

NEWS

La Casa de Don Pedro

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

From the Executive Director

Linkages are the Key to Successful Organizing

One of the most important elements in my coming to La Casa was the quality of the organization's linkage to the community. As a Peace Corps Volunteer and community organizer, I was a outsider in a foreign land. The experience taught me that organizers often are not products of the community and may not ever live there, however you *can* be linked. As La Casa grows, the issue of being linked to the community is supremely important.

Some four years ago La Casa embraced the philosophy that we are a community-based organization linked to all of the communities we serve. We committed ourselves to work with the community in every aspect of our work. We instructed all outreach and other staff on the following responsibilities:

- 1) Telling the community what we do at La Casa;
- 2) Listening carefully to the community to bring back information to guide our efforts; and

- 3) Building community infrastructure from block associations and homeowners groups, to PTO participants to youth leadership, from tenant leaders to soccer teams, to assist people to be better engaged in collective action.

We have worked diligently towards this goal with both positive and negative results. Still, organizing is not a "perfect science" and I believe that we must continue to refine our approach.

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La Casa Takes Home a Prize at the National Business Plan Competition!

The Yale School of Management-The Goldman Sachs Foundation Partnership on Nonprofit Ventures National Business Plan Competition attracted 551 entries from every state in the country. On May 14, 2003, La Casa was named as one of the four runners-up, receiving \$25,000 for La Olla de La Casa de Don Pedro, its food preparation business.

The organizations competing were extremely accomplished. Five of this year's finalists were entrants from last year's competition and many organizations were starting their 3rd, 4th or 5th business. The projects of some competitors have been profiled by 60 Minutes, Newsweek, Time and other national media. One of the grand prize winners is opening dollar stores inside their 9 successful thrift stores while a second winner is running a

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For those people who we serve, in our early childhood classrooms, after school programs, from the GED to the ESL classes, whether it's a new boiler or paying the PSE&G bill, from the saver or borrower, to the new homeowner, the activist parent or merchant...there is a tremendous level of connection and gratitude for what we do. But too often that connection ends after the service is rendered.

What if each and every one of us at La Casa encouraged our program participants, volunteers, supporters, friends and family to take some additional action? What if each of us passed along a message of power to one other person each and every day about voting, Newark's property tax re-valuation, drugs and gang violence, the drop-out rate, why our children can't read, why we can't buy a decent pair of shoes in our own neighborhood, and so on? The power of these messages builds very quickly.

I challenge each of La Casa's employees to talk to a resident about something important to the community every single day. Avoiding negativity, try to find out what that person knows and what they think! Follow-up by re-engaging that person and provide them with a little more knowledge and then challenge with what "we," they and us can do.

Some people would prefer that we not take this action. They discourage our tapping into the power of this natural linkage - a connection we have developed over the last 32 years in this community. Those people survive on the "status quo", but La Casa thrives on change!

We need to do better when it comes to the larger community issues. We must listen to our families about the quality of the work we do; we need to

respect the perspective of our constituency; and yes, we need to internalize it within our programs, work plans and the organization's strategic plan. Within our board of directors we need to foster and sharpen greater community participation.

If we engage, activate and motivate our constituencies, I promise you a heightened sense of participation in the life of the community and an agency that is more in-tune, responsive and truly linked to the community it was created to serve.



Greetings From Our Board President

La Casa Welcomes Summer

Greetings to all and great news once again from La Familia at La Casa. Our success at the 2004 Yale/Goldman Sachs National Business Plan Competition is yet another example of the strength we have as a team. As one of 4 runners up, La Casa's business plan for La Olla Catering beat out almost 550 other nonprofit organizations around the country. The fact that our initial plan was created using in-house resources including staff, members of the Board and volunteers is a tribute to the depth of our expertise.

In addition to the national exposure received recently, La Casa continues to gain recognition and notoriety from the regional and local funders. Regionally, the Wachovia Regional Foundation awarded La Casa a \$750,000, three-year grant to implement aspects of the Lower Broadway Community Plan. As for local support, I wish to extend a heartfelt thank you to the parents and staff members from the Early Childhood Education Division for contributing more than \$4600, almost half of the \$10,077 we collected! Board members and other La Casa staff who contributed are also appreciated.

La Casa is poised to enter our summer season with an action-packed calendar. Summer officially kicked off with our 10th Anniversary Quality of Life Festival held on the site of the new Franklin/Jones campus. The selection of that site for this year's festival is particularly meaningful to La Casa as we have worked closely with the community, school system and city to protect that site from other development. Architectural plans are already underway for the new school!

