

Homeless take runway turn

BY NICOLE BROWN
nicole.brown@amny.com

When she walks down the runway at the annual Care for the Homeless fashion show wearing a red gown with a black fedora, Renee Brooks, 57, says she may break out some Michael Jackson moves.

"It's definitely a Michael Jackson fedora," Brooks said, laughing. "Do we have a glove, just one?"

This will be Brooks' second year participating in the Health Empowered Beauty Fashion Show, which began several years ago in the cafeteria of Susan's Place, a transitional residence in the Bronx for homeless women.

Now in its sixth year, the event raises money for Care for the Homeless, a nonprofit that runs Susan's Place and provides services to homeless men, women and children. This year's show will be on Thursday, Sept. 20 at 6 p.m. at the Prince George Ballroom at 15 E. 27th St.

The 15 models are former or current residents of Susan's

Place, and they will keep the clothes they wear, which were donated by several companies, including Eloquii and Torrid.

The event "takes the stigma off of being homeless," says Brooks, who still occasionally wears the black skirt and sparkly gold shirt she wore at last year's show.

"The fashion show shows that we're real people, we have real lives and that we really deserve to be looked at differently," she said.

Brooks, a lifelong Brooklynite, has a heart defibrillator and was in the hospital last month when her kidneys started to fail. She lost her apartment of 23 years after she had to take care of her ill mother in Florida about 3½ years ago.

When she came back to the city, she didn't have anywhere to stay and has been at Susan's Place since June 2017, she said. At the time, she was a 911 operator, she said, but her health has worsened, preventing her from working.

Though there are things she would change at Susan's Place



Renee Brooks, left, and other residents of Susan's Place participate in the 2017 fashion fundraiser for Care for the Homeless.

— she is currently on a committee that is pushing for more nutritious food options — she is grateful to have a bed and a roof over her head.

"A lot of us really are happy and looking forward to our futures," she said.

Susan's Place, which has 200

beds for women who are medically frail or mentally ill, has placed more than 900 women in supportive or affordable housing since it opened in 2008, according to Care for the Homeless.

Last year's fashion show raised \$16,000 for the nonprofit, a spokeswoman said.



Lisa Levy, Miss Subways 2017, poses with her crown.

of the poorest service performance in decades, applicants for this year's event cherished the tender moments of humanity and serendipity that the subway system brings to their lives.

"It's such a communal space that we all rely on," said Parker MacLure, 25, a government worker and Greenpoint resident who is preparing a drag performance under his amateur persona "Miss Subways." "All of us, we live in the city, we don't talk to each other, but then we're forced to be so close to each other."

Charli Battersby, 47, a video game designer and screenwriter from Williamsburg who rides the L train, said they would use their platform as Miss Subways to stick up for riders ahead of the L train shutdown. Battersby is designing a video game about the contest and commuting through the subways.

"With the L train going under halfway through the next Miss Subways reign," Battersby said, "it seems like a good time to have someone here be an advocate for riders — especially since the government and MTA haven't put out a good plan for when the L train goes down."

The contestant crowned Miss Subways is expected to take up transit advocacy in some form, through their own creative lens. Last year's winner, Lisa Levy, filed video blog reports from MTA public hearings, sometimes while wearing her crown.

Mind-bending tricks at Museum of Illusions

BY SHAYE WEAVER
shaye.weaver@amny.com

You'll question everything at a new museum meant to trick your eyes and your mind, opening Thursday in the Meatpacking District.

The Museum of Illusions, a Croatian transplant with 19 locations established or coming soon across the world, will fool you into looking like a giant, feeling off-kilter and get you hanging upside down through an optical illusion.

You'll be unsure of things from the beginning — the museum is housed inside an old bank building, and when you walk in, you'll immediately be given the opportunity to trick your Instagram friends with a photo that will make you look tiny using perspective.

Feel free to go wild taking selfies in the crazy, confusing and colorful rooms and exhibits, of which there are 70.

The Ames room, which has a floor that slopes, makes you "shrink" or "grow larger" on the video screen. The tilted room also uses a sloped floor



Museum visitor Oprah Williams and her "head on a plate"

so it's nearly impossible to walk straight and not feel dizzy.

"It gives you a nauseous feeling," Roko Živković, the museum's CEO, told amNewYork during a walk-through.

There's another room that's completely rotated so that by taking a photo and rotating it, the subjects look like they're floating in the air.

And placed throughout the museum are interactive pictures,

sculptures, games and puzzles that are explained on wall panels.

A lot of the illusions you'll see come from psychology books — some well-known, others not so much.

The museum's "thermal grill," for example, will give you a fake feeling of burning just by touching it. The illusion uses harmless levels of both cold and warm, which for some reason causes a burning sensation.

And its zoetrope, a device that uses a rapid succession of pictures to mimic movement, will make you believe you're seeing bizarre movement of an object. This one uses a rapidly flashing strobe light to illuminate the pieces.

You can also "swap noses" with a friend through a mirror illusion, if you like.

The museum takes about an hour to get through and it's best with friends or family, according to Živković.

He and CEO Renne Gjoni wanted to create a space where people can play and learn through doing, he added.

The museum only has one rule: Don't break anything.

"It's about visitors losing themselves, climbing on the walls . . . we're used to fixing stuff," Živković said. "The museum is a 21st century concept. I always loved National Geographic and brain games and I wanted to do it for people to experience something really different. It's fun and educational, which has proven to be a hit in all the countries where we are and we are hopeful it will be here, too."

PHOTO COURTESY OF WALTER WILODARCZYK

ALONZO BOLDIN / CARE FOR THE HOMELESS

LINDA ROSIER