

# NEWS

## La Casa de Don Pedro

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

FALL 2004

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

## From the Executive Director

Dear La Casa Colleagues:

The summer season is coming to a close, fall is knocking at the door, and children are returning to school, it all presents us with a new beginning.

La Casa de Don Pedro's latest facility, the First Street Early Childhood Center represents a new chapter for us. And what a center it is; with eight classrooms, a multi-purpose room and La Olla - our very own food preparation enterprise – kitchen, in an expanded building that used to house a danceclub. We also are unveiling our renovation of the Park Avenue-Mt Prospect Early Childhood Center, with its improved entry and three new classrooms and there is more to come.

All of this development symbolizes the improved and broader quality of services envisioned as part of the La

Casa de Don Pedro's strategy.

During the past five years we have witnessed extensive growth in all of our program areas- more people are linked to La Casa de Don Pedro than ever before. As our menu of goods and services grows, more people will become connected to us.

In touching more people, each and every La Casa de Don Pedro staff member is our representative to our constituencies...from the receptionist, counselors, instructors, outreach workers, clerical, accounting, custodial personnel, as much as the management team or the Board of Directors. Each of us is an ambassador to each person who inquires, desires, requests, or needs our services.

That first experience and each subsequent contact must be welcoming, courteous, and satisfying, even when

we can not provide the attention being sought by our constituencies. This is even more important as we become a more diverse community and as we attract personnel from across the metropolitan area. We, La Casa de Don Pedro and all of its personnel must demonstrate "*respecto entendiimiento y union*" ["with respect, understanding and unity"] with those we serve.

At the same time we must strive to provide the very best service. We achieve this by attracting and retaining the very best talent out there and by ensuring that each and every one of you has the appropriate tools, environment and recognition to excel in your jobs. A wonderful example is being demonstrated by the instructional

*Continued on next page*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Greetings from</i>	
<i>Board President . . . . .</i>	2
<i>La Casa Saves Lives . . . . .</i>	2
<i>Back To School Resources</i>	3
<i>Grants and Awards . . . . .</i>	3
<i>Division Updates . . . . .</i>	4-6
<i>Board Update</i>	
<i>Richard Roper . . . . .</i>	7
<i>Vanessa Jest</i>	
<i>Summer Intern . . . . .</i>	7
<i>By the Way. . . . .</i>	8

## Staff Picnic is HOT

La Casa held its first annual staff picnic on the bucolic campus of Ramapo College in Northern New Jersey. Over 150 staff and extended family members spent a sunny afternoon munching on hamburgers, hotdogs, corn-on-the-cob and homemade salads. El Payaso Charles the clown entertained the children with a magic show, face painting and balloon hats. DJ Kaz kept the day hopping as he emceed round after round of games. The spoon-and-egg race proved most challenging for the adult-child teams as eggs the eggs rolled off the spoon and into the grass. The balloon toss game matched adults and children again but quickly deteriorated into a water balloon fight that left few people dry. Throughout the day the crowd munched on all-you-can-eat ice cream treats from an ice cream cart and watched the competition heat up as players vied for gift certificates to KB Toys, Loews Movie Theaters and more. The day concluded with a rousing, staff-only game of tug-of-war refereed by La Casa's very own Executive Director, Ray Ocasio.





## Greetings From Our Board President

This month we celebrate the opening of our new early childhood development center - a significant accomplishment among the daily challenges and aggressive timelines we set for ourselves. We all understand how important it is to educate our children with the proper teaching tools and resources. At La Casa, we strive to create opportunities and experiences for our children to meet their academic and nutritional needs, but this year we have added one major component.

*Introducing La Olla, La Casa's newest social enterprise.*

This venture's primary social purpose is to provide children with nutritious and appealing hot meals - with cultural sensitivity. Not only will we expand our meal preparation services, we will employ members of our community to prepare these meals. As *La Olla* grows, and we most assuredly expect it to, it will contribute to the healthy development of our future leaders while creating employment opportunities for our community and ensuring financial sustainability for La Casa.

