

Obituary: Janet Sillas

Janet Sillas, who joined BNL's Director's Office as a secretary in July 1974, and retired from the Public Affairs Office on January 17, 1997, passed away on February 26, 2015. She was 84 years old.

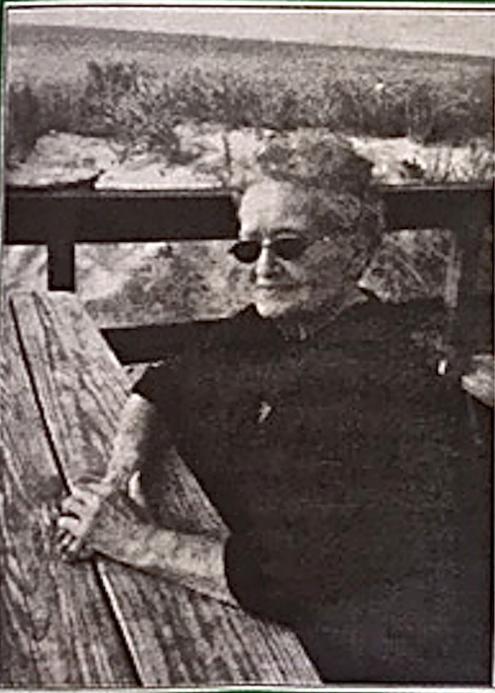
All are welcome to join Janet's family and friends for her memorial service on Saturday, June 27th, at 2:30 pm, at the Wading River Cemetery, North Wading River Rd, Wading River 11792.

Janet's first job at the Lab was as secretary assisting with BNL's environmental impact statement. After becoming part of the Lab's first technology transfer effort, she moved to Public Affairs in June 1977.

Wherever she worked or played, Janet was a star, contributing not only her musical and comedic talents, but also a commitment to helping and getting things done. On a local level, this was acknowledged in the following obituary published on the front page of Wading River's *Community Journal*:

G *Community* **JOURNAL** The News and More From "The Mighty Little Ne

P.O. BOX 619, WADING RIVER, NY 11792 • BERNADETTE SMITH, ESQ. Editor & Publ.



A Legend Gone

Janet Sillas, of Wading River, passed away peacefully, at home, surrounded by her family, on Thursday, February 26, 2015. She was one special lady and will be greatly missed. Janet was born March 25, 1930, one of three sisters, both of whom, June and Doris, predeceased her.

Janet Sillas has been a major participant in the community for many years. Every Christmas, she put on a Santa Lucia "Christmas tradition" of singing with candles on her head at the Wading River Congregational Church. Janet had a beautiful voice and sang her heart out at the Congregational Church.

Janet moved to Wading River, with her two daughters, Lorraine and Karen, in 1973. Her sister Doris, and brother-in-law Bert Rhodes also lived in Wading River. Janet got a job at Brookhaven National Lab and joined the Wading River Beach Club and Civic Association. She enthusiastically threw herself into the community and activities. She helped organize impromptu "Friday Night Parties" at the Beach Club, became secretary of the Civic Association for many years and coordinated the annual Duck Pond Day in Wading River. Her daughters fondly remember her as a beautiful, fun-loving person who will be greatly missed. A memorial service is planned for June.

Janet Sillas is pictured, left, at the Wading River Beach Club porch.

Janet's stardom at BNL is evident in the frequency and variety of events for which she appeared in the *Brookhaven Bulletin*. Some of the stories are reprinted below.

April 28, 1990:

Brookhaven Bulletin

The Woman With All the Answers

"For a painting I am undertaking, I need to interact with a particle — do you have any pictures you can send me?"

Of course — I have a selection: Do you care to interact with an omega minus, a pi-meson, a proton-antiproton pair or, perhaps, a charmed baryon?

Dear Brookhaven National Laboratory,

I think there exists a particle of time (*timeon*). It's going to take time to detect it, however.

Good luck with your research, and, do, by all means, take your time.

Dear BNL,

I am a seventh grader at the local Junior High School, and I am taking science this year. I want to build a nuclear reactor or particle accelerator for my science fair project. Can you send me some plans?

Building a nuclear reactor or a particle accelerator is a big project — even for engineers and physicists. So you can see how big these projects are, why don't you ask your science teacher to bring your class to the Lab for a tour?

If you want to know anything about Brookhaven National Laboratory and you don't know whom to contact, ask Janet Sillas, Ext. 2345. A senior public affairs assistant at the front desk in the Public Affairs Office, Sillas is the woman with all the answers about BNL — "and, if I can't provide the answer, then I know who can."

