

ACE Founder Henry Buhl

It all started in 1992 when a SoHo street cleaner asked Buhl for \$20.

byline
Editor

In 1985 while Henry Buhl was photographing for “Brazilian Vogue” at an art gallery located on 170 Mercer St. (now Dop-Dop hair salon), a well-known still life photographer approached Buhl and asked him to be his assistant. Buhl had already established himself as a wedding photographer in 1980 and had a flourishing night and weekend business. Buhl accepted the position, which combined a full schedule of commercial photography during the day and charities and wedding during the night and weekend. Soon he had several assistants of his own and along with eight other photographers purchased two floors at 114 Greene St. where they set up four large shooting studios and two dark rooms. Buhl was commuting every day from uptown, so he decided to move to SoHo and purchased an empty warehouse on Prince Street and moved into SoHo in 1990.

The studio soon boomed with 12 photographs sharing the space and expenses.

In the summer of 1992 a street cleaner approached Buhl asking to borrow \$20. Buhl had noticed the man sweeping Greene Street in the mornings and was often sleeping in a door well after lunch. Buhl asked why he should give the man \$20 since he had a job. The sweeper told Buhl that he had just been fired and was homeless. Buhl asked who had hired him? The sweeper said Tony Goldman, a real estate developer who lived and worked across the street from Buhl.

Finding sweepers

Buhl approached Goldman to find out that he was unable to continue to employ the sweeper as he had purchased four buildings in Miami and had to spend the next two years there. Goldman explained that 12 stores on Greene Street between Prince and Spring each paid \$600 a year for the sweeper’s salary. Buhl approached the stores and all 12 stores wanted to continue cleaning in front of their storefronts. Where would Buhl find a sweeper? An assistant suggested going to the Bowery Residence Committee (BRC), a 99 percent grant-funded non-profit located nearby. Buhl spent an hour listening to the executive director describing what BRC did and then asked if BRC might have one of its clients who could sweep Greene Street. If the client did a good job Buhl could recommend him for an outside job.

The executive director threw-up his hands and shouted “Hal-lelujah” you could be my savior.” Buhl asked, how? The executive director explained that BRC took men coming out of jail and housed them, fed them, clothed them and provided medical care (the most expensive segment) for more than \$31,000 a year per man. After two years the clients’ government benefits were terminated, they would migrate to the streets and become homeless again as no employer would hire them because of their criminal records.

One day after the meeting, the executive director called Buhl to say that he had a person who did not want to remain in the homeless cycle and wanted a job.

Thus, Buhl formed the SoHo Partnership. Two days after the first BRC client started to work the executive director called to say that BRC had another man that wanted to get out of the homeless cycle and wanted a job. Buhl explained that the BRC client would have to wait several weeks as Buhl would have to approach more stores to see if they wanted clean sidewalks and were willing to pay \$600 a year to help the homeless. The BRC executive director kept calling with more candidates who wished to reclaim their lives and within three months Buhl had eight clients working five days a week cleaning SoHo streets. Buhl designed and bought SoHo Partnership uniforms, found space to store garbage pales, paid the sweepers a weekly stipend and made sure the eight clients showed up and swept their assigned streets. The SoHo Partnership took a toll on Buhl’s lucrative photographic business so he decided to close it down



Buhl’s goals through ACE is to help as many homeless men and women as possible to reclaim their lives.

in 1993 and devote his energies fulltime to preparing his homeless clients for productive lives.

The SoHo Partnership was booming and the residents, stores and buildings complained about the dirty streets that were not swept two days a week so Buhl commenced sweeping seven days a week, which is how the practice continues to this day.

Soon the TriBeCa Partnership was formed, then Hudson Square Partnership, 22nd Street [is this the correct title?], Lolita, NoHo and other smaller partnerships. As all the partnerships required separate uniforms, stationary and accounting, in 2010 Buhl decided to consolidate them all into ACE – The Association of Community Employment Programs for the Homeless.

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ACE’s objectives remain the same today as they did in 1992. ACE takes homeless men and women who are currently living in shelters all over New York City and works with them with the objective of obtaining a full-time job and finding permanent housing.

Today, the ACE programs have two main components:

Education – ACE provides GED courses, math and English and one of the most comprehensive literacy courses in New York City. About 25 to 35 percent of all ACE’s intakes are illiterate and without being able to read or write it is almost impos-

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Graduates of Project Comeback, ACE’s four-month job training program, are honored in a ceremony.



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Keeping communities clean – ACE's clients are required to show up early in the morning, change into their ACE uniforms, follow a prescribed route to clean the sidewalks and streets, remove graffiti, water plants, remove snow on the crosswalks and put down salt, etc. ACE supervisors make sure that ACE's clients follow the correct routes. ACE sweeps all of SoHo with exception of Broadway between Houston and Canal where a BID – Business Improvement District -- is in formation. TriBeCa, NoHo, Lolita, the Bronx, Time Square, Meat Packing District, West Village, etc as well as caring for parks and plazas throughout the New York City.