La Casa's new early childhood development center houses a state-of-the-art food preparation facility, enabling us to centralize and improve our meal preparation into one location for delivery to the diverse locations. By upgrading our food preparation facility and our staffing capacity, La Casa expects to prepare enough meals for our own preschoolers and have the capacity to deliver meals for other child development centers. Most importantly, our meal selections will include diverse ethnic choices.

La Casa has been down the road of *social ventures and social enterprises*. La Casa's subsidiary LC HomeBuilders is a for profit construction company. In less than three years the company has achieved sales of better than \$2 million and growing. *La Olla's* social mission and La Casa's excellent reputation will assure customers that our fine foods, excellent service and timely delivery is also providing quality training and employment opportunities to residents of our community.

I am sure La Familia at La Casa will be proud of the fine foods and quality service *La Olla* will provide our community.

Zoraya E. Lee-Hamlin, President  
Board of Directors

*Continued from previous page*

staff of the early childhood centers. They are required to be college-educated and licensed to be instructors. The overwhelming number of our former "certified instructors" made continuous efforts and sacrifices to earn their degrees and licenses. Their efforts taken with the improved remunerations and the physical environment of our centers make this an excellent model. As much as I am proud of their efforts and our own, I am also pleased by their accomplishments and the improved quality of services we provide.

As we move forward, I hope you will join me in ensuring every interaction is a successful engagement with the communities who come to this place - La Casa de Don Pedro - for service.

## Press Conference

La Casa was recently awarded a \$750,000 3-year grant from the Wachovia Regional Foundation to implement portions of the Lower Broadway Community Plan. The check was recently awarded at a press conference held jointly by La Casa and Wachovia. "This comprehensive revitalization effort is exciting because it grew directly from neighborhood needs," said Denise McGregor Armbrister, Wachovia Regional Foundation Executive Director. "La Casa has shown exceptional leadership in working with residents to build the future of their neighborhood and in successfully attracting the resources necessary to carry out the plan." John Petillo, President of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey presented the check in his capacity as a Wachovia Regional Foundation board member.

## La Casa Saves Lives

The third annual blood drive was held at La Casa's Personal Development Division on June 30, 2004. Thirty-one people registered and twenty-one people donated blood. According to NJ Blood Services, one donation can save three lives, therefore La Casa's staff and stakeholders helped to  save 63 lives that day.

# Back to School: Resources for the Community

**ESL CLASSES** ESL Civics is currently registering for their Morning, Evening and Saturday classes. For more information, please contact Darlery Franco or Maria Lopez 973-481-4713.



## **"NEWARK, TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH"**

Health screenings such as HIV testing; Blood Pressure; Vision Screening; Pregnancy Testing; and more will take place on Wednesday, September 22, 2004 from 9:00-1:00 at 23 Broadway, The Youth and Family Division.



## **CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE (CDA)**

Training Youth and Family Division, in collaboration with Programs for Parents, is sponsoring a Child Development Training Program. Candidates must have a GED, a minimum of 2 years experience and are required to take a literacy placement test in order to qualify for this training. People already employed by pre-kindergarten centers may be eligible for a scholarship. Classes begin on September 25, 2004, ending sometime in June and will be

held at 23 Broadway. Call Jackie Gallo for eligibility requirements at 973-483-2703.



**"COMENZANDO BIEN"** F.A.C.E.S. will be holding Prenatal Education Classes at 23 Broadway Tuesdays mornings from 10 AM- 12 PM September 7-28.



**PARENTING SKILLS CLASSES** The Youth and Family Division will be offering parenting skills classes as part of the Parents and Children's Club. Classes will be held Wednesday mornings from 9:00-11:00 AM beginning September 15th at Broadway Elementary.



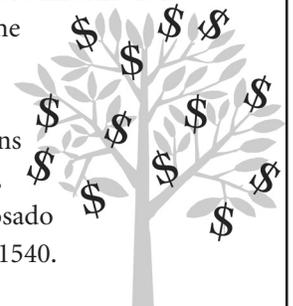
**"WOMEN AND MONEY: SECURING YOUR FINANCIAL FUTURE"** Seminar Saturday, October 16th 10:30-4:00 at the City University of NY Graduate Center, 365 Firth Avenue. You must pre-register by emailing [ggallovich@act-einc.com](mailto:ggallovich@act-einc.com) sponsored by 100 Hispanic Women.

