

OPINION / COMMENTARY / **GUEST ESSAYS**

Rauch Foundation's final plea for regional collaboration



The LIRR's Third Track project under construction in September 2019, in Carle Place. Credit: Howard Schnapp

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

Guest essay

June 28, 2022 12:14 pm

The leadership of the Rauch Foundation is passing to the next generation. Taking the helm will be my two daughters, Eva Douzinas, who will serve as president, and Ruth Douzinas, who will remain as a member of the executive committee.

The foundation will retain a small footprint on Long Island, funding a few programs with which we have partnered for many years. As a lifelong Long Islander, I will remain involved in issues affecting the region, stay active on the boards of several local institutions, and offer my expertise when requested.

However, the bulk of the foundation's focus will shift to New England, where our family has a long-standing history. It will invest in programs advancing critical life-skills education in K-12 schools, with an emphasis on health and wellness, financial literacy, and college and career planning.

Major leadership changes involve numerous issues. Our decision to change our programmatic focus reflects many years of thinking about how to address the serious health crisis taking place in this country and the lack of preparation among high school graduates for the real-world responsibilities of adulthood.

Over the past 30 years, the Rauch Foundation has focused most of its grant-making on Long Island. Initially, the focus was on addressing the needs of disadvantaged children and families through investments in early education and children's health. The foundation gradually broadened its reach as it became apparent that any social change requires a wider systemic lens.

Then, as now, few foundations focused on the region, even though its problems were acute. As the Rauch Foundation de-emphasizes its Long Island focus, we look forward to a new generation of philanthropists stepping up to meet the region's needs; they are no less acute today, and many are the same problems that plagued Long Island 30 years ago.

Back then, young people were leaving the Island at three times the national rate and the previously robust manufacturing sector was moving elsewhere. Long Island's devotion to home rule discouraged region-wide planning. Its many communities, nonprofits, government agencies and oversight jurisdictions were extremely fragmented and divided by income, race and competing interests. The epitome of this is the 124 separate school districts.

Over the years, we increasingly encouraged coalition-building and cross-sector partnerships. We helped to seed projects like Accelerate Long Island, a consortium of research institutions, universities and businesses collaborating to start new companies on Long Island. Another coalition of five environmental groups took on the issue of protecting Long Island's drinking and surface waters. Our seed capital played a role in leveraging a \$10 million state investment to devise an action plan around nitrogen mitigation.

The Rauch Foundation is perhaps best known for our 15-year research project — the Long Island Index — which analyzed issues including education, transportation, and the loss of Long Island's young talent. Most recognized was our research and organizing effort for building a third track on the Long Island Rail Road's Main Line, a project to be completed this year — and an example of Long Islanders working together across sectors to bring positive attention, and capital, to our region.

Finding rational solutions requires cooperation, pragmatism and constructive collaboration. It has been an honor to help foster that and to play a leadership role on Long Island. While the Rauch Foundation will be less active here, I feel confident that Long Island is a better, more collaborative place. Now it's time for new philanthropic players to step forward and become stronger community leaders.

This guest essay reflects the views of Nancy Rauch Douzinas, president of the Rauch Foundation.

This guest essay reflects the views of Nancy Rauch Douzinas, president of the Rauch Foundation.



TF