ACE offers cash rewards to graduates for 6, 12 and 18 months of employment. According to ACE, 81 percent of the organization's graduates have held their jobs two years or longer -- a statistic they are very proud of.

organization where the residents, buildings and stores donate for two reasons: 1. Because they are grateful for the service ACE provides to keep sidewalks and streets clean and 2. Because the donors realize the ACE provides a service for helping revitalize previously homeless men and women. Other monies are received from contracts from New York City for maintaining

After Care Program – This unique program asks graduates to return to ACE twice a month – the first time to sit with a group of graduates and a supervisor to discuss the graduates' progress with his or her job which is often their first legitimate undertaking – such questions as how do you get along with your supervisor, do you like the work – when do you think you will be secure enough to leave the shelter and seek a permanent apartment. If the graduate stays in a job and keeps in touch with ACE; ACE offers cash rewards for 6, 12 and 18 months – 81 percent of ACE's graduates have held their jobs two years or longer, a percentage they take great pride in.

In 2012 ACE started providing housing in the Bronx for its most ambitious graduates who wish to improve their wages and way of life. Although only a few graduates are currently in this program, it is scheduled to double in 2013.

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Who Is Henry Buhl?

Originally from Detroit, Buhl has a background in investment banking and photography.

The early years in New York

Henry Buhl is from Detroit and started as a specialist's clerk on New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). He did not like being trapped on the floor of the Exchange, and asked to become a stock analyst. After five years as an analyst, he was promoted to a salesman.

A stint in Switzerland

After 10 years working with NYSE, he was hired in 1961 by a growing mutual fund organization Investors Overseas Service (IOS) in Geneva, Switzerland. Initially he managed a small fund \$3.2 million which grew to more than \$1 billion and oversaw

15 other funds. When trouble arrived at IOS and Bernie Cornfeld was ejected from the chairmanship, Buhl took over and ran the 18,000 employee organization until IOS was sold to Robert Vesco. Buhl then returned to the United States where he continued doing investment-banking deals until he became a full-time wedding photographer in 1980.

Back in SoHo

Today Buhl spends most of his time on ACE, but also collects sculptures of hands. Last December, Buhl had a single-person sale at Sotheby's of his famous photographic hand collection. The Buhl Foundation received

75 percent of the proceeds, which will be distributed to homeless and educational causes.

New tree planter program

Buhl lives and works in SoHo and is most excited about ACE's new greening of SoHo (and other areas) through a tree planter program. His goals through ACE is to help as many homeless men and women as possible to reclaim their lives and to keep SoHo and other areas clean for the residents and daily workers who work in these areas as well as to enhance SoHo with his green project.

The Buhl Foundation

This foundation oversees the Buhl Collection of hand art and the funding of programs to help those in need including the homeless, the less privileged and the underserved.

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For information on Project Comeback, call 212-274-0550 ext. 18 or 212-274-0550 ext. 58.

PROJECT COMEBACK CRITERIA

Here are the program's five requirements:

- **Housing: Applicants must have** a history of homelessness.
- **Sobriety: Applicants must have** at least 30 days of documented sobriety. No applicant may be currently taking methadone.
- **Criminal History: Applicants may** not have a violent or aggressive criminal history.

- **Health History: Applicants need** to be able to lift, stand, and walk for an 8-hour shift; applicants on medication for an Axis-1 diagnoses must have six-months documented stability. Applicants cannot have had an inpatient psychiatric hospitalization in the previous six months.
- **Other: Applicants must be** at least 21 years of age and be a U.S. citizen or legal resident.

bus stops, revitalizing city parks and plazas but the majority of the donations are received from foundations.

In 2012 ACE started providing housing in the Bronx for its most ambitious graduates who wish to improve their wages and way of life.

Organizations can become a member of ACE to help keep a cleaner New York. ACE crews sweep the streets and sidewalks of the service area twice a day, 362 days a year (every day but

Christmas Day, New Year's Day and Thanksgiving Day). While sweeping, crews empty every garbage can on the routes, bag trash and maintain the receptacles. Over the years, ACE has added 47 additional cans and three recycling units to the neighborhood to supplement those provided by the City.

On any given day, ACE has approximately 45 men and women working in lower Manhattan, supervised by two route supervisors and ACE Executive Director, Jim Martin.

Membership is tax-deductible and contributes to breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Other benefits include receiving discounted prices on services such as tree trimming and watering, graffiti removal, mass-clean up, window washing, packing, loading, unloading, painting, and inventory.

ACE also offer unique advertising opportunities members. Company logos can be featured on a cast iron trash can near member locations.

Members also get featured on the "ACE Shopping Guide," which reaches 100,000 shoppers and tourists.

Fundraising events

The organization also sponsors several fundraising events throughout the year. ACE's Junior Committee held a Winter Soiree with cocktails and music at the Crosby Street Hotel on Thursday, March 7.

This year marks ACE's 21th anniversary and the organization will be celebrating in style at its 2013 Annual Gala. ACE's biggest event of the year will be held on Tuesday, May 21 at the Russian Tea Room. The event will feature a special awards presentation to Dorothea and Jon Bon Jovi and their JBJ Soul Foundation.

Additional information

For more information on membership, email membership@acenewyork.org or call 212-271-0550, x52.

For tickets and reservations for the 2013 Annual Gala, call Sandra Sanches at 212-274-0100, ext. 10.

Anyone wishing to help NYC's homeless men and women reclaim their lives and are grateful to ACE for keeping SoHo clean may donate to ACE. Contributions may be mailed to ACE, 598 Broadway, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10012.

Additional information may be found on the organization's website, acenewyork.org



Henry Buhl spends most of his time on ACE, but also collects sculptures of hands. Pictured above is Buhl in his indoor sculpture garden.

Photo by Christopher Hyland