## *Grants & Awards*

- \$15,000 from the Prudential Foundation to run the Youth Leadership Academy summer internship program.
- \$49,000 From the Mayors Office of Employment and Training (MOET) to run the STEP Forward and STEP Out summer youth programs.
- \$8,000 from the MCJ Foundation to support the summer Newark Youth Leadership Program initiative.
- \$39,970 from the New Jersey Attorney General's Stop Violence Against Women's Act fund to add a part-time domestic violence counselor to the staff.
- \$123,333 From the Center for Hispanic Policy and Research Development to fund the Telecommunications Learning Center (\$43,333), Youth Computer Lab (\$22,000), Domestic Violence (\$23,000) and Immigration Program (\$35,000).
- \$55,000 from the United Way for the FACES/Success by 6 initiative.
- \$20,000 from the Essex County Open Space Trust Fund to create a tot lot in Lower Broadway.
- SPECIAL THANKS to ATA Airlines which has donated several round trip airplane tickets to La Casa's Youth and Family Division for raffles. Funds raised through those raffles supplemented field trips and activities this summer.

Become a member of  
**LA CASA'S  
FEDERAL CREDIT UNION**  
and enjoy the benefits of the savings and loans programs available. To become a member, visit the Credit Union and complete the member application and make your first deposit of only \$20.00 to open your personal savings account. There is an annual maintenance fee of \$10.00. La Casa staff can choose to have deposits made directly from their payroll into their savings account.

For more information contact the  
Credit  
Union  
Operations  
Manager,  
Gisela Rosado  
973-481-1540.



## Youth and Family Services Division

### Family Daycare Providers Network

F.A.C.E.S. will be taking your children on a field trip to the Continental Airline Arena to see "Sesame Street Live." This exciting event begins on September 16, 2004 at 23 Broadway. Children must be at the Youth and Family Division no later than 9:00. The show begins at 10:00 and will end at 12:00.

### Parents and Children's Club

The Family and Children Education Services is going on a trip to the Turtle Back Zoo in West Orange, New Jersey for their Family Activity on September 25, 2004 from 10:00-3:00. Parents and Children must arrive at 23 Broadway no later than 9:00 for transportation.



### Welcome Back to School Kids Day

On Friday, August 27, 2004 the Abbott Preschool and Family and Children Early Education Services (FACES)/Success By Six Program held a Back to School Kid's Day Event that was a complete success thanks to the efforts of La Casa staff from four different locations. Several Abbott preschool centers

enrolled Newark children ages 3 and 4. The Newark Department of Health was on-hand and immunized children on-site. Newark Now and



AmeriGroup also came to show their enthusiasm by proving families with information on their programs. Program Supervisor for the FACES program, Jacqueline E. Gallo and Outreach Liaison, Aida Duran, did a phenomenal job preparing for the event. Despite the heat, children ran about and enjoyed playing in La Casa's playground behind 39 Broadway while parents enrolled their children in various Early Childhood Education Programs.



## Personal Development Division

### Work Place Literacy Program

Ms. Madeline Charneco came to La Casa de Don Pedro to study for her GED. Although Ms. Charneco has completed the program, she still comes in 3 times a week for a refresher course. Madeline was hired by a pharmaceutical company recently and plans to take her GED exam soon.



**Abriendo Caminos' Program**

Out of 18 women who completed Workplace English on June 25, 2004 seven are currently employed, 3 are starting more advanced ESL classes at Essex County College in September and the others are waiting for their children to return to school in September so they can actively start looking for employment or continue their education.

**2003 Ivette Del Rio Scholarship Updates**

The recipients were Adriana Arias, Ena Calva, Mishell Puente, Patricia Ruilova, Patricia Lopez and Isabel Quinteros.

- Patricia Lopez and Isabel Quinteros will graduate from ORI Medical Technology

Institute on October 2, 2004 as Clinical Medical Assistants.

