Williamsburg Mourns the Loss of a Housing Lion

Williamsburg Lamenta la Pérdida de un León de la Vivienda
A MESSAGE FROM CONGRESSWOMAN NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

In Memoriam:

I am saddened by the recent passing of David Pagan, a trailblazer, distinguished Armed Force Veteran and champion of affordable housing and community development. David’s life work at Los Sures is immeasurable. His vision and leadership were a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization. He demonstrated that even in the poorest neighborhoods of Williamsburg, there were assets that could be developed with vision, effort and public support.

“His vision and leadership were a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization.”

David understood the role government had in shaping housing policy and its impact on urban areas. Soon after I was first elected, David and I met to discuss housing issues, the Community Reinvestment Act and the lending practices of local banks to low income neighborhoods. He was concerned with how many financial institutions were still redlining the Southside. I promised that I would investigate the issue and would invite the HUD Secretary to tour my district. In May of 1993, Secretary Henry Cisneros visited Williamsburg and David gave us a tour of an abandoned building on South 4th Street. He shared his vision of converting it into senior housing with a street level senior center. I’ll never forget how his face lit up with a huge smile when Secretary Cisneros and I promised to help secure funding for his project. Today, the Los Sures Senior Center, senior housing buildings, low-income coops, and more stand as a model and testament to David’s vision and commitment to neighborhood revitalization and affordable housing. He will be remembered through the countless lives he touched. I am proud to have known and worked with him.

Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, David Pagan, and then Secretary of HUD Henry Cisneros discussing affordable housing in Williamsburg.

A MESSAGE FROM SOUTHSIDE UNITED BOARD CHAIRMAN

JUAN RAMOS

“We’ve faced a myriad of obstacles, but we continue moving forward thanks to the groundwork he laid over 30 years.”

David Pagan established an inspiring legacy of community development and improvement that will not be forgotten. We’ve faced a myriad of obstacles, but we continue moving forward thanks to the groundwork he laid over 30 years.

We should all strive to emulate his steadfast dedication to the families we serve as we fight to overcome the daunting forces of extreme gentrification in North Brooklyn. We are forever in debt to his family for supporting him through the long-hours he spent ensuring that we were successful and that Housing Justice prevailed. On behalf of the board of directors of Southside United, thank you, David.

A MESSAGE FROM SOUTHSIDE UNITED BOARD MEMBER

DAVID LOPEZ

As one of the preeminent leaders in the fight to save the South Side of Williamsburg during the times of abandonment, David Pagan worked tenaciously to improve the quality of life of all local residents. I had the privilege to work with David in this endeavor by serving on the Board of Directors of Southside United for decades. He was a role model for the whole staff, who looked up to him and relied on his collected demeanor and his intellect to strategically guide them through many challenges. We will miss David dearly, and we thank him for all the progress that was made through his unwavering efforts.

“David Pagan worked tenaciously to improve the quality of life of all local residents.”
A MESSAGE FROM BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT DIANA REYNA

David Pagan had a tremendous impact on my life. Professionally, he was a leader respected amongst many citywide. With his calm demeanor and savvy composition, he achieved deadlines and managed complicated partnerships for the good of our community. I, like so many, sought his insights to help better understand my neighborhood and career. He was a dedicated mentor and friend, sharing his knowledge selflessly. I enjoyed most his storytelling of the years gone by, reflecting on the grief, anxiety but most of all the hope in a shared struggle to preserve the community.

“When a mirrored image, it was Los Sures that reflected David, and David, reflected Los Sures.”

Personally, my family and I relied on his compassion and empathy as he was endearingly referred to as “Chief” by his loyal Executive Assistant, Laura. As I look around our ever evolving community, since his passing, I’ve thought about his legacy and deeply cherish the moments we shared together—whether we were laughing or yeling, we made progress. Ultimately, like a mirrored image, it was Los Sures that reflected David, and David, reflected Los Sures. It’s been an honor to call David my friend and advisor. It’s been a privilege to have lived in Los Sures, and called David Pagan a neighbor.

A MESSAGE FROM SOUTHSIDE UNITED
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RAMON PEGUERO

David was a lion of the community development movement in New York City, leading us from our early days in the 1970s until his retirement in 2010. David’s life, and the impact of his pioneering work and leadership in Williamsburg and in the community development movement across New York City, was extraordinary. David was a founding board member of the Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development, and his vision and values shape our work to this day.

