Carolyn McLaughlin has announced plans to retire as Executive Director of BronxWorks in July. Her retirement will come 34 years after taking leadership of this community organization, which until 2009 was known as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

McLaughlin began when the agency operated as just a program of a large umbrella organization. She and the one other staff member provided services out of a small storefront with a budget of $50,000. With McLaughlin at the helm, the organization was incorporated in the 1980s and has expanded tremendously to now include over 600 staff, 20 locations, and a budget of $36 million, all serving 35,000 Bronxites each year.

“Then as now,” McLaughlin said about the organization’s beginnings, “BronxWorks was the main resource for so many people who didn’t have anywhere else to go for help.” With a master’s of social work from Columbia University, McLaughlin has long been seen as an expert on the role of community organizations in providing effective social services in NYC.

“Through her tireless devotion to advancing BronxWorks’ mission, Carolyn has kept BronxWorks at the forefront of providing services to the disadvantaged. She has been a constant source of inspiration to all of us who care about BronxWorks and its mission, and we will miss her greatly,” said Board Chair David McLean. “It has been a pleasure to work with terrific colleagues, many of whom have also made their careers here, and a highly supportive board of directors. Together, we have built a fine organization,” McLaughlin said.

“Though I’ve been here for 34 years, the job is constantly changing as the needs of the Bronx change and as the agency has expanded its range of programs,” reflected McLaughlin. Over these decades, BronxWorks has been tuned in to local needs and has stepped up to lead in providing crucial services. As opportunities to support Bronxites have arisen and innovative new approaches have been required, McLaughlin has led BronxWorks to consistently play a key role in understanding these trends and developing needed programs.

Over the years, BronxWorks has been one of the first nonprofits to work in pioneering solutions to many areas of need in the Bronx, including: sponsoring newly contracted-out senior centers; providing housing for homeless families and individuals; conducting outreach to the homeless, resulting in 70% fewer street homeless people in the borough; providing services to the first wave of those diagnosed with HIV/AIDS; offering free, public immigration services; developing the city’s new, small public high schools and replicating the transfer school model for overage and under-credited youth; providing large-scale eviction prevention support; running school-based afterschool programs; and successfully piloting several of the city’s Center for Economic Opportunity anti-poverty initiatives. These are all program areas in which BronxWorks continues to work.

During her tenure, McLaughlin facilitated the acquisition of major community spaces now owned by BronxWorks, most notably the organization’s community center centrally located on the Grand Concourse and the newly built administrative office. The community center ownership came with the organization’s merger with the Girls Club of New York in the mid 1990s. This was also when the agency joined United Neighborhood Houses and began a new program area focusing on children and youth. At this point, BronxWorks had fully stepped into its current role as a settlement house, providing the community with a broad scope of programming.

BronxWorks is currently in the midst of its 40th Anniversary Year of Celebration, marked with special initiatives including 40 BronxWorks Stories. On December 10, 2012, 40 years to the day of the first office opening, McLaughlin, colleagues, and community members and city representatives celebrated BronxWorks Day, as proclaimed by Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council. The milestone year will conclude with a gala on June 10, at which McLaughlin will receive special recognition for her contributions and leadership spanning these four decades.

After her retirement in July, McLaughlin will continue to serve on the board of the Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York. The search for the new BronxWorks executive director is being conducted by Harris Rand Lusk.