

## NY DAILY NEWS.COM QUEENS

### Shaw makes improving Cambria Heights her business



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She was selling "urban lit" books to the [New York City Board of Education](#) before African-American theme novels carried that most trendy of labels. Now, as executive director of the [Cambria Heights Development Corp.](#) (CHDC), [Julia Shaw](#) is using her marketing skills to bring attention to the 170 mostly small businesses that line [Queens'](#) Linden Blvd. between the Cross Island Parkway and Francis Lewis Blvd.

"I always wanted to work in Queens because the majority of my professional career has been spent outside of Queens," said Shaw, 48, who took the post last February.

"One of the things I enjoy is working with entrepreneurs, since I have an entrepreneurial spirit. I understand some of the challenges they face," added Shaw, who lives in [Jamaica, Queens](#). "You have to do work to generate income, which is their priority, but you also have to do work to build your business, to take it to the next level. It's that constant juggling act that all entrepreneurs are faced with."

[CHDC President Kevin Jemmott](#) said the group wants to help merchants grow their businesses to reflect the relative affluence of the surrounding community. Demographics show that the median incomes in [Cambria Heights](#) - bounded by the Cross Island Parkway on the east - and nearby [Laurelton](#) and [Rosedale](#) are the highest in the borough, Jemmott said. "We still noticed that the residential area went one way, but the commercial strip did not reflect that," he said. There was no cohesiveness, Jemmott said; the merchant association was not strong and there was no real communication and or planning. "My vision was to get businesses talking to each other and to create a medium where they could find out about grants and other programs available to them," said Jemmott.

So in February, Jemmott, a manager with [Verizon](#), [CHDC Treasurer Eva Duzant](#) of E.G. Edwards Certified Public Accountants, and [CHDC Secretary Yolanda Billings](#), owner of YMB & Associates, hired Shaw.

Born in [Wilmington, N.C.](#), and raised in [Queens Village](#), Shaw has had a varied career. She laughed recalling an early job as "cashier No. 2" in the Transit Authority's money-counting office. "I counted \$150,000 a day of somebody else's money, and had to prove to the penny," she said. "And I did the same thing every day, and it drove me crazy!"

A search for Afrocentric children's books that her then-toddler daughters, [Asia](#) and Denisha, could read helped launch Shaw into the book publishing world. "I was looking for books for my children but I didn't see that many for African-American kids," she said. "Then I met [John Steptoe](#) [whose books include 'Mufaro's Beautiful Daughter' and 'Thank You [Jackie Robinson](#)'], a well-known children's author. "It showed me that there were black children's authors who had been publishing for years. I just didn't know about them."

Her saleswoman's sense told Shaw she was not the only parent looking for books for children. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, she started selling African-American-theme books to several clients, including the Board of Education (now the Education Department). "It was all about supply and demand," she said. "A lot of people didn't know these books even existed, so I started selling them to meet that need."

Those sales led to a job with a book distributor, which evolved into a job as a book promoter, mostly working with self-published authors, she said. "People would get a book published and think that because they gave it to a distributor, it was going to fly off the shelves," Shaw said. "They thought it was the distributors' job to promote the book. "The industry has changed tremendously since then," Shaw said. "African-American books have gone mainstream. You can buy them at Barnes & Noble."

As a freelance publicist, Shaw worked with publishing houses including [BET Books](#) and Kimani Press, a division of Harlequin Books, to create Kimani Tru, a line of books for young adult readers started in 2006. She has promoted the biannual [National Black Writers' Conference](#) at [Medgar Evers College](#), and has been a public relations consultant for the [Brooklyn](#)-based International African Arts Festival for almost 15 years.

SINCE JOINING CHDC, Shaw said she has worked hardest to make business owners along Linden Blvd., the neighborhood's main financial strip aware of the services available to them. The city's [Department of Small Business Services](#) (212) 513-6300 and groups such as Project Enterprise (212) 678-6734 provide small loans and extensive counseling to budding entrepreneurs. She recruits local businessmen to attend CHDC meetings and encourages them to see their problems as group rather than individual concerns.

The CHDC created a Linden Blvd. shopping guide and distributed 10,000 in the community. "We have a wide variety of stores, restaurants, dentists, lawyers, doctors, barbershops, real estate offices - the works," Shaw said.

CHDC also has used grant money to commission and mount banners that hang from lampposts along the boulevard. The group also created and gave away T-shirts, tote bags, book bags and backpacks - all bearing the CHDC logo.

"Julia has definitely been a positive addition to the CHDC," Jemmott said. "We needed someone of her caliber, because all of the CHDC board members are volunteers. Our time is limited. Julia was able to free us up so we can do our regular nine-to-fives. We gave her the blueprint, and she carried it out to a T."

For information about the CHDC, see the Web site: [www.chdcqueens.org](http://www.chdcqueens.org).

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