- Mishell Puente and Patricia Ruilova's scholarships were used for the fall semester at the college of their choice.
- Ena Calva completed the Real Estate course at the Professional School of Business. She is studying to take the state exam.
- Adriana Arias is currently working, but plans to enroll in school to get her Child Development Association certificate soon.

**Job Offers**

The Personal Development Division now has 2 Job Developers and from June to August 2004 our 2 Job Developers, Anibal Alvelo and Craig Allen, have placed 25 Welfare to Work students!

**Community Development Division**

---

**Lower Broadway Community Prepares to take a on Weed and Seed**

For the last ten months the Lower Broadway has been a flurry of activity. Between finalizing the Lower Broadway Plan and preparing to apply for a federal Weed and Seed designation, the residents are excited and busy. An average of forty stakeholders have regularly attended the monthly community meetings in which goals for Community Policing, Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment, and Neighborhood Restoration were developed. The Community and Economic Development Lower Broadway Plan, and the School District Facilities' Plan were catalysts in this process. The full application will be submitted in October and the Steering Committee, made up of resident leaders and other stakeholders, will be informed of the acceptance of our strategy by the spring of 2005. In the meantime, resident groups will continue to address local community issues. Watch for changes in the Lower Broadway area!



arrived at each school early in the morning to distribute coffee, and donuts and important information to the parents as they dropped off their eager students. This event offers La Casa an opportunity to introduce parents

to our programs and helps us motivate parents to get involved in the education of their children.

**Open Space Award**

Congratulations to the Division and the residents of Lower Broadway who will receive a \$20,000 grant to create a tot lot on a vacant parcel. This work is outlined in the Lower Broadway Plan. Funding was provided in the first-ever funding round sponsored by the Essex County Open Space Trust Fund.

**Voter Registration**

Few staff need to be reminded of the importance of this year's election on **November 2, 2004. New Jersey residents may register to vote in this election until October 2, 2004.** All divisions are encouraged to help their

*(continued on next page)*

*(Continued from previous page)*

participants register to vote. Elections demonstrate the values we hold in common as a nation! La Casa will be closed for the Presidential Election, November 2, 2004 and

we encourage all staff to vote. Volunteer opportunities are also available through NJ Citizen Action's Newark Office, 973-643-8800 ext. 12 for more information.

## Community Improvement

This summer members of the Community Improvement Division delivered fans and air conditioners to 44 seniors as part of an Essex County Division on Aging program.

The Weatherization Unit is working hard on local outreach. So far, they have completed 114 units this contract year. Essex County residents who are income eligible may receive assistance weatherizing their homes. Once eligibility is determined, a home evaluation is conducted. Houses that are

deemed eligible may receive some of the items: insulation, heating system repair or replacement, air sealing, weather stripping and refrigerator replacement. These items are determined on a priority basis by the Weatherization staff. Tenants and homeowners are eligible, for more info call Marisol Santana 973-485-0701.

Home energy starts November 1<sup>st</sup>. Requests for applications can be obtained by calling 973-485-0795. Applications will be accepted starting November 1.

## Early Childhood Education

### Newest Early Childhood Center Set to Open!

The paint has dried, the rubberized floor surfaces are in place and the brand-new central kitchen is sparkling. One hundred and twenty pre-kindergarten students will be marching through the doors of La Casa's First Street Early Childhood Center at 202-216 First Street rehabilitated by La Casa's own construction company, LC HomeBuilder. Registration for the new classrooms was filled in record time with parents eager to send their child to one of La Casa's schools. "The parents didn't mind sending their children to a farther location, they were just happy to register with La Casa!" exclaimed Gloria Jerez, Deputy Director. La Casa's kitchen facilities are also scheduled to be relocated to First Street by October when operations for La Olla, La Casa's institutional catering business will commence.

### Classrooms at 75 Park Reopen

Parents were pleasantly surprised on the first day of school at La Casa. The Early Childhood Education Center unveiled its newly renovated classrooms and grand new entrance. Children will no longer be dropped off at the Park Avenue entrance, coming instead through the new glass entranceway



erected on Prospect Avenue. In addition to creating a beautiful and inviting face to the community, the new

entrance is handicap-accessible, leading to 2 accessible classrooms on the ground floor. Two more classrooms were refurbished on the first floor and a brand new classroom was built on the third floor. The Early Childhood Center at 75 Park Avenue now has 5 classrooms for 60 children.