Sillas handles "BNL's fan mail and phone-in requests" from the general public, as well as from community organizations, scientific and technical corporations, educational institutions and book publishers.

The inquiries she directs fall into three categories: "the standard, the unusual — and the artistic avant-garde," Sillas explains.

Standard requests that come under Sillas' jurisdiction include those by publishers searching for appropriate photos for science textbooks; homeowners and builders inquiring about BNL's past research on oil-hot water heating systems and energy-efficient housing; teachers and students needing information about radiation; and civic groups and schools asking for speakers to talk about BNL.

The unusual includes inquiries about any strange sights, smells and noises that have been observed by the community around the Lab. "Usually, the Lab is not responsible for UFOs and other such sightings," explains Sillas. "But, first, I have to decide whether these phenomena were really spotted or just imagined."

"We also get a fair amount of correspondence — loaded with equations — and a number of phone calls from people who consider themselves self-employed inventors, or who think that they are the second Albert Einstein, or who believe that strange physical forces are invading their lives," says Sillas.

She credits coursework in psychology at Suffolk County Community College, taken under the Lab's tuition reimbursement program, with helping her know how to handle these inquires. As Sillas says, "Even eccentrics have their place in the world."

"I love dealing with the public because I like interacting with people," explains Sillas. "And I like my job because I deal with every aspect of the Laboratory and every day is



Roger Stoutenburg

different — different people, different topics, different challenges to find the right answers."

She began her employment at BNL in July 1974, as a secretary in the Director's Office, working for Len Emma on BNL's environmental impact statement. After becoming part of the Lab's first technology transfer effort, Sillas moved to the Public Relations Office, now called Public Affairs, in June 1977. She was promoted to a public relations assistant in 1979 and to her present title in 1983.

Sillas has been active in the BERA Choral Group since 1974, singing alto in their annual Christmas concert and in an octet of Choral Group members. In addition, she has been a member of BERA's Theater Group, performing in their past vaudeville shows.

From her years at the Lab, she has developed a network of contacts — employees who can answer technical questions from scientists and engineers outside the Lab and who can talk about BNL as part of Public Affairs' speakers bureau.

Sillas' favorite inquiries and requests are the avant garde — "being somewhat of an artist myself, I am sympathetic to the needs of creative people." So, artists, writers, composers and choreographers in search of scientific inspiration for their latest creations get Sillas' special attention.

What would she do if she got a request for "Broadway Baby?"

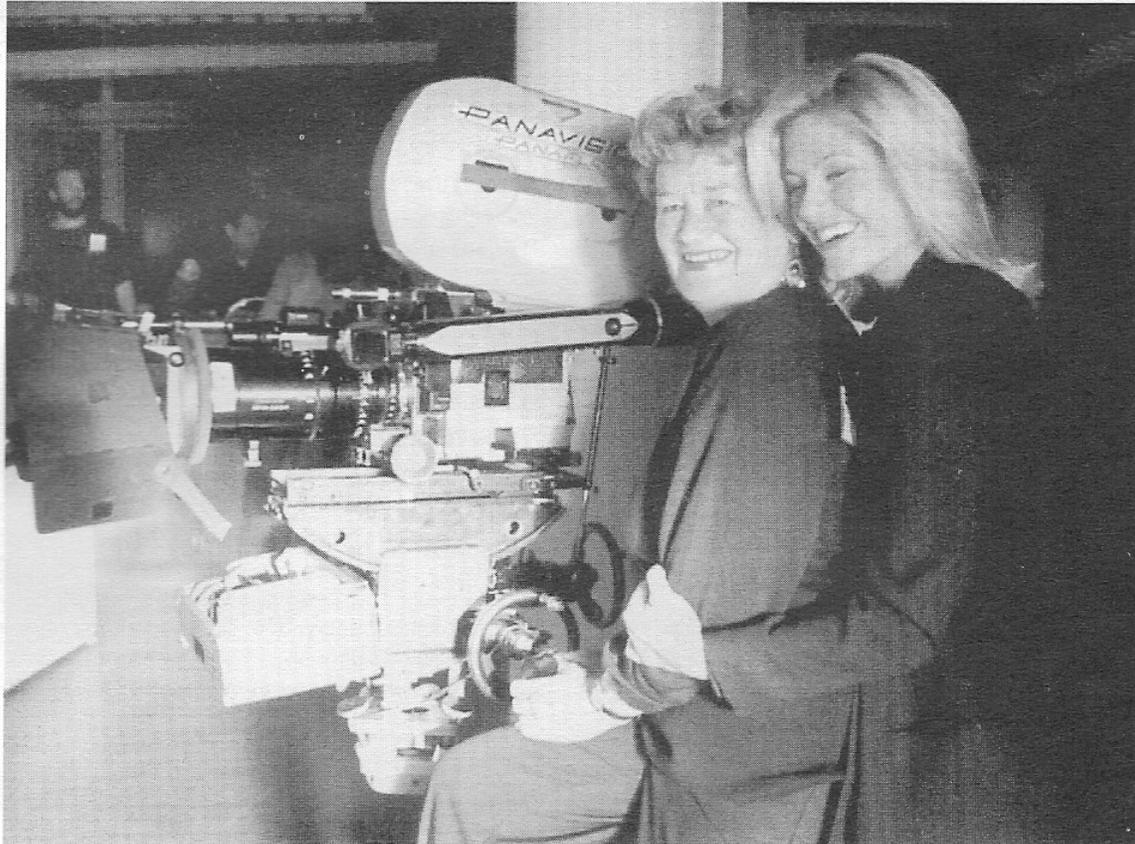
"Buddy, I'd sing it over the phone!" Sillas answers without hesitation.

