

ISLANDWIDE

Long Island Cares names CEO

New leader faces turbulent time for food pantries

FIRST IN NEWSDAY

BY JOHN ASBURY

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Long Island Cares and the Harry Chapin Food Bank has named their first new CEO in 17 years.

Katherine M. Fritz will take over the food bank, which has an annual budget exceeding \$40 million and distributes more than 1 million pounds of food per month to Long Islanders in need.

Fritz has worked at the Hauppauge-based food bank for six years as the nonprofit's vice president of development and communications, where she focused on fundraising with donors. She previously worked for more than a decade for the Guide Dog Foun-



LONG ISLAND CARES INC.

Katherine M. Fritz is the food bank's first new CEO in 17 years.

dation and America's VetDogs, based in Smithtown.

She takes over the position during a turbulent time for food banks nationally as they face federal spending cuts and an increased demand from families who cannot afford to put food on the table.

"We're definitely looking at an uncertain time across the United States," Fritz said. "I'm grateful

for our other colleagues and food banks in Feeding America to find the best ways to handle this uncertainty. We're looking at what this means for SNAP cuts and changes to the government shutdown. We're analyzing it day by day to make sure we do the best job and make food available for Long Island."

Fritz succeeds longtime Long Island Cares president and CEO Paule Pachter, 71, who announced in June that he planned to retire by the end of the year. He said he would stay on through the new leadership's transition and in an advisory role.

Pachter said Fritz mentored him in fundraising while he led her in administration and government relations. During her tenure, he said, Fritz has increased the food bank's fundraising from about \$4 million per year to some \$11 million annually.

"I think the future of the organization is bright and it will continue in the vein it has for the past 17½ years," Pachter

told Newsday on Tuesday. "I'm certainly pleased with the fact I will hand off Long Island Cares to Katherine because she will continue to see it remains as strong as possible."

Fritz was selected following a nationwide search before the nonprofit settled on an internal candidate, said David E. Herold, president of the board of directors at Long Island Cares.

"She will lead us in meeting the ever-increasing need ahead, which is what the battle against the challenging climate surrounding food insecurity requires," Herold said in a statement. "We believe that with her steady hand on the tiller, our mission will be advanced and the future of the people we serve will be brighter."

The food bank was started in 1980 by singer-songwriter Harry Chapin and his wife, Sandy, before he was killed in a 1981 car crash on the Long Island Expressway on his way to perform a benefit concert at Eisenhower Park.

The pantry serves 16 million pounds of food annually to about 318,000 Long Islanders, including 75,000 children, officials said. It has grown to provide food at nine locations on Long Island with a budget that has grown from \$8.5 million to \$41 million and a staff of about 78 people, according to the organization.

Fritz is focusing on maintaining Chapin's legacy, she said, and building upon Pachter's work in growing community outreach. The rising demand for food has been evident since the COVID-19 pandemic and rising prices at the grocery store, Fritz said.

"People are feeling that pinch on their wallets and there's a misconception on Long Island that the only people in need are immigrants or without jobs. People are working multiple jobs and not making enough to meet the needs of a family on Long Island," Fritz said. "People come here, not because they want free food, but because they have nowhere else to turn."

BETHPAGE

Town approves zone change at issue in mosque denial lawsuit

FIRST IN NEWSDAY

BY JOSHUA NEEDELMAN

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The Oyster Bay Town Board on Tuesday changed a zoning law it cited in its decision to deny a Bethpage mosque's bid to triple its footprint.

The board voted 7-0 to extend a formula it had established for parking space requirements at religious institutions to buildings with secular uses. The law, initially implemented in 2022, requires the number of parking spaces at a building to be based on total occupancy, rather than the number of square footage or the number of seats in the building.

Muslims on Long Island, the owners of the Masjid Al-Baqi mosque on Central Avenue, had cited the requirement in its January lawsuit against the town for allegedly violating federal religious land use laws. The measure effectively cre-



NEWSDAY / DREW SINGH

The Masjid Al-Baqi mosque in Bethpage is in a legal battle with Oyster Bay over the zoning standards.

ated tougher standards for religious facilities, lawyers for the mosque have argued.

The parking requirement now also applies to buildings such as theaters, libraries and museums.

Oyster Bay Town Supervisor Joseph Saladino said in a statement the new rules will "keep things more uniform."

"It's a system that makes sense and helps make sure there's enough parking, keeps

traffic moving safely, and looks out for everyone's safety," Saladino said.

Last week, an attorney for the mosque told Newsday the change would effectively make it harder for other institutions to secure town permits.

Muhammad Faridi, of the Linklaters LLP law firm that represents MOLI, told Newsday last week the proposal makes it "more difficult for theaters, libraries and other

types of similar secular uses to be able to get a permit."

Faridi told Newsday last week that the town's measure was "basically doubling down on the requirements that they imposed on us."

For years, the mosque has sought to triple its footprint in Bethpage by converting two one-story buildings into a single site with a larger prayer room and new wudu stalls, which is used by congregants

to wash their hands as part of the Islamic cleansing ritual.

In August, Oyster Bay agreed to approve the expansion and pay \$3.95 million to the mosque to settle a federal lawsuit. The town backtracked a couple of weeks later, reigniting the legal battle. The town cited traffic concerns surrounding the expansion.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Justice sided with the mosque's argument. A statement of interest filed by the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division said the 2022 measure treated religious institutions under the law "less favorably than comparable secular uses such as theaters, libraries, and museums."

The Town of North Hempstead also is embroiled in a legal battle with a local mosque that wants to expand. In February, the town filed a notice of appeal after a judge called on the town to approve the Hillside Islamic Center's request to expand in New Hyde Park.