### Full-Day Early Childhood Services will Remain Free

La Casa and our partners declared victory recently when the Governor withdrew his proposal to charge parents for wrap-around early childhood services. As we reported in the Spring/Summer issue, La Casa parents and staff joined a citywide and statewide coalition to protest this proposal. Our voices were heard and the services will not be altered. The children are the biggest winners!



## Board Spotlight, Richard Roper

Richard W. Roper came to Newark, New Jersey in 1965 seeking employment so he could earn the money needed to return to college. He ended up staying in Newark and enrolling at Rutgers-Newark. He quickly became involved on campus in a host of civil rights and black

power activities, founding the Black Organization of Students (BOS) and serving as its first president. BOS framed the demands that were presented to the University as part of the famed Conklin Hall takeover of 1969, which occurred the year after Roper graduated. Among the demands made were: increase the number of black students; increase the number of black professors, open the campus to the surrounding community; and a host of economic development actions. "I came to Newark just as it was about to undertake a new burst of freedom", Roper explained. His activism as a student leader in Newark led to his career in public service.

After graduating from Princeton University with a Masters in Public Policy, Richard Roper returned to Newark in 1971 to help shape the city's economic, education and children's policies. Over the course of his career, he has been instrumental in the creation of several Newark institutions including: Newark Emergency Services for Families (NESF), WBGO-FM, Newark's Jazz Radio Station, Leadership Newark, and the Institute for Social Justice. He also served as executive director for the Newark in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Task Force which proposed a set of initiatives important for the city's economic future. At the state level, Roper was co-founder of the New Jersey Public Policy Research Institute, a

Black Think Tank housed at Rutgers University's Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy. He also helped launch New Jersey Future, the state's anti-sprawl organization. Most of Roper's professional accomplishments have benefited both the City of Newark and the State of New Jersey in some way. "We are all given a set of skills and abilities that allow us to contribute to society in special ways and we have a responsibility to do exactly that."

Roper joined La Casa's Board of Directors in 2000. "I had been familiar with La Casa from its earliest days and had friendships with both Ramon Rivera (La Casa's first Executive Director) and Alfonso Roman" (a founding board member). Raymond Ocasio, La Casa's current Executive Director, was leading the organization when Roper was asked to join the board. "Ray is also a long-time friend, and I have great respect for his leadership." Roper feels strongly that there should be a closer working relationship between the African-American and Hispanic communities and he saw a seat on La Casa's Board as "an opportunity to put substance to the rhetoric".

Roper has seen La Casa grow from a primarily social service agency into a comprehensive community development organization that really impacts and improves the lives of Newark residents. He believes that La Casa will continue to grow despite an overall contraction in public funding because the organization is a vital part of Newark's social and economic development infrastructure.

In 1996 Richard Roper founded the Roper Group a public policy consulting firm specializing in economic and social policy research and evaluation. He is married and has two grown sons who are both attorneys.

## "My Summer at La Casa" by Vanessa Jest

*Vanessa Jest spent her summer interning in La Casa's Administrative Offices as part of the Newark Youth Leadership Program. She will be starting her sophomore year at Mount St. Dominic Academy.*

One might say that their summer was best spent going out and just relaxing, not having to worry or contemplate about a single thing. However, I say my summer was best spent at La Casa de Don Pedro. Not only did I adapt many new skills and concepts about office work, I gained responsibility, maturity, and self-conduct. I found the work

challenging and I saw it as an opportunity to upright myself as an individual. La Casa has helped me in many ways. I met new people and become friends with a few. The experience also gave me a chance to learn about myself. When I was not working in the office, I participated in numerous activities. As a part of the Youth Leadership Academy and the Newark Youth Leadership Program, we visited three spectacular universities, New York University; Montclair State; and New Jersey City University. Also, we learned to break

free from our shyness in "Stand and Deliver". We experienced the burdens of being a young teenage mother/father through the "Baby Think it Over Program". We grew in knowledge as well as in friendship. As a result, I believe that La Casa does in fact bring people closer together. After all, when you're home, you're family. I would have to say that I wouldn't want it any other way.



