calendar, organized each year by Baccus, became a cherished tradition and a highlight of the Pines season. In recent years, the event was moved to Memorial Day Weekend.

An old-fashioned thermometer sign prominently placed in the harbor each year became a Pines icon as it measured weekly progress toward reaching the annual fundraising goal. Residents watched with keen interest each week as the red, from a can of red paint stashed under a nearby boardwalk, inched its way to the top of the thermometer. Throughout the years, the community never failed to ensure that PCC reached its annual fundraising goal.

A memorial program was established early on to help raise additional money and to enable people to make contributions in memory of deceased family members and friends. Hundreds of names have been memorialized or honored in the Book of Memories over the years. Reflecting current times, the Book of Memories is now being incorporated into the PCC website.

PCC's most crucial early benefactor was Dr. Nicolai Gioscia, a retired physician and long-time Pines resident. Dr. Gioscia underwrote the costs of some of the first medical equipment acquired, including an examining table.

PCC's early management philosophy was that it was advantageous not to accumulate sizable assets subject to a lawsuit and that the treasury should be built only large enough to provide a one-year cushion for operating expenses. After two summers of successful auction events, the Directors elected to do something almost unprecedented for a not-for-profit group. In the annual spring report to the community, PCC told Pines residents that it had accumulated a two-year cushion and would therefore skip fundraising for a year. Supporters were asked instead to contribute to another worthwhile community organization. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with the community thanking PCC for its honesty and practicality. The following year, financial support returned undiminished to its previous levels.

Those auctions, in the summers of 1986 and 1987, were social highlights for the Pines. The old Community Center was not large enough to accommodate the large crowds attending the events, so John Whyte hosted the auctions on the dance floor of the old Pavilion under the famed chandelier. Five-foot-tall Pine trees, auctioned at the end, were the only décor along with the disco lighting. David Forrest, a gregarious homeowner on Shady Walk, served as auctioneer at both events, bringing the humor for which he was widely known. The dazzling array of

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merchandise and services, all donated by Pines people and friends, ranged from fur coats and Baccarat crystal to walk-on roles on television. With an open bar flowing throughout the evening, bidding became lively and competitive, with more than a few scratching their heads the next day and wondering what had made them acquire expensive things they really didn't need.

For the first few years, the PCC Board prioritized renovating the facilities it rented from FIPPOA. Jacobsen's designated role as a Director was to oversee this work. Following Jacobsen's death, Schaible led the effort for the next 18 years. The doctor's office was located in the basement and was accessible from the ground level on the east end of the building. A large area was set aside for the waiting room so the Pines AA group could hold regular meetings there. Jacobsen had platforms built and carpeted on a number of levels to accommodate a crowd that often rose to almost 100, and this proved functional as an intimate meeting space for almost 25 years.

Much effort was directed to renovation of the doctor's apartment on the top level of the community center, accessed by some shaky, old wooden exterior stairs on the west side of the building. The shabby old apartment had spectacular ocean views and a wonderful ocean breeze, but it had been furnished with a motely collection of cast-off furniture from the Pines' first generation of beach shacks. A new kitchen and all new appliances were acquired and installed. And Jacobsen developed a modular plan for the large living area, again with carpeted platforms and large seating cushions.

The camaraderie of the early PCC Board was never more evident than on the Saturdays when all Directors gathered to work together in sprucing up the doctor's apartment. At one point, Jacobsen had secured a donation of carpeting from a carpet manufacturer for the living area and platforms. The Directors showed up with hammers and tools, and when the carpeting was unwrapped, everyone was aghast at its green color. But it was decided that the green was appropriate for the Pines, and it had cost nothing. So the Board of Directors, in its best self-help tradition, became carpet layers for an afternoon.

In the beginning, PCC doctors were contracted through an emergency medical service company that provided the necessary malpractice insurance coverage. As many physicians discovered the special joys of Fire Island Pines, they often planned their summer vacations so they could return each year for one or two weeks, often accompanied by family or partners. As the years went by, Pines residents visiting the Care Center often developed close doctor/patient relationships with doctors who cared for them each summer.

While the PCC Board encouraged the doctors to assimilate into the community and had a hands-off policy regarding how they enjoyed their time in the Pines, there were times when a doctor would generate concern. When one particular doctor, a straight man with a family, became a full participant in the nudity on the beach, some eyebrows were raised. However, it was decided the Pines were the Pines, so it should be irrelevant. And since the doctor had very good reason to display all his assets on the beach – and again, the Pines being the Pines – the number of

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patients he began seeing increased noticeably. The feedback on this doctor's professionalism was very positive during the years he came to the Pines.

