

La Casa de Don Pedro

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SPRING 2005

La Casa's mission is to foster self-sufficiency, empowerment and neighborhood revitalization

Noche en el Parque A Great Success

Over 200 people joined La Casa at Nanina's in Branch Brook Park for our first annual fundraising event. Dubbed Noche en el Parque/Evening in the Park, the event took a unique approach to the fundraising dinner, offering an array of strolling carnival performers - some of whom came straight from Ringling Brothers - and an excellent Flamenco gui-

tarist serenading the crowd from his very own perch. The event concluded on a sweet note with an oversized Dessert Bar that included a chocolate fountain, gelato bar, cake assortment and more. Nobody left empty-handed as each guest received an insulated picnic backpack complete with two wine glasses, a wine opener, a cheese board and a knife.



La Casa Board President Zoraya Lee-Hamlin chats with Shirley Ward and Cecil House from PSE&G, the Event's Corporate Chair



PSE&G's Shirley Ward is escorted into Noche.

"We met our fundraising goal and, more importantly, our goal to hold an event that was fun and memorable," said Charles Grossman, Chairman of the Resource Development Committee. Ralph Izzo, President and COO of PSE&G, served as the Dinner Chairman and Rosie Saez, Regional Manager of Community Development from Wachovia, served as the event's Vce-Chair. Other sponsors included: Prudential Financial, Washington Mutual Bank, City National Bank, McCarter & English, LLP, Citigroup,

Bank of America, JPMorganChase, Hispanic Federation, the Port Authority of New York/NJ, Horizon Blue Cross/Blue Shield, PNC Bank, Valley National Bank

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A New Space to Gather

Phase I renovations at 75 Park Avenue concluded in March with the completion of a brand new conference room. The room is situated in the original balcony section of the 100 year-old former Italian Baptist Church and features intricately painted wood beams criss-crossing a 20-foot ceiling that had been covered for more than 30 years. In April, 2004, the bare space was utilized for La Casa's Raise the Roof fundraiser, which raised more than \$10,000 to help rebuild the Early Childhood Wing, after it was seriously damaged by a fire. Today this beautiful room accommodates up to 20 people around a conference table or can be organized in a classroom formation. So far, it has been used for board meetings, community gatherings, training sessions and parent meetings and is sure to see many more events.



From the Executive Director: Ray Ocasio

Dear La Casa Colleagues

Many of you have witnessed the tremendous growth La Casa de Don Pedro has experienced over the last several years. The number of constituents we serve, has jumped from some 7,500 in 1998 to over 20,000 clients today. Others might look at the increased and improved quality of the community centers and facilities that house our services and offices. Some of our facilities are considered among the best centers in the region while others are in need of some TLC. Six years ago we had a \$3.5 Million budget, 80 staff members and a simple 403 pension plan based on an employee-only contribution that served fewer than 30 staff members. Today, we are 175 employees-strong, supported by a \$10 + million budget. Our pension plan has over 120 participants with assets of more than one million dollars based on employee and La Casa's contributions to employee designated accounts. We have been successful in obtaining some of the most highly sought after grants including the Yale -Goldman Sachs Nonprofit Business Plan Competition, the Wachovia Regional Foundation's Community Plan Implementation Grant, and Bank of America's Community Excellence Award.

Many La Casa de Don Pedro staff may not realize how much praise and recognition we have received in recent years. Last month in the splendor of New York's Waldorf-Astoria Ballroom, the Hispanic Federation honored La Casa with the Outstanding Community Service Organization award; selecting us from a pool of almost one hundred member agencies throughout the Tri-State area. This month Hispanic Business Magazine once again listed La Casa among the top twenty-five Hispanic non-profits in the United States based on our 2004 revenues and expenditures. Coming in 12th place, we were pitted up against a number of national, regional or citywide institutions, not bad for a local community based organization. Our Evening in the Park, a fundraiser had over 200 guests who joined us for a relaxed yet high powered event. Much of what we do and the notoriety lavished upon us goes unnoticed by the average program partici-

pant. What they are most familiar with is you, the professional line staff person tending to their questions, concerns and needs.

La Casa has a long and positive history in this community and it has been very bright during these last half dozen years. Our past is a good indication of the future, but what does the future hold for La Casa? That is a question we are asking ourselves at this very moment as we proceed with our third three-year Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is the composite blueprint of the collective thoughts, responses and creativity of our constituents, our staff, and the Board of Directors.