The Youth and Family Division will open their doors to over 100 children for the Summer Enrichment Program in July.

Thank you for continuing to support La Casa de Don Pedro and I wish all of you a fun summer!

Zoraya E. Lee-Hamlin,
President
Board of Directors

Board Member Profile

Louis Prezeau Strives to “Give Back”

Louis Prezeau has served on La Casa’s Board of Directors since 1996, and is the chairman of the Finance Committee. He recently discussed his commitment to serving people and his vision for La Casa.

Mr. Prezeau has spent the majority of his career working in the banking field in the under-served communities of Harlem and Newark. As a CPA (he was the first Haitian-born CPA in New York State), Mr. Prezeau set out to do per-diem work for several agencies in New York City when he was recruited by Freedom National Bank of Harlem, a minority-owned bank. “Freedom gave me an opportunity to serve the needs of people who were qualified, but could not get credit” said Mr. Prezeau. He moved to Newark’s City National Bank (CNB) in 1989 where he is the President and CEO because it offered a similar opportunity. “I like being somewhere where I can make things happen” which is exactly the role he plays at CNB for fledgling entrepreneurs and growing businesses alike.

The Bank strives to serve the needs of the underserved. This mission motivates Louis Prezeau to sit on the boards of several local institutions including La Casa and St. James A.M.E. Church. “We have to give back to the community and many of these nonprofits have been the best kind of partner to enable City National to fulfill its mission...a stronger community makes this institution prosper.” He was attracted to La Casa because of the organization’s mission to serve the residents of its immediate community; Hispanic and non-Hispanic and was also impressed by the staff. “The staff like being (at La Casa), they are committed to the cause and have an excellent record of performing.”

Mr. Prezeau was recruited to serve on La Casa’s board because of his fiscal management skills and his leadership has paid off. He believes that La Casa has “the potential to become the most successful organization in New Jersey, not just for Hispanics.” His prediction is based on the vision of the Executive Director and staff as well as the financial discipline that has given La Casa the strength it needs to grow.

Louis Prezeau traces his commitment to service back to his Godfather in Haiti, “the way he treated his staff...he was so hardworking and honest”. He is also inspired by Raymond Chambers, a wall street entrepreneur who was born and raised in Newark and has given back millions to the city, “he returned to the community and gave as much as possible to make it better”. La Casa is fortunate to have Louis Prezeau’s commitment to excellence!



Louis Prezeau

Grants, Awards and Recognition

Wachovia Regional Foundation – \$750,000 to implement Lower Broadway Plan

Yale/Goldman Sachs National Business Plan Competition – \$25,000 in addition to consulting services for La Olla food preparation

Anonymous Contribution – \$30,000 in recognition of Early Childhood Education and Community Economic Development

Independence Community Bank – \$30,000 to support residential development.

Prudential Foundation – \$15,000 to support the Summer Youth Leadership Program

MCJ Foundation – \$5,000 to support the Newark Youth Leadership Program

HISPANIC BUSINESS Magazine ranked La Casa 15 among the top 25 Hispanic non-profit organizations in 2004.

Special Thanks to **ATA Airlines** for donating 2 tickets to La Casa to be used as a fundraising give-away!

Early Childhood



An enthusiastic crowd of parents, staff and friends of La Casa gathered on Thursday, April 29th for the “Raising the Roof” fundraiser supporting the extensive renovations currently underway at La Casa’s Early Childhood center at 75 Park Avenue. “This is another example of our ability to triumph over tragedy!” exclaimed Zoraya Lee-Hamlin, President of La Casa’s Board of Directors in her remarks that night.

The fundraiser, attended by over 70 guests comprised of staff, parents of the Early Childhood division, board members, and friends of La Casa raised over \$10,000. Almost half of those funds were generated by the parents and staff associated with Early Childhood. “We knew we had local support, this is just further proof that we need to tap into the community more often,” said Raymond Ocasio, Executive Director. These funds will help pay for damage caused by a fire that struck La Casa in December, 2003. Thank you to all who contributed and volunteered!



Volunteers and attendees pose in front of the children’s artwork.

Rally in Trenton

When it comes to standing up to make a point, you can count on La Casa to be on the steps of the Trenton state house. La Casa accompanied over 25 parents and children to demonstrate against the Governor’s proposed co-payment for Early Childhood Education. Over 300 people from Abbott Districts around the state attended.