One particularly handsome doctor cut a relatively broad swath through the Pines in the late 1980s, but his living situation became a matter of Board discussion. While it was widely assumed that he was straight, he had nonetheless moved a spectacular, very popular Brazilian houseboy into a closet in the apartment. The Directors decided that the doctor's private life should be kept private. Plus, it was a large walk-in closet to accommodate a small bed.

No history of the Pines Care Center would be complete without acknowledging the tremendous role played by Dr. Arlo Pitcher, a genuinely caring and compassionate physician and a wonderful gentleman. A Pines homeowner on Cedar Walk with his wife Elsie for more than 50 years, Dr. Pitcher, was retired from his practice and was a PCC doctor during the organization's first 25 years. In the beginning, he would work as a doctor on cruise ships for part of the summer but always was available for the Care Center's harder-to-

fill weekly slots in the early season and after Labor Day. Later, throughout the season, he would always fill in without hesitation whenever there was a vacancy or a cancellation. The untold number of patients he saw through the years appreciated his dedication and were grateful for the compassionate care he always provided. The Pines regarded Dr. Pitcher as the community's own, much-loved doctor.

Another doctor who made an indelible imprint was Dr. Juanita Evereteze, who served as a PCC doctor for many years and was widely popular within the community and among all the patients she saw. Dr. Evereteze went above and beyond the call of duty in serving the Pines and eventually built a home in the community and became a PCC Director for a period.

In 1989, Dr. Fenoglio died at the age of 46. Dr. Levin was elected to replace him as President, and Martin was elected Vice President, a position he held for 17 years until he resigned in 2006 upon his election as FIPPOA President.

Perhaps the most important addition to the PCC Board of Directors came in 1994 when Dr. Ed Schulhafer was recruited. Dr. Schulhafer, an allergist with a practice in New Jersey, would eventually significantly impact the Care Center. When Dr. Levin stepped down as President in 2000 due to failing health, Schulhafer was elected to replace him. Under Schulhafer's tireless leadership during the next 11 years, PCC continued to grow, achieve more financial stability, and establish itself more firmly within the community.

One of the most challenging times for the Pines Care Center came in the fall of 2005 with the demolition of the old Community Center and the construction of Whyte Hall to replace it. Facing the 2006 season without a home, the PCC Board rented the small house at 194 Beach Hill Walk from Dr. Sumner Freeman and Dr. Roy Yeager to serve as a temporary doctor's office and residence. Drs. Freeman and Yeager made a major gift to the new community center, and in the summer of 2007, PCC moved into its current, modern facilities in the Freeman/Yeager Wing of

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Whyte Hall. A beautiful new apartment on the upper level of the building made it easier than ever to attract doctors for a summer residence.

Keeping with the long tradition of community members providing special help, Richard Carpenter, a designer and homeowner on Fire Island Boulevard West, solicited all the furnishings needed for the new doctor's apartment, waiting room, and doctor's office when Whyte Hall was completed. In addition, a group of prominent Pines residents underwrote the purchase of all the new medical equipment in the doctor's office. Their names appear on a plaque in the waiting room. Tim Williams contributed personal computers for the new office, and Dr. Schulhafer succeeded in obtaining the donation of an EMR for medical record keeping.

In 2009, the Pines Care Center eliminated its fee schedule to make health care available to everyone, regardless of their ability to pay. This makes the delivery of medical care in Fire Island Pines one of the country's most progressive models of health care delivery. This move increased the number of yearly visits to the doctor's office from around 225 to more than 600.

A new era began for the Care Center in 2011 when Schulhafer stepped down as President. Stephen Hayes, who had been serving as Vice President for eight years, became the organization's fourth chief executive, and under Hayes' leadership, PCC has continued to grow and flourish.

While it's easy for PCC's history to focus on its leaders and doctors, the role of the Pines community can never be underestimated. The generous financial contributions each year have enabled PCC to grow and improve service quality, eventually making it possible to provide services free of charge to every resident and visitor who walks through the door. Through their committed support, the people of the Pines have ensured the continuing vital role of the Pines Care Center as it moves toward its fourth decade in serving the community.