David Pagan arrived in New York City from his native Barraquitas, Puerto Rico, in 1956. He grew up in the Williamsburg and Bushwick sections of Brooklyn. After attending New York City Community College, he was drafted into the Army and served in Vietnam as an infantryman in the Air Cavalry Division. When he returned, he obtained a Bachelor's degree in accounting and economics from Queens College and later a Master's degree in Finance from St. John's University.

David was a neighborhood and social activist at heart, and he was quickly drawn to the struggles in his own part of Brooklyn. David was a neighborhood and social activist at heart, and he was quickly drawn to the struggles in his own part of Brooklyn.

Brooklyn. The South Side of Williamsburg, like many neighborhoods across New York City in the 1970s and 80s, suffered from disinvestment and abandonment as entire communities were written off by banks, developers, and even the government. But these neighborhoods were not written off by their residents.

The community residents who started Southside United-Los Sures were responding to this epidemic of abandonment, and to the property owners who were trying to vacate their buildings to intentionally change the ethnic composition of the neighborhood. Under David’s leadership, Los Sures fought back by promoting community-based control of housing, through both management and ownership. In 1975, Los Sures became the first community-based organization to enter agreements to manage City-owned properties. A few years later, it was one of the first groups to undertake large-scale rehabilitation.

I worked as David’s Deputy Director for five years, and I always looked forward to our early morning conversations, before staff started to trickle in. He was a wealth of information, and I wanted to absorb as much as possible, knowing that he planned to retire and may not be as available to me later on.

The one thing that David always said that stuck with me was, “I’d rather have 10% of something than 100% of nothing.” That statement opened me up to the understanding that dialogue, communication and relationships were extremely important to move the organization forward. It taught me that we were not going to win every single fight or get everything we requested, but as long as we were moving forward, we would be on the right path. I interpreted those words to mean that we should negotiate and create common ground with others and look beyond our differences and focus on the things we can agree on to bring about positive results.

David was a mentor and a friend who will be dearly missed.

Southside United Board Members William Vargas and David Lopez, with David Pagan and Executive Director Ramon Peguero at Southside United’s 40th Anniversary.
A MESSAGE FROM SOUTHSIDE UNITED
TENANT ORGANIZER BARBARA SCHLIFF

If we needed him to go to court—he was there; if we needed him to attend a meeting—he was there.

I have many fond memories of working with David. —Of sitting with him doing budgets for funding proposals and contracts. Usually he realized, I didn’t get the math, but he would patiently explain things to me.—Of our organizing trying to figure out the percentages of rent the tenants would get back when settling a rent strike. After a few frustrating hours, we would call David who would calmly help work things out in a matter of minutes.—Of touring the South Side with City and elected officials who were so appalled at the conditions in the neighborhood, they called to have abandoned cars removed from inside a park before we even made it back to the office. He was as delighted as I was.

To say I miss David is an understatement. His recent passing was hard to believe. I learned many things from him—especially his qualities of patience, perseverance and consistency (and even some math). He left the legacy of an organization well established and able to move into the future to face the challenges ahead.

A MESSAGE FROM SOUTHSIDE UNITED
DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES ROBIN SIROTA BASSIN

In addition to helping local families, David greatly helped the staff achieve their full potential. I was 27 when I came to Los Sures—my first job out of grad school. I remember David sitting with me and explain going why I should enroll in a 401-k plan. I was living pay check to pay check then and was worried that I couldn't do 10%, as he suggested. He patiently explained that I needed to do it for my future. 22 years later, I'm so grateful to him for helping me to build a little nest egg.

David was very patient and caring. He taught me how to use Excel, create budgets and much more. He was very family-oriented and loved talking about Betsy and his kids. He and Betsy came to my wedding and he came to my father's funeral. In many ways, he was a bit like a father figure to me and I think that's true for many staff members.

A MESSAGE FROM SOUTHSIDE UNITED
DIRECTOR SONIA IGLESIAS

I am forever in debt to Mr. Pagan and his family. I will always remember his kindness and patience. After several months working at Southside United–Los Sures (I started when I was 28) he came to me and stated “I was wrong, when Ana first recommended hiring you I was shocked. I was skeptical.” He apologized and told me he was so proud of me. I will never forget his words. He never, to my knowledge, ever used harsh words and taught me that to respect others you do not have to agree with them!

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I remember our morning talks; I was always an early bird and would come to work at around 7:30 a.m. One day there was a morning blizzard and I called the office at 6:30 a.m. to check if we would be opened, and he answered the phone. I started to laugh and simply stated I would be there soon. Mr. Pagan’s commitment is unmatched—he was better than the post office—through rain, snow, sleet, blizzard and even black outs he was at the office!