La Casa rallies the troops in Trenton.

ECD Students “Lost in Space”

May was Outer Space Month in the 75 Park ECD Center. Students studied the galaxies and learned about weightlessness as seen here.



Community and Economic Development

Quality of Life Festival

The 10th Annual Quality of Life March & Festival was held in slightly soggy weather Saturday, June 5th. The day began with a march from Rafael Hernandez Elementary School to the site of the soon-to-be-built Franklin Jones Campus on 7th Avenue and MLK Blvd. The march included students and parents from First Avenue Elementary, Benjamin Franklin, Gladys Hillman Jones, Rafael Hernandez Luis Munoz Marin and other schools.

After the 1-hour march, revelers gathered in the Lower Broadway site to munch on hotdogs, meet their neighbors, visit the petting zoo, play games and listen to the smooth sounds of several bands. Over 500 people attended the festival. Next year's festival will have to be held in a different location because construction on the **new school** should start in within the next year. "The excitement this year emphasizes the growing activity and investment La Casa has made in the Lower Broadway Area. It is part of a larger community planning strategy" said Patricia Jelly, the festival's coordinator.



Hector Corchado served as the Grand Marshall. He is pictured with Crystal Campa, Aimee Triminio and Carmen Ruiz.



The petting zoo is always popular

Dignitaries Visit La Casa to Launch "Partnering for Traffic Safety" Initiative

A press conference announcing the kick-off for Child Safety Seats was held, May 25, 2004 at 317 Roseville Avenue. Many parents attended with their children to learn more about the importance of securing children in proper car seats. Under a new NJ law, children must be secured in car seats until the age of 8. Guests included: Roberto Rodriguez, Director of New Jersey's Department of Highway and Traffic Safety, Angie Armand-Leon, Director of the NJ Center for Hispanic Policy Research and Catherine Cuomo-Cecere, Director of Newark's Department of Health and Human Services. Under this new program, the Community Health Unit will be offering workshops and car seat giveaways through the rest of the year. For more information, contact Sheria Brown.



Pictured from left to right: Mr. Buckle-Up; Roberto Rodriguez; Sheria Brown, Project Coordinator; Angie Armand-Leon; Brian Morris, Deputy Chief, NPD; Julio Colon, Director of Community & Economic Development; Sally Lee, Newark Emergency Services for Families; and Catherine Cuomo-Cecere.

Community Improvement

The NJ Citizen Action honored Norma Sessa for her commitment to affordability utility services and participation in NJCA's Energy Committee and Oil Group on May 12, 2004 at the Hilton Newark Airport.

Facts: As of May 31, 2004, the Home Energy Assistance Program processed 14,871 applications for assistance. Over 23,000 individuals and families applied for the program this season.

Personal Development

Inspirational Women's Day Luncheon

The Annual Women's Day luncheon was held on March 23, 2004 at Seabra's Restaurant. Ileana Montes, Director for the Division on Women delivered an inspirational message. Montes has been an active proponent of women rights since graduating from Seton Hall University School of Law. The Ivette Del Rio Scholarship dollars awarded to Adriana Arias, Ena Calva, Mishell Puente, Patricia Ruilova, Patricia Lopez and Isabel Quinteros will enable these women to pursue educational or career training courses in their respective fields of interest. The Scholarship Fund has been awarding scholarships since 2002.

The following women are graduating on June 25, 2004:

Esperanza Beltran, Rosa Carmen, Yolanda Gamonal, Rosa Castro, Cinthia Idrovo, Rosa Chagray, Luz Medina, Maria Colon, Jhoselin Curet, Amparo Diaz, Maria Paredes, Norma Paredes, Marisol Penaloza, Luisa Perez, Sandra Prince, Ana Rendon, Elvira Rodriguez, Sandra Torres, Maria Trinidad, Zoila Ziguencia, Iniderkis Aybar, Susana Cabos, Ana Diaz, Karla Diaz, Rosa Espinoza, Ana Ferreras, Carmen Flores, Amparo Guzman, Araceli Lazo, Elizabeth Lanfranco, Camila Moran, Rosa Moreno, Doris Ortega, Yraelista Oviedo, Ivelisse Reynoso, Cecilia Vargas, Dolores Villacis and Lucia Villacis. Congratulations!



