

Strength of character, nerve, sheer persistence, creativity, real mother wit: a catalog of sterling virtues fills these pages of stories about local people. A community activist and single mother forced the state to change policy on birth certificates for children: this is the proudest achievement of Lois Fernandez, better known as founder of the long-lived ODUNDE festival. The first woman percussionist to graduate from Curtis Institute and a working mom long before it was common, Elaine Watts kept playing her family's klezmer tunes, even when no Jewish bands would hire her. One of the first women to work locally as a transmission mechanic, Suzanne Povse figured out how to advance in her trade, one hard-won step after another. Playing Cuban charanga music for more than sixty years and well-known as one of the Fania All-Stars, Pupi Legarreta became an electrician when music wouldn't pay the bills. And in these pages, the late great Philadelphia hooper LaVaughn Robinson keeps dancing, his sound and Philly-bred style remembered by his protégé and dance partner, Germaine Ingram. Each of the remarkable people in these pages broke new ground. None had an easy road. All of them persisted and endured—and we are so grateful!

For 21 years, we have been using this magazine to offer

small but penetrating glimpses of inspiring neighbors—people who sustain some of our city's greatest artistic traditions or who have been part of grassroots efforts for equity and justice. From our perspective, the practice of significant cultural expression and grassroots social activism are similar in their positive effect on the social fabric of our city and its neighborhoods. The parallels and similarities are reflected in the stories contained in this volume. Each story is about an "everyday" Philadelphian—someone who could be our next-door neighbor—whose passion and vision led each to defy the conventions of the day. For Fernandez, it was a passion for the worth and blessedness of each child, regardless of the marital status of his or her parents. Povse was motivated by a vision of respect and fairness in the workplace, regardless of gender or race. Watts rejected limiting assumptions about the value and place of women musicians and ethnic music. Robinson and Legarreta proved that excellence and artistry can be achieved in cultural expressions that were disregarded, devalued, or even denigrated. These people have fed sustenance to a vision of our city as a place where each person receives equal respect for his or her humanity and potential, where the power of significant cultural practice to build and sustain communi-

ties is understood and nurtured, and where talent and accomplishment are recognized in a multitude of diverse forms and faces.

We tell these stories to honor inspiring individuals, but also to remind ourselves and our readers that paying attention to the cultural treasures among us is something we each can do—individually and together, in large and small ways—to build a sense of shared promise and an avenue for collective investment in social progress in our city and region. The work of building never stops. Rarely does a week pass without a headline announcing an incident of disregard, neglect or abuse of this city's children. The fact that a man of color, born of an African national and raised in Indonesia could become our country's next president should not obscure the continued existence of unfair barriers to opportunity based on gender, disability, religion, language, race, sexual orientation and other invidious distinctions. Commercialization and homogenization of culture threatens our ability to know who we are and teach our children who they are. Telling these stories is our modest contribution to showing and building a way forward. We invite you to read on.

— Debora Kodish and Germaine Ingram