Together we will visualize what the future has to offer. That future will incorporate much of what we do now with thoughts as to how we might do more and do it better. It should also include many of the activities in our 'pipeline' such as the development of our next community facility on Broadway for the Community Improvement and Community & Economic Development divisions and the renovation of 317 Roseville to house the Youth & Family Division's counseling programs currently located in 23 Broadway. Both of these initiatives will provide a more convenient and attractive environment for our clients. I am particularly excited about ending the long lines we currently face for the Home Energy Assistance Program as well as respecting the privacy of our participants at both facilities.

The Strategic Plan should go much beyond the items in our hands. Health concerns are growing and should be integrated into more of what we do in the future. Moving beyond current programs that focus on the average resident, perhaps we should be addressing the special needs populations within our community.

I invite you to consider the future and share what you believe it should hold for La Casa. Reflect on it from your perspective as a critical staff member, a professional, a community resident or a stakeholder. Seek input from you clients, family and friends and please share your insights with your division director or with me.



Whatever the future holds for La Casa, let me assure you that I am committed to maintaining La Casa as the most meaningful and relevant organization in our community. In the past I have suggested that I wanted to elevate La Casa from a "good organization" into a "great institution". Excellence and sustainability are the keys to achieving this qualitative measurement. I believe we have a great foundation to build upon, thanks to all of you who give yourselves and are committed to what we do every day.

Awards

- *La Casa named as Community Organization of the Year by Hispanic Federation. Gabriella Morris, President of the Prudential Foundation, presented the award to Raymond Ocasio at the Federation's 11th Annual Gala.*
- *La Casa named as 12th largest Hispanic nonprofit by Hispanic Business Mag, up three spots from our position last year. Raymond Ocasio was also extensively quoted in the article, which featured pictures of La Casa's programs.*
- *Raymond Ocasio was invited to join the Newark Alliance's Newark Opportunities Committee. The group is working to leverage the City's educational, business and locational assets in order to foster and expand employment opportunities for residents.*



Greetings From Our Board President

La Familia at La Casa did it again with a wonderful display of support from our friends in the community. The highly successful Noche en el Parque was a phenomenal success garnering rave reviews by not only our guests but from the many corporate sponsors and supporters who attended the event. Our strategy was to provide a networking opportunity with excitement and delicious food.

Making any fundraiser memorable is hard these days, with so many “dinners” and “cocktail receptions” following the same old format. We were able to create an atmosphere of joy and fun with a lot of “whimsy”. Beginning with the very friendly mime escorting people through Nanina’s doors, to the magicians and stilt walker and ending with a dessert bar that made all of us forget about our diets.

This event clearly demonstrated La Casa’s vast and diverse network of support from all industries and communities. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our committed and dedicated staff for making this happen and say to all our sponsors and friends, “thank you”. We truly hope you had a great time.

*Zoraya E. Lee-Hamlin, President
Board of Directors*

Noche en el Parque *(continued from page 1)*

and Bank of New York. “This is La Casa’s first Annual Event and it represents a new model of friend-raising and fund-raising,” stated Raymond Ocasio, La Casa’s Executive Director; “we are pleased to have so many vital and diverse institutions supporting the work we do in our community.” Next year’s annual event will be a concert held in a location that has not yet been determined but is sure to be memorable. We are counting on members of the community and staff to make this a great event!



Diane Johnson, Director of HUD's Newark Field Office makes conversation.



Upcoming Events

Thursday, June 2nd	Health/Job Fair 10 AM – 2 PM at Alma Flagg School, 150 3rd Ave.
Saturday, June 4th	Quality of Life March and Festival 12:00 – 5:00 PM at Barringer High School
Tuesday, July 6th	Summer Camp begins
Wednesday, June 15th	Barbecue Career Day 10 AM to 2 PM at 39 Broadway
Wednesday, August 10th	Pregones Theater Presentation 6:30 PM – Location TBA Call Pat Jelly at 973-485-0701 for more info
Friday, August 26th	Back To School Day Call Delia at 973-483-2303 for more info

Early Childhood

Two Centers Seeking National Accreditation

The Early Childhood Education Division is nearing the end of a quest for accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children that began in 2003. Accreditation is a rigorous undertaking, requiring approximately 9 months to complete. Unfortunately, the Division experienced a major setback in December 2003 when a fire damaged three classrooms at 75 Park. A strategic decision to withdraw from the process was made in order to focus on improving and renovating the damaged classrooms.

