

Street renamed in honor of Carlos Lezama

People

By Glenda Cadogan

On a late summer day in which the sun's noon-day embrace could still be felt, an impressive gathering which included, family members, elected officials, community leaders and schoolchildren, paid tribute to the late Carlos Lezama with the historic renaming of a busy Brooklyn street corner in his honor.

In recognition of his contributions as an icon and pioneer of the West Indian Day Carnival Parade on Eastern Parkway, the intersection of St. John's Pl. and Brooklyn Avenue was co-named -- the Carlos Lezama Way. The block is also home of the Carlos Lezama Archives and Caribbean Cultural center, an educational entity devoted to the preservation, research and development of Caribbean culture and dedicated to the legacy of Carlos Lezama.

Yolanda Lezama Clark,

who took over the reins of the Carnival Association from her father, embraced the day as "one of honor and privilege for a man of humble beginnings.

"My dad worked hard to create a life for himself and his family in America," she said. "He loved the United States and he especially loved Brooklyn. I imagine that he would be grinning from ear to ear today on this occasion."

According to Lezama-Clark, it was a few years ago on her visit to the home of Louis Armstrong in Corona, Queens, that she fell in love with the idea of the Louis Armstrong Museum. "When I saw the street sign -- < st1:street>Louis Armstrong Way -- I felt that it was a wonderful tribute and hoped that one day too, my dad's memory would be so honored."

This dream became a reality at 12 noon on Sept. 18, with the official



(Front row) Fourth from left, Yolanda Lezama Clark with her brother Ken Lezama at extreme right with local politicians and friends.

unveiling of the Carlos Lezama Way. Joining the tribute were elected officials who have worked along with Lezama-Clark and Community Board 8 to assist in what Rev. Kaleb Buchanan of St. Gregory the Great Church called,

"making sacred the memory of Carlos Lezama." They included: Borough President Marty Markowitz, State Senator Kevin Parker, Assembly members Nick Perry, Annette Robinson and Karim Camara and City Council members, Al Vann, Letitia James and Mathieu Eugene.

Borough President Markowitz celebrated Carlos Lezama as "a rare Brooklynite who brought about an understanding and recognition in New York City and Brooklyn of

the power and majesty of Caribbean American culture. I know he will be remembered by future generations as a man who spent his life enriching the lives of others," he said.

State Senator Kevin Parker added his voice to the chorus by calling Mr. Lezama "a cultural warrior on whose broad shoulders we stand. Today we have a living libation and call the name of Mr. Carlos Lezama as a testament to the great works and deeds he has done."

In her reflections, Councilmember Leticia James, spoke about Lezama's drive in building the Eastern Parkway parade to become the largest in North America. "This parade helps us to speak about the wonderful contributions of Caribbean Americans not just to culture but to business, music, politics and a number of other genres," she said.

Councilmember Al Vann, remembered Lezama as "a man who was very proud of his Caribbean ancestry. But he was also proud of the African roots that we all share and he valued the American experience."

More accolades came in from other elected official who called him "a quiet, powerful leader," "a legend in the Caribbean American community" and "a cultural hero."

The street naming was made possible through the organizing effort of Community Board 8, whose president also brought greetings.

Also in attendance were past and present members of the West Indian American Day Carnival Association and board members of the Carlos Lezama Archives and Caribbean Cultural Center and students from three Brooklyn public schools.