Youth and Family Services

Youth Take Center Stage

Thursday, May 27th was a very special day for eight of La Casa's afterschool youth. That night each student took his or her turn at the microphone in the Victoria Theater of the NJPAC to recite original works as part of the United Way-NJPAC Young Writers Residency. Mr. Arthur Wilson a teaching artist who has made a long career out of playwriting, poetry writing and acting spent 12 weeks teaching the youth to articulate their thoughts and experiences into written works. "This experience was truly unique for all, I am very proud of the students who participated and await the opportunity to do this again," said Seouvan Rodriguez Youth and Family Counselor.

Newark Bears Visit the Kids!

To many Pedro “Pete” Sierra and Tommy Parks are not names linked to the major leagues. But when they stopped by 23 Broadway to meet the kids and autograph baseball cards, it was a star moment. Sierra is the new bench coach with Newark Bears. A former Negro League and Major League player, Sierra recalls always wanting to play baseball as a child growing up in Havana, Cuba. When he was provided with the opportunity to play in the United States he vowed that he would inspire other kids by sharing his story whenever the opportunity was presented to him.

One of the Bears’ newest players, Tommie Parks, talked to the afterschool students about his childhood in Mississippi and the importance of not giving up. After his remarks, Parks noted, “I am so glad to be a part of something like this, because these kids remind me of myself when I was their age.”

Valiant Victims of Violence

Over 60 people came out to support the “Victims Recognition Ceremony” hosted by the Domestic Violence Program on April 14. Deputy Mayor Jeannette Ramos presented certificates to 25 women for breaking the chain of violence. The women wore white veils during the ceremony to pay special tribute to Gladys Ricat who was slain on her wedding day by her former boyfriend. Under La Casa’s Domestic Violence program, these women have received individual, group and family counseling. Some have also gotten assistance locating permanent housing, after school services, childcare services and employment.

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Stacey Smith, Victim Witness Advocacy Program Coordinator offered a few words of encouragement to the audience

Salsa, Sabor Y Salud News

La Casa’s newest program, *Salsa, Sabor y Salud* has enrolled 14 families to date. Funded by the Kraft Foundation, the goal of the Salsa, Sabor y Salud program is to encourage healthy eating and activity habits through group activities, classes and counseling.

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Community Development Division Completes Lower Broadway Plan

La Casa recently finalized it’s second community plan for the Lower Broadway area. This plan revisits a previous plan created 5 years ago, taking stock of the area’s current status and outlining guidelines for all future aspects of physical development, redevelopment and preservation activities in Lower Broadway. Community planning changes the focus of community development by elevating the community to the position of partner rather than as a passive audience in the community revitalization process. This plan provides a structure for the stakeholders to redefine their vision for the neighborhood. The community’s identity and character; land use; streets and traffic circulation; building condition; streetscape and urban design are assessed and recommendations are made accordingly. There are also social and programmatic elements that address quality of life issues such as health, education, recreation, commercial activities and safety issues like crime and vandalism. The plan will be the guiding document for La Casa’s Community and Economic Development Division. The Wachovia Regional Foundation is generously supporting the implementation and we will be seeking funds from other sources as well.

venture capital investment business. Another organization has opened a full-service mortgage brokerage company while a different group has the 3rd largest independent jazz music label in the country- neither group took home a prize last night.

La Olla will prepare and sell nutritious meals to pre-kindergarten programs, after school centers and other organizations that supply free and reduced cost meals in Newark. The recognition that La Casa received demonstrates our rich mix of private and public partners as well as the stellar team of professionals working and volunteering for the organization.

By the way....

BLOOD DRIVE

- The Hispanic Women's Resource Center and New Jersey Blood Services will hold a Blood Drive on June 30, 2004, 1pm-6:30pm.

For further information, contact Maria Lopez 973-481-4713, ext: 205.

CONGRATULATIONS

- Sheria Brown, Program Coordinator, Project Vaccinate, will marry Pastor Donnie Sobers on June 19, 2004 at Faith Gospel Tabernacle in Irvington.
- To La Casa's Early Childhood Education 2004 Class, 75 youngsters are moving on to Kindergarten next year!

NEW STAFF

Early Childhood Education

- Luis Aquino, Driver, Carmen Cosme, Assistant Cook

Personal Development

- Natasha Maldonado, Instructor, Community Advocates

La Casa de Don Pedro

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Raymond Ocasio
Executive Director

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