

A Message from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey  
on the Life and Career of Susan Baer

Susan M. Baer, who shattered longstanding gender barriers at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey by becoming the agency's first female aviation director after becoming the only person to manage all three major NYC metropolitan area airports, died on Tuesday, August 9, 2016. She was 65.

Ms. Baer, a natural leader who was persuasive without ever being overbearing and firm without ever making others feel threatened, was compassionate to her core. Her illustrious transportation career that spanned four decades began at the Panama Canal with a non-governmental agency, where she worked until the United States turned the facility over to the Panamanians.

After returning to the United States, Ms. Baer started her 37-year tenure with the Port Authority in 1976, managing the Port Authority Bus Terminal and the Lincoln Tunnel before moving to the agency's Aviation Department, where she would leave her greatest mark on the agency and the region, holding every top job in the nation's largest aviation system. She was the first female appointed as general manager to - in succession - LaGuardia, Newark Liberty International and John F. Kennedy International airports, before being named Aviation Director in 2009. Succeeding at a time when the Port Authority was a male-dominated agency, Ms. Baer understood the importance of being a role model and mentored other women who would eventually follow in her leadership roles at the airports.

"The first is fine, but I don't want to be the only," Ms. Baer told USA Today in a 2013 interview about her career and role as the agency's first woman aviation director. "What I've tried to do with it is give other women opportunities and that's something all women should be doing. It was hard for us to get here but we ought to be making it easier for the people who are coming behind us."

Patrick J. Foye, Executive Director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey said, "Sue Baer's career was one of many firsts; first woman to run many of our major transportation facilities and first female Director of Aviation. She left a legacy of professionalism, integrity and leadership at the Port Authority. Her colleagues responded to her service with fierce loyalty. Sue was a great public servant."

Airport modernization efforts, including overseeing the revamping of old and building of new terminals at Newark Liberty and Kennedy airports, was one of Ms. Baer's priorities. She had a ready response for those who asked her when all the work would finally be done.

"I tell them: I hope never, because that means we've stopped working and we're not really meeting the needs of the future," Ms. Baer also told USA Today. "You've always got to be doing something."

Pushing for NextGen, the overhaul of the nation's air traffic navigation system that will allow planes to fly more safely and efficiently, was another of Ms. Baer's major goals during her directorship, as she fought to ease air traffic congestion over the New York City region - the the world's most crowded airspace. Her dedication to advancing NextGen earned her an appointment by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Raymond LaHood to his Future of Aviation Committee. In addition, she was appointed by Michael P. Huerta, Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, to his NextGen Advisory Committee.

On Sept. 11, 2001, Ms. Baer was at the helm of Newark Liberty and watched the destruction of the World Trade Center before helping to shut down airport operations and restart them in the anxiety-laden days after the terrorist attack. Later, she oversaw the installation of a simple memorial, with tall silver Roman Numerals "IX, XI," set in an outside area of the airport's administration building.

Following her 2013 retirement from the Port Authority, Ms. Baer joined Arup, one of the world's leading professional consulting firms, where she became the Americas Aviation Leader responsible for the strategic planning for major aviation projects and overall vision of master planning options. In 2015, she was named the Global Aviation Business Leader, overseeing consulting efforts at over 100 airports worldwide.

"Come to me with a problem," she was fond of saying, "and you'll leave with a project."

Yet it never felt like a burden. She was, if anything, a master at empowering her employees, trusting them to be autonomous, giving them the confidence to succeed. And if they struggled or stumbled, she was there to right them, to help, to ensure they would not fail.

Ms. Baer earned a bachelor's degree in urban studies and anthropology from Barnard College and a master's degree in business administration from New York University. She held memberships with the International Aviation Women's Association, Airports Council International-NA (ACI-NA), the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE), and also served on the board of the Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology, the Newark Museum and the Wings Club.

For all her aviation accomplishments, however, Ms. Baer's most treasured title was that of Mom to her three amazing children, Nick, Lizzie and Jack.

"We all work for something," observed Ms. Baer in recent months. "I do it for my three kids to show them how we can all make a difference. And in return they make me happy to go home every night and bring love and balance into my life."

Ms. Baer appreciated her children's understanding of her unique job, with its unpredictable hours, extended business trips, and in particular the requirement

during snowstorms that she take round-the-clock shifts, instead of staying home and sledding.

In addition to her children, she is survived by her devoted husband, Joseph Martella, her sister, Sally, brothers John and Kirk, and was pre-deceased by her beloved parents from whom she developed her strong work ethic.