I’ll never forget his humble voice telling me to not be so hard on myself. “Son, an intelligent person learns from his or her mistakes and a wise person learns from the mistakes of others”. It is easier to remember the days in which I felt comforted because his voice was always in my ear telling me everything would be ok. I loved him dearly and always will! I miss him and his visits to the center where we talked about good things!

There is so much I can say about him because he was one of a kind. What a great person he was! He held my hand through so much, including illnesses and personal and work issues. Mr. Pagan is a giant in my eyes, his mannersisms and his love for life and his family is admirable.

I always remember David Pagan as a reliable and stabilizing force for Los Sures especially during the turbulent late 1970’s, 80’s and 90’s—when abandonment, vacant lots, lack of City services and crime were prevalent in the Southside. David came to work at Los Sures as the controller, but it soon became clear that with his intelligence and commitment, he would make a great administrator when the time came. After a few years, and with much pressure from the Board of Directors and staff, he agreed and guided the organization with a steady hand for over 30 years.

He was acutely aware of the need for affordable housing in the neighborhood and worked tirelessly with HPD and groups like ANHD to formulate and carry out development projects that would provide for low-income housing as well as opportunities for community residents to become homeowners. Under David’s administration, hundreds of affordable units were built and rehabilitated in the Southside.

As Director of the Housing Resources Unit during this time, I worked on tenant organizing and advocacy—helping tenants preserve and improve their privately-owned housing. David supported these efforts in many ways. In most cases landlords had abandoned their buildings or had just decided not to provide any services, so through housing court action we would petition to have a “7A Administrator” appointed to collect rent and make repairs. That 7A Administrator would be David Pagan—who showed confidence in us organizers to work closely with numerous tenants associations, making sure the buildings were managed and improved responsibly. If we needed him to go to court—he was there; if we needed him to attend a meeting—he was there. He always supported us in our many coalitions and causes and though he might not have attended every rally and protest—he was there in spirit.

David was a kind a caring person—his wonderful family came first, but Los Sures was close behind. He had an “open door” policy, always willing to discuss any problem and help resolve any conflict. I always remember David was the person who would calmly help work things out in a matter of minutes.

In addition to helping local families, David greatly helped the staff achieve their full potential.

I was 27 when I came to Los Sures—my first job out of grad school. I remember David sitting with me and explaining why I should enroll in a 401-k plan. I was living pay check to pay check then and was worried that I couldn't do 10%, as he suggested. He patiently explained that I needed to do it for my future. 22 years later, I'm so grateful to him for helping me to build a little nest egg!

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David Pagan in his Southside United office at 213 S. 4th Street, Brooklyn.
UN MENSAJE DEL PRESIDENTE DE LA JUNTA DIRECTIVA DE SOUTHSIDE UNITED, JUAN RAMOS

“Nos hemos enfrentado a innumerables obstáculos, pero seguimos adelante gracias al trabajo de él por más de 30 años.”

David Pagan estableció un legado inspirador de mejoramiento y desarrollo comunitario el cual no será olvidado. Nos hemos enfrentado a innumerables obstáculos, pero seguimos adelante gracias al trabajo de él por más de 30 años.

Todos deberíamos de intentar emular su dedicación a las familias que servimos mientras luchamos para superar las fuerzas abrumadoras del aburguesamiento extenso en el norte de Brooklyn. Estaremos siempre endeudados a su familia por apoyarlo en todas esas horas largas que paso asegurándose de que fueran exitoso y que la justicia en la vivienda prevaleciera. De parte de la junta directiva de Southside United, gracias, David.

UN MENSAJE DEL MIEMBRO DE LA JUNTA DIRECTIVA DE SOUTHSIDE UNITED, DAVID LOPEZ

Como uno de los líderes preeminentes en la lucha para salvar a Los Sures de Williamsburg durante los tiempos del abandono, David Pagan traba tan tenazmente para mejorar la calidad de vida de los residentes locales.

Yo tuve el privilegio de trabajar con David en su esfuerzo cuando serví en la junta directiva de Southside United por décadas. Todos los empleados seguían su buen ejemplo, y lo admiraban y dependían de su comportamiento tan calmo y su intelecto para superar retos. Vamos a extrañar a David mucho, y le agradecemos por todo el progreso que se logró debido a sus esfuerzos.

“David Pagan trabajó tan tenazmente para mejorar la calidad de vida de los residentes locales.”