In September, 2004 La Casa opened its renovated classrooms at 75 Park as well as a new center on First Street and re-entered the accreditation process. Describing the task Martha Villegas, Director of the Division, said "The process has been incredibly rewarding," Ms. Villegas stated, "the entire staff- teachers, teacher's aides, the kitchen staff, the maintenance staff - came together to assess our strengths and weaknesses." An action plan was created and has been implemented over the last four months. "At the end of this process, the entire staff came to really understand the important roles they each play in the lives of our pre-kindergartners." The centers at 75 Park and 39 Broadway are entering the final phase of the process and will be visited by NAEYC Validators for an intensive 2-day final assessment. If they pass, both centers will be accredited for five years. The First Street Center will likely go through accreditation in 2007 as centers must be in service for at least 2 years before they are eligible for accreditation.

Mentoring Continues

Several of La Casa's early childhood education teachers are going through a rigorous mentoring process as part of the alternate route for their teaching certificates. Currently these teachers have Provisional Certificates and have two years to complete

the mentoring process. Under the regulations, teachers have until 2007 to complete the mentoring process. Teachers must participate in intensive mentoring over 20 consecutive days. Additionally, the teachers must be evaluated by a certified mentor over a period of 30 weeks. Two of La Casa's teachers are currently engaged in mentoring with Center Directors' Wanda Recio and Xiomara Guevara. Four are expected to finish mentoring by June and receive their certifications during this school year.

Week of the Young Child

April 4th was the kick-off for the Early Childhood Center's much-anticipated Week of the Young Child Celebration. Each day brought a new



All of the students participated in a parade around the neighborhood.

round of festivities for the children in all three centers including a fashion show, parade, pajama party and magic show. Parents were also treated to a breakfast and open house during the week. At the end of the week the entire staff attended a special recognition dinner hosted at Seabra's Rodizio. "The Staff Dinner provided an important opportunity for integrate the staff from each of the three centers," noted Martha Villegas. "By the end of the night, the room was filled with laughter and singing," she added.

Community and Economic Development

Weed and Seed Work Continues

Over a year ago, the Lower Broadway Community initiated a Weed and Seed planning process to address crime and public safety issues in the community. Three subcommittees are now meeting regularly: Neighborhood Restoration, Community

Policing, and Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment. The committees are dealing with issues involving planning for beautification, pushing drug dealers and prostitutes off the corners, providing resource information to the community and identifying unmet needs and issues. The work is beginning



Residents sign in at a recent meeting.

to pay off. Residents of Victoria near Mount Prospect report that drug activity has lessened in their “hot area”. Plans have begun for the use of the open spaces on Victoria/Mount Prospect and Crane/MLK. Additionally, more than 1000 signatures have been collected calling for the closing of MLK Blvd between Crane Street and 7th Avenue to improve the design and use of the new Franklin/Jones school campus.

A Steering Committee meets monthly to coordinate the efforts of the sub-committees. In April the first formal elections were held for officers and members at large of the Executive Committee. This group will work closely with the community builders to develop an application to the US Department of Justice for a Weed and Seed designation. All La

Casa divisions who serve clients from the Lower Broadway area are encouraged to inform them of these opportunities for improving this area with other neighbors and parents.

11th Annual Quality of Life March and Festival: Saturday June 4, 2005

The goal of the Quality of Life March and Festival is to celebrate our community as a better place live, attend school, and work. The route of this year’s march underscores the Weed and Seed efforts taking place in the Lower Broadway community. The 2005 march will begin on Parker Street in front of Barringer High School; proceed on Park Avenue, past La Casa’s Administrative offices; turn down Mount Prospect Avenue past our most recent housing; through the neighborhood and back to the Barringer High School parking lot via Clifton Avenue.

The festival will take place in Barringer’s parking lot from 1-5 pm. The event will include a range of entertainment, family games, rides, a community information table as well as food and drinks for all who come. Every year we have a great deal of participation from staff in all five of La Casa’s divisions and we encourage you to join us this year!



Youth and Family

The Family Violence Prevention Program

The Family Violence Prevention Program held a Flea Market fundraiser on Saturday April 16, 2005. Students from the Youth Counseling Services also sold items as did staff from several La Casa divisions. The day included special appearances from Dora the Explorer, Elmo and Spongebob Square Pants. The Flea Market was such a success that there are plans to hold another flea market in the near future. Once again thank you to all who came out and supported the event.