For those who would like to catch her rendition of this song in person, Sillas can be seen and heard as Hattie in the May 13 through June 24 production of *Follies* at Theater Three, Port Jefferson.

— Marsha Belford

September 16, 1994:

Her Trip Was *Under Suspicion*



Janet Sillas (left), Public Affairs Office, just returned from a trip to Portland, Oregon, where she spent many hours on the set of the new CBS series *Under Suspicion* — which stars her daughter Karen Sillas (right) as police detective Rose (Phil) Phillips, working in a mostly all-male precinct. The show makes its two-hour debut tonight, September 16, at 9 p.m., on WCBS (locally channel 2), and it can be seen thereafter on Friday nights at 9 p.m. Karen Sillas also stars in the award-winning film *What Happened Was*, which will be playing at the Cinema Arts Center in Huntington, September 30 through October 6.

Let Us Entertain You!



Roger Stoutenburgh

Entertainers (from left) Karl Swyler, Skelly Frei, Fran Ligon and Janet Sillas are revving up for the show to be given by members of the Theater Group and others at the BERA Special Event Dinner-Dance and Theater on Saturday, October 21. The festivities will also include a fashion show, dinner with your choice of chicken cordon bleu or prime rib, a Viennese table and dancing to an "oldies" band or dee-jay music. A cash bar will be open all evening.

Tickets at \$27.50 per person are on sale on a first-come, first-served basis from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Thursdays and Fridays in the Cafeteria. For more information, call BERA Special Events Committee chair Rosalie Piccione, Ext. 3160, or member Betty Pergan, Ext. 2937. Remember: *The last day to buy tickets is October 14.*

Our private Bulletin files only go back so far, so the following three items were taken from the online archive at <http://www.bnl.gov/bnlweb/pubaf/bulletin/default.asp> for which items were not scanned at high quality. Nonetheless, Janet's charm and versatility shine through.

Come To The Cabaret!



Joan Humphrey

Janet Sillas will demonstrate her comic talent and singing ability when the Theater Group presents the Fourth Annual Vaudeville Show, on July 17 and 18 at the Brookhaven Center, at 8 p.m. This promises to be the best show ever - some old favorites, some new acts - and lots of fun for a summer evening. Bring the kids, Grandma, the neighbors, and enjoy a summer evening at the Center. Two nights only. Tickets are \$3; \$2 for those under 12, or over 65. For information call Liz Russell, Ext. 3940.



Janet Sillas, Public Relations Office, is the 1977 loaned executive from Brookhaven for the United Way campaign. So far, Janet has sent many letters, made countless phone calls and has logged 2000 miles in six weeks visiting prospective donors. She has been working out of United Way HQ in Melville since September 19 and will spend a total of about two-and-a-half months on the job. Janet has found this a very worthwhile experience and says, "The life of a salesman has its ups and downs. Sometimes when you get down, the quickest way to get rejuvenated is to tour one of the member agencies. You realize your 'product' is a good one and you get back on the road determined to do all you can to see that United Way agencies are supported." The loaned executive program is a program whereby the larger companies on Long Island loan an employee to United Way without cost to the program. This has cut down on administrative costs drastically and allows 85¢ out of every dollar contributed to go directly to the member agencies.

Top left: July 20, 1981

Above and at left:
November 4, 1977



Janet Sillas, Public Relations Office, swooped through the Center as the wicked witch, delighting visitors. (See United Way story for the real Janet Sillas.)