David Pagan guiando al ministro de HUD en ese entonces, a la congresista Nydia Velazquez y a otros líderes de la comunidad en un tour de Williamsburg.
UN MENSAJE DE LA VICEPRESIDENTE DEL CONDADO DE BROOKLYN, DIANA REYNA

David Pagan tuvo un impacto enorme en mi vida. Profesionalmente, él fue un líder respetado entre muchos alrededor de la ciudad. Su comportamiento calmado y su compostura sabia para alcanzar metas y crear asociaciones complicadas para el bien de nuestra comunidad. Yo, como muchas personas, busqué su sabiduría para entender mejor mi vecindario y mi carrera. Él fue un amigo y mentor muy dedicado, y compartió su conocimiento abnegadamente. Yo disfruto mucho sus historias de los años del pasado, reflexionando en la tristeza y ansiedad, pero más que todo la esperanza, de la lucha para preservar la comunidad.

“Como una imagen reflejada, era Los Sures que reflejaba a David, y David reflejaba a Los Sures.”

Personalmente, mi familia y yo dependíamos de su compasión y su empatía ya que él se le conocía como “El Jefe” por su fiel asistente, Laura. Mientras vemos alrededor de nuestra comunidad que sigue cambiando, desde que falleció, yo he pensado en su legado y profundamente estimado los momentos que compartimos juntos, así fuera que nos estábamos riendo o gritando, hicimos progreso. Ultimadamente, como una imagen reflejada, era Los Sures que reflejaba a David, y David reflejaba a Los Sures. Ha sido un honor llamar a David mi amigo y mi consejero. Ha sido un privilegio haber vivido en Los Sures, y haberlo llamado a él un vecino.

Diana Reyna, concejal en ese entonces con David Pagan y otros líderes locales en la gran apertura de un edificio de apartamentos asequibles.

UN MENSAJE DEL DIRECTOR EJECUTIVO DE SOUTHSIDE UNITED, RAMON PEGUERO

David fue un león en el movimiento del desarrollo comunitario de la Ciudad de Nueva York, dirigiéndonos desde nuestros primeros días en los 70’s hasta que se jubiló en 2010.

La vida de David, al igual que el impacto de su trabajo pionero y su liderazgo en Williamsburg y en el movimiento del desarrollo comunitario a lo largo de la Ciudad de Nueva York, fue extraordinaria. David fue un miembro fundador de la junta directiva de la Asociación para el Desarrollo de Vecindarios y de Vivienda, y su visión y sus valores han formado nuestro trabajo hasta el día de hoy.

David Pagan llegó a la Ciudad de Nueva York desde Barranquitas, Puerto Rico, en 1956. Ejerció en los vecindarios de Williamsburg y Bushwick de Brooklyn. Después de asistir New York City Community College, él fue reclutado para el ejército y sirvió en Vietnam como un soldado de infantería en la división de Caballería Aéromóvil. Cuando regresó, el obvio su licenciatura en contabilidad y economía en Queens College y después su maestría en finanzas en St. John’s University.

“David era un activista social y comunitario de corazón, y fue atraído rápidamente a las dificultades que existían en su propia parte de Brooklyn.”

David era un activista social y comunitario de corazón, y fue atraído rápidamente a las dificultades que existían en su propia parte de Brooklyn. Los Sures de Williamsburg, como muchos vecindarios alrededor de la Ciudad de Nueva York en los 70’s y en los 80’s, sufría de la desinversión y del abandono mientras que comunidades enteras fueron dadas por perdidas por los bancos, desarrolladores, y hasta por el gobierno. Pero estos vecindarios no fueron dados por perdidos por sus residentes. Los residentes que crearon a Southside United – Los Sures estaban respondiendo a esta epidemia de abandono, y a los dueños de propiedades que estaban intentando dejar vacante a sus edificios para cambiar la composición étnica de sus vecindarios. Bajo el liderazgo de David, Los Sures resistió mediante la promoción del control comunitario de viviendas – no solo la posesión sino también el manejo de las propiedades. En 1975, Los Sures se convirtió en la primera organización comunitaria que entro en acuerdos para manejar propiedades posesadas por la Ciudad. Algunos años después, fue uno de los primeros grupos en llevar a cabo rehabilitaciones de grandes escalas.

Yo trabajo como el subdirector por cinco años, y siempre esperaba nuestras conversaciones temprano por las mañanas, antes de que llegaran el resto de los empleados. Él era una fuente de información, y siempre quería absorber todo lo que fuera posible, sabiendo que el quería jubilarse y el no estaría tan accesible en el futuro.