A Day for the Children

For the third year in a row, La Casa partnered with the Newark Girl Scouts to celebrate Dia de Los Niños, sponsored by the National Latino Children’s Institute. On Saturday, April 30th celebrations were held throughout the country. Newark’s celebration

took place at McKinley Elementary School. Despite the rainy weather, almost 400 children and adults turned out for a day of arts and crafts, face painting, carnival games, popcorn and cotton candy, raffles and much more. “Holding the event at McKinley Elementary this year instead of Rafael Hernández enabled us to serve families from the Colonnades who do not always participate in our events” stated Hazel D’Lugos, Afterschool Program Supervisor. “The day was a complete success!” she added enthusiastically.

Newark Youth Leadership Program Updates -

On April 1st NYLP students visited the Museum of the City of New York in Manhattan. The trip focused on a wing named “El Barrio: Puerto Rican New York,” which explores the El Barrio neighborhood, defining it as an incubator of the New York

(continued on next page)



NYLP students learning about the Puerto Rican Arts Movement

Puerto Rican identity and as an emotional keystone for more than 800,000 New Yorkers of Puerto Rican heritage. The exhibit features 44 photographs by Hiram S. Maristany, including images of La Marqueta, El Barrio Integral, the Young Lords Party, and images from the Puerto Rican arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Three NYLP seniors are graduating this year: Yanira Almagro is graduating from Belleville High School and is patiently awaiting an acceptance letter from Rutgers University - Newark; Jessica Gómez is graduating from St. Vincent's Academy and has been accepted to Caldwell College and is waiting to hear from Montclair State University; and Nairobi Richiez is graduating from University High School and has been accepted to New Jersey City and Fairleigh Dickinson Universities and on the waiting list for Ramapo College.

Personal Development Division

Women's History Month Celebration

The Personal Development Division hosted a luncheon in honor of Women's History Month on March 30. The keynote speaker was Grizel Ubarry, a management consultant, who counts La Casa de Don Pedro, Inc. among her clients. Educational scholarships of one thousand dollars each were awarded to two graduates of the Abriendos Caminos Program. One student is currently earning her Child Development Associate certificate at North Jersey Community Coordinated Child Care Agency. The other student is enrolling in summer classes at Essex County College where she is working on her associates in Biology, Pre-Medicine.

Hispanic Women's Resource Center Recognized

The Hispanic Women's Resource Center received the 2005 Essex County Althea Gibson Spirit Award for Women Making a Difference. The award was given on behalf of Essex County Executive-Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. and the Essex County Advisory Board on the Status of Women.

This award celebrates women's organizations in the county that exhibit outstanding dedication to improving the lives of women by encouraging friendship, networking and support for women in all stages of life. It was presented in honor of La Casa's work with Essex County women as part of Women's History Month.

Community Improvement

On May 1st, the Community Improvement Division wrapped up another successful year of Home Energy Assistance. Participation this year was unusually high because the State of New Jersey sought to educate its citizens on changes to the Universal Service Fund by sending out over 160,000 letters to residents. The Division is currently taking applications for the Universal Service Fund only. Essex County residents must meet income guidelines.

May means that the Community Improvement

Division ramps up its Division on Aging program to help protect Essex County senior citizens from the heat. Air conditioners are delivered to Essex County seniors who are referred by county Division on Aging.

Improvements to the exterior of 317 Roseville are due to begin soon. The driveway is scheduled to be repaved and the accessibility ramp will be repaired. Lowes Home Improvement is donating plants to help beautify the landscape.



Board Spotlight, Gloria Ramos

When she moved to Newark, New Jersey in 1965 and started a family, La Casa Board member Gloria Ramos sought to create a stable, happy home. Several years later, she enrolled her children in the Newark Preschool Council's Head Start program. There she met Rebecca

Doggett-Andrade who was the program's Executive Director. A proactive parent who was concerned about her children's educational development, Gloria got involved with the Newark Preschool Council and was elected to the board of Directors in 1969. At that time, Head Start was a relatively new program and Gloria became active with its implementation at both the local and national levels, serving on the National Head Start Policy Advisory Committee in Washington, D.C.

"My community involvement with Head Start pushed me to pursue my own education," Ramos stated. When her children started school fulltime, Gloria also became a fulltime student at Rutgers University in Newark, graduating with High Honors in 1977. She went on to complete her Masters in Public Administration at New York University. It was during this time that Gloria became involved with La Casa de Don Pedro as NYU required her to complete an internship. "I had known Ramon Rivera (La Casa's founding Executive Director) through my work with the Pre-School Council, we often vied for the same funding." She approached Rivera and secured an internship writing proposals to create the Lower Broadway Community Project.

