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[Locals](#)

October 1, 2009, 5:56 pm

## Local Locals: Eva Samo

By [WINSTINA S. HUGHES](#)



Harvey Samo, Eva Samo and Dr. Ralph Buultjens, earlier this year. Marilyn Lehren Left to right:

When “Our Whirling World,” the [Eva Samo Lecture Series](#) at the South Orange Maplewood Adult School, begins this month, it will be honoring a woman who survived a tragic chapter of world history and used her gifts to improve our towns.

The series is named for Mrs. Samo, a Maplewood resident who worked at the [South Orange Maplewood Adult School](#) for 45 years. One of the lecturers is ~~It is hosted by~~ [David Brancaccio](#), the host of PBS’ NOW, an award-winning newsmagazine, who also lives in Maplewood.

“Quite simply, Ms. Samo is the conscience and the soul of the Adult School,” said Emily Zacharias, a trustee of the school, which created the lecture series in her honor.

Mrs. Samo created numerous educational programs for children and adults, including the community summer program — a creative arts and academic enrichment program for more than 1,000 children.

“The afterschool program evolved from the summer program,” Mrs. Samo said with a smile. “They call me the grandmother.”

Also fondly referred to as “The First Lady of [First Night](#),” she organized community activists from both towns in 1990 to work on the popular New Year’s Eve celebration.

Of her work at the Adult School, Mrs. Samo said she is proudest of helping to organize the summer enrichment program.

“It involved all the relevant organizations in the two communities and created a network that did not exist before,” she said.

Mrs. Samo, now in her 80s, developed a passion for learning early on. Born in Berlin, her family left everything behind and immigrated to the United States on Nov. 10, 1938 to escape Nazi Germany. It was the second night of [Kristallnacht](#), the “night of the broken glass,” which would be the death knell for 6 million European Jews.

Her life drastically changed the day the superintendent of their building said to her father, “You know doctor, I get around a lot of people, and I hear them talking. They are planning really bad things for the

Jews. I think you should go.”

“When we left Germany we each had \$15 in our pockets,” Mrs. Samo recalled.

During her early years in New York, her father studied for the New York Medical Boards, which would then permit him to practice medicine again. Mrs. Samo worked during the day and attended classes at New York University, then at Hunter College, to earn her degree in social work.

Her childhood sweetheart, Harvey, spent the war years in England. The two would reunite after World War II, marry and settle in Bayonne.

I met my husband Harvey at the age of 10 in Berlin. He was my brother’s best friend. When I was 11 I told my mother ‘That’s the man I’m going to marry.’

In 1960 Eva and Harvey, who died this summer, moved to Maplewood for the trees and the school system, and lived in the Washington Park section. They have two sons, Daniel and Toby, both graduates of Columbia High School and both physicians.

“We found this life-sustaining emotion, the feeling of belonging, in this small town and in the Adult School community,” she said. “Both Harvey and I had not known the feeling of belonging since Hitler decided that we were to be eliminated if we stayed in Germany.”

This fall the Eva Samo Lecture Series, “Our Whirling Minds,” will be held on Monday evenings in the library at Columbia High School. The lecturers will tackle the changing worlds of capitalism, religion, science and technology, and foreign affairs.

Professor [Ralph Buultjens](#) of New York University asks the question: Is America “the last best hope on Earth?” and Mr. Brancaccio gives a lecture on “The New Capitalism.” In addition, [S. Wesley Ariarajah](#) of Drew University School of Theology explores “Religious Traditions in a Changing World,” while [Michael Lemonick](#), senior writer at Climate Central, a non-profit climate communications firm, examines “Changing the World with Science and Technology.”

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1. 1. October 2, 2009 2:37 pm [Link](#)

Fascinating and lovely story ...

— *Robert*

2. 2. October 3, 2009 9:16 pm [Link](#)

What a wonderful woman to have established herself and her family in a new community and to have made such an impact. Thanks for publishing it.

— *Janice Bunis*

3. 3. October 8, 2009 5:13 pm [Link](#)

Mrs. Samo is very warm and very kind, and I agree with you. Her story is lovely and she has made quite an impact here.

— *winstina s. hughes*

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