Una cosa que David siempre decía que se quedó conmigo, fue lo siguiente: “Prefiero tener el 10% de algo que 100% de nada.” Esa declaración me hizo entender que el diálogo, la comunicación, y las relaciones eran extremadamente importantes para llevar la organización hacia adelante. Me enseño que no íbamos a ganar todas las batallas o tener todo lo que pedíamos, pero que mientras siguieramos moviéndonos hacia adelante, estaríamos en el camino correcto. Yo interpreto el significado de esas palabras a decir que debíamos negociar y crear intereses en común con otros y ver más allá de nuestras diferencias y enfocarnos en las cosas en que podíamos estar de acuerdo para tener resultados positivos.

David fue un mentor y un amigo que hará mucha falta.

Miembros de la Junta Directiva de Southside United William Vargas y David Lopez, David Pagan y el Director Ejecutivo de Southside United, Ramon Peguero en el 40º Aniversario de la organización.
Memorias de David Pagan

Siempre me recordaré de David Pagan como una fuerza fuerte y estabilizadora para Los Sures, especialmente durante los años turbulentos de 1970, 1980, y 1990s—cuando el abandono, los terremotos, las huelgas, la falta de servicios y el crimen eran prevalentes en Los Sures de Williamsburg. David empezó a trabajar en Los Sures como el gerente, pero nos dimos cuenta que, con su inteligencia y su dedicación, sería un muy buen administrador cuando llegara la hora. Después de algunos años, y con presión de los empleados y de la junta directiva, el aceptó y guió la organización firmemente.

Él estaba muy consciente de la necesidad de viviendas en el vecindario y trabajó laboriosamente con HFP y grupos como ANHID para crear y llevar a cabo proyectos de desarrollo para proveer viviendas asequibles y oportunidades para los residentes comunitarios para que fueran dueños de sus hogares. Bajo la administración de David, ciens de apartamentos asequibles fueron construidos y rehabilitados en Los Sures.

Además de ayudar a familias locales, David ayudó mucho a los empleados para que lograran su potencial total. Él era el tipo de persona que se interesaba personalmente de cada uno de los empleados.

“Además de ayudar a familias, David ayudó mucho a los empleados para que lograran su potencial total.”

Yo tenía 27 años cuando empecé a trabajar en Los Sures—mi primer trabajo después de que obtuve mi maestría. Me recuerdo de David porque era importante que me inscribiera en un plan de 401K. Yo estaba viviendo de pago a pago en ese entonces, y yo estaba preocupada de que no podría poner 10% como él me había sugerido. Él me explicó pacientemente que lo que tenía que hacer para mi futuro. Veintidós años después estoy muy agradecida a él por haberme ayudado a ahorrar.

David era muy paciente y se preocupaba por los demás. El me enseñó cómo usar Excel, crear presupuestos, y mucho más. Él quería mucho a su familia y le encantaba hablar sobre Betny, y sus hijos. El y Betny asistieron a mi boda y el vino al funeral de mi padre. De muchas formas, para mí él era un poco como una figura paterna y creo que fue lo mismo para muchos empleados.

Yo estuve por siempre endebleda al Sr. Pagan y a su familia. Siempre me recordé su bondad y su paciencia. Después de muchos meses de trabajar en Southside United – Los Sures yo me encontré cuando tenía 28 años, él se me acercó y me dijo “Yo me equivocé—cuando Ana te recomendé para contratarle, yo estaba un poco escéptico.” Él se disculpó y me dijo que estaba muy orgulloso de mí. Yo nunca olvidare sus palabras. Él nunca usaba palabras duras y me enseño que respetar a otros no significa que tienes que estar de acuerdo con ellos.

“Me enseño que respetar a otros no significa que tienes que estar de acuerdo con ellos.”

Me recuerdo de nuestras pláticas en las mañanas—yo siempre llegaba temprano alrededor de las 7:30 a.m. Un día hubo una tormenta de nieve y llame a la oficina a las 6:30 a.m. para saber si es...
IN MEMORY OF DAVID PAGAN, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SOUTHSIDE UNITED
En Memoria de David Pagan, el Previo Director Ejecutivo de Southside United

David Pagan at his graduation from New York City Community College in 1964. David Pagan en su graduación del New York City Community College en 1964.


David Pagan at Southside United’s 35th Anniversary. David Pagan en el 35 Aniversario de Southside United.

David Pagan and community leaders at the grand opening of 145 S. 3rd Street, a senior housing building. David Pagan y líderes comunitarios en la gran apertura de 145 S. 3rd Street, un edificio para personas mayores.

David Pagan and community leaders celebrating the grand opening of a Southside United affordable housing building in the 90s. David Pagan y líderes de la comunidad en la gran apertura de un edificio de unidades asequibles en los 90s.