After graduating from NYU, Gloria accepted a full time position directing the program she helped to initiate. Working with a staff of six people, Gloria dedicated herself to empowering members of the Lower Broadway community. "I never drank so much coffee in my life!" Gloria laughed. "It was how we got to build trust in the community- by sitting in people's living rooms and learning about the issues, both big and small, that they faced". During Gloria's tenure, the area saw some improvements including lot clean-ups, closing down of problem bars and tenant organizing. Unfortunately health concerns forced Gloria to leave La Casa. She still maintains that "working for La Casa was the most satisfying period of my life".

Gloria remained committed to the public sector in her worklife, coming full circle from Preschool to Higher Education, first working for Seton Hall University and then moving on to become the Assistant to the Dean of Schools of Health Professions at Hunter College of CUNY. She maintained close ties to La Casa and has served on the Board of Directors for over 20 years. Gloria is proud of the progress that La Casa has made and notes that the organization works to manage its growth and maintain its strong grassroots presence.

Nothing has made as great an impact on Gloria's life as her community service. "The way to empower oneself is to get involved in the community. The work enabled me to see and realize the many possibilities available to me and to my children." There is no greater endorsement of the organization's impact.

Immunization Week Events

More than fifty children and adults were on-hand for La Casa de Don Pedro's "Up to Date Party" which concluded the City of Newark's Annual celebration of National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW) and Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA). Members of the community braved a rainy Saturday with their children in tow to participate in a series of activities including free immunizations, healthcare education, clowns, balloons, a raffle, food and more.

A number of La Casa's key partners contributed to the success of the day. The City of Newark's Department of Health offered preventive health information; WIC signed up eligible families; Leaddy Eddie from Gateway Maternal Health distributed vital information on childhood lead poisoning; Americhoice signed eligible attendees up for NJ KidCare; UMDNJ

offered the adults blood pressure screenings; La Casa's FACES program offered information on parent education and a seminar on the proper use of car seats was presented. Several local companies including Babies R Us and McDonalds donated goodies for the raffle. "We were able to assess the immunization records of more than 25 children, delivering shots to ten of them," said Dorothy Williams, Program Manager, Disease Control and Prevention for the City of Newark's Health and Human Services Department. "Newark parents showed their commitment to keeping their children healthy by attending the event despite the inclement weather and we thank all of the people who came out to support our efforts." The event was covered by New Jersey 12 News.

NIIW is a national effort to educate parents, caregivers, providers, and com-



A mother reviews her son's immunization record with a Project Vaccinate worker.

munities on the importance of timely infant immunization. This year's event took place from April 24-30 in over 500 communities throughout the United States to highlight the need for routine vaccinations and to promote access to health services for infants and children.

By the way....

NEW STAFF

Youth and Family Services

Daisy Quinroz is the new Administrative Assistant

Carlos Rodriguez is the Community Mentor Counselor

Katilia Velez is the Domestic Violence Counselor

Julia Borrás is the Counseling Supervisor

Personal Development Division

Olga Eskow

Community Improvement

Brenda Rivera

Early Childhood Education

Filida Calle and Vanessa Martínez

Welcome to all new staff!

CONGRATULATIONS

• Enid Méndez was promoted to the position of Manager for Human Resources/Asset and Risk Management

• Congratulations to three new mothers working in the Early Childhood Education Division: Ureliza Maldonado give birth to a girl; Diana Gamarra also had a girl; and Diana Moreno had a boy. Babies and mothers are all happy and healthy.

GRADUATIONS

• Karina Vieras (Youth and Family) graduated in the winter of 2004 from Montclair State University with a BA in Psychology

• Diana Martínez (Youth and Family) is graduating from Rutgers University with a Bachelors of Social Work and has been accepted to the Masters Program for Social Work at New York University

- Nelson A. Rodriguez (Youth and Family) is graduating from Montclair State University with a BA in Psychology
- Marlene Cruz is graduating from Kean University with a BA in Elementary Education
- Family Workers Iraidá Sánchez and Lillie Moore received their Family Development Credentials after completing a series of trainings at Rutgers University.

LA CASA ON THE WEB!

- Remember to check us out at www.lacasanwk.org

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Raymond Ocasio
Executive Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Zoraya Lee-Hamlin	<i>President, Executive Committee, Resource Development Committee</i>
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Digna Dubon	<i>Special Events Committee</i>
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