## By the way....

### NEW STAFF

#### *Community Building*

Barbara Cid, Robert Baez and Ivesse DeLeon joined the Community Building team in July.

#### *Early Childhood*

Damaris Andino, Samary Gonzalez, Natalie Jerez, Rosmilda Lizardo, Rosalinda Mayo, Gloria McNeil-Williams, Lillie Moore, Diana Moreno, Milagros Pabon, Nancy Paredes, Maridsa Reyes, Wanda Roman, Aurora Romero, Josefina Terry and Diocelin Velazquez.

#### *Fiscal*

Jair Sanchez was hired to replace Ambreen Sheikh in the Fiscal Office. Latoya Stewart also joined the Fiscal Office.

#### *Transitions*

Natalie Jerez moved from the Fiscal office to the Early Childhood Division.

Aura Dussan moved from Weatherization to the Early Childhood Division.

### CONGRATULATIONS

- Raymond Ocasio will receive the Policy Leadership Award from the New Jersey Public Policy Research Institute on October 22nd. The award is conferred to individuals who forward issues relevant to communities of color.
- Mishell Puente an intern in the immigration program graduated from Science High School on 6/29.04. Mishell will be attending Robert Wesleyan College this fall where she will be majoring in Pre-Law.
- Yolanda Fernandez from Personal Development gave birth to Danelly Delgado, a beautiful baby girl. Miriam Lopez from Youth and Family Services also had a baby girl and Rigoberto Irizarry from Community Improvement is expecting his first child in September.

- Michele Gonzalez from Personal Development married her high school sweetheart, ESL Civics Instructor Joel Naatus married former ESL Civics Instructor Mary Kate Romano. Sheria Sobers from CED is also a newlywed.
- Tania Monterrosa a family worker from 75 Park Avenue and Diana Moreno from the First Street Center received the New Jersey Family Development Credential from Rutgers University.

### UPCOMING EVENTS...

- The Puerto Rican Day Parade will take place on Sunday, September 19th.

### LA CASA ON THE WEB!

- Remember to check us out at [www.lacasanwk.org](http://www.lacasanwk.org)

## La Casa de Don Pedro

Executive Office  
75 Park Avenue, Newark, NJ 07104  
Phone: 973-482-8312  
Fax: 973-482-1883

*Alle Ries, Editor*  
973-482-1883 (fax)  
[AReis@lacasanwk.org](mailto:AReis@lacasanwk.org)

Raymond Ocasio  
*Executive Director*

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Zoraya Lee-Hamlin	<i>President, Executive Committee, Resource Development Committee</i>
Carlos Arrom	<i>Finance and Asset Management Committee</i>
Sam Delgado	<i>Resource Development Committee</i>
Digna Dubon	<i>Special Events Committee</i>
Marc C. Epps, Jr.	<i>Finance and Asset Management Committee</i>
Charles M. Grossman	<i>Chair, Resource Development Committee</i>
Angel Luis Juarbe	<i>Board Governance Committee</i>
Lanny Kurzweil, Esq.	<i>Resource Development Committee</i>
August C. Lozano	<i>Finance and Asset Management Committee</i>
Louis E. Prezeau	<i>Special Events Committee</i>
Louis E. Prezeau	<i>Treasurer, Executive Committee Chair, Finance and Asset Management Committee</i>
Gloria Ramos	<i>Secretary, Executive Committee</i>
Richard W. Roper	<i>Vice President, Executive Committee</i>
Jose L. Rodriguez	<i>Resource Development Committee</i>
Kathy Spivey	<i>Chair, Board Governance Committee</i>
Hector Velazquez	<i>Resource Development Committee</i>
Hector Velazquez	<i>Chair, Special Events Subcommittee</i>
Vielka Velazquez, Esq.	<i>Resource Development Committee</i>
Vielka Velazquez, Esq.	<i>Special Events Committee</i>