

# NEWS

## La Casa de Don Pedro

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 1

SUMMER 2010

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



Once again La Casa hosted a successful “La Casa Es Su Casa” Annual Fund Raising Event. The event was successful in two critical ways: one in raising critical unrestricted funds during these tough economic times and by bringing together loyal supporters and new friends of La Casa for an enjoyable evening.

Keeping the same theme “La Casa es Su Casa”... this year’s event was even more welcoming and festive for the more than 200 friends and guests by the beautiful setting framed by the NJ Per-

forming Arts Center. A cocktail reception, the event was embellished by delicious dishes, including a table of luscious chocolate covered strawberries and the music of “Wil Vega and Friends” a local ensemble playing Latin jazz. A silent auction with items donated by our board members and supporters was held with all items being successfully auctioned. The charming Ms. Odalys Molina of Telemundo Channel 47 was our Mistress of Ceremonies.

A compelling and dramatic four-minute video depicting four personal but telling accounts of how La Casa helped and impacted their lives was shared with the guest. The presence of these clients at the event made their stories more real for our guests. Our Executive Director Raymond Ocasio shared with the audience La Casa’s commitment to press on making a difference in people’s lives despite the harsh economic realities and connected the evening events contribution to that effort.

The evening allowed a special tribute La Casa’s Chief Financial Officer, Niladri Bagchi, who retired after ten years of outstanding service to La Casa. Special remarks were made by Board President, Zoraya Lee-Hamlin, Executive Director, Raymond Ocasio, and Board



*Lucia DiNapoli Gibbons of Wachovia a Wells Fargo Company with La Casa at NJPAC.*

*(continued on page 1)*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Executive Director's Update... 2*
- Board Members Retire ..... 2*
- Board Spotlight ..... 3*
- Puerto Rican Birth Certificate Update ..... 3*
- Division Updates ..... 4-10*
- Business Office Communications ..... 11*
- Staff News*
- Topics of the Quarter*

## La Casa to Launch New Website

La Casa de Don Pedro is excited about the re-launching of its next generation web site, [Lacasanwk.org](http://Lacasanwk.org). The site will feature a full description of our programs and services with easy accessible links to contact information, success stories, job opportunities, and how to get involved and even how to donate to La Casa. The site will feature galleries of photos, up-to-date news and events, and information on enrollment, registration and programmatic activities. There will be links to LIHEAP, Weatherization and other social services information with applications that can be downloaded. [Lacasanwk.org](http://Lacasanwk.org) will be launched in late September and remains focused on offering online information for both clients, friends and La Casa employees. Stay tuned for more information!!!





## Executive Director's Update

Dear La Casa Colleagues:

In the last La Casa News I wrote:

*"While La Casa is very well positioned ... we must remain tuned to the looming financial crisis affecting our nation, state and community."*

*"The demands and need for our services has never been greater during our institutional history."*

*"There is no doubt that some negative effects of the economic downturn will be imposed upon La Casa."*

All three suppositions appear to be true and holding up!

The economic recession is still not broken despite signs of some improvement. If anything the second recessionary punch is affecting state and local governmental units as well as school districts that will pull the economy down and assure all of us will experience a prolonged recovery process.

Demand for our energy assistance programs managed some 76,000 actions of which more than 39,000 households will receive Low Income Home Energy Assistance, and some 18,000 will benefit from Universal Service Fund. This is dramatically higher than last year which was a record breaker on its own. In the same way demands for rental assistance, foreclosure counseling, and even food are up. Domestic violence assistance is also up...hard times bring harsh realities.

The balancing of the New Jersey's State budget had some cold reality for La Casa and its constituencies. In cold numbers, La Casa was cut \$1,116,000. This represents 8% of our overall budget and 10% reduction of staff. Minor re-instatement of the After3 and the Center for Hispanic Policies, Research & Development funding was at 1/3 the prior allocations so we are not sure refunding of the lost programs will follow.

Eliminated and lost to La Casa and its program participants are the Hispanic Women's Resource Center, the Homeless Prevention Program, Family Reunification for ex-offenders, and the After3 programs. While English As a Second Language and the Youth & Adult Computer Literacy to name a few, were slashed and/or severely curtailed placing them in suspension or jeopardy

as we await definitive budget numbers.

As we sounded words of caution of the pending budget cuts we also stated that La Casa was well positioned to withstand these cuts with a sense of true shared sacrifice.

I believe we have as an institution. Despite the budget cuts, our Board of Directors recently approved our Fiscal Year 2010-2011 budget with a less than one percent increase at \$15.2 million in revenues. Staff reduction was mitigated by freezing salaries, containing the increase to our health benefit to less than 3%, prioritizing transfers & re-employment within the divisions to growth areas. Management asked for and received board approval to provide funds from La Casa's reserves to address programmatic shortfall and to sustain capacity during these challenging times.

In my previous closing statement in this space I said: "...we should be mindful of the harsh realities that so many of our clients and participants are living through". For many of our families and program participants, these harsh economic times means higher bus fares, loss of health care insurance and long waits or rejections at the emergency room, more crowded classrooms, increase in costs for school meals and childcare for infants, toddlers and even to our Pre-K population. Some will lose public assistance, while others will have smaller unemployment compensation. The loss of municipal services will befall us all as even police and fire join other municipal workers for more furloughs and even more lay-offs. This promises to bring less services and higher costs.

So it is that our clients, our program participants, our constituents, our colleagues, our neighbors and friends will be confronted by challenges much greater than we as an institution have faced.

In a purely mathematical way we are managing the budget cuts, the real challenge is going to be in providing the critical services and assistance that our clients and program participants need. We will have to do more with less, with the full appreciation that "less is less" in dollar terms but not with regards to our commitment and sacrifice. The times require a more profound commitment from each and every one of us! A challenge that I believe we are all capable and willing to make.

Peace to all.

## Board Members Retire

As we welcome new members, leaving us is Angel Luis Juarbe and Frederick Cooke.

Mr. Juarbe who recently retired as the principal of the Elliot Street Public School has taken on new and more challenging positions within the central office administration of the Newark School District. These heightened responsibilities necessitated prioritizing his commitments and led to his resignation from La Casa's board after nine years. He has been a knowledgeable and strong supporter of La Casa and commitment to meeting the needs of students and residents of the community.

Frederick Cooke was invited to La Casa's Board to provide his expertise in architecture, planning and construction. These same talents and his professional accomplishments in designing solid solutions for difficult architectural and construction work related to renovating older and outdated residential buildings led to a situation where his expertise was needed for the "implementation" of an actual project as opposed to providing guidance from the sidelines. Confronted with this, Mr. Cooke resigned his position with the Board and will be working with La Casa to renovate foreclosed properties that are blighting our community. Mr. Cooke served on La Casa's board for the last four years.

# Board Spotlight:

## La Casa Welcomes Three New Board Members

La Casa's Board Governance Committee was once again tasked with reviewing and nominating board membership for La Casa's Board of Directors. As they assessed our Board's composition and developed a list of expertise needed, they shared this information with the board, staff and stakeholders of La Casa. They were able to compile an impressive list of 15 potential candidates of which three commendable members were appointed at the June Board meeting. "With the nomination of these three new members, we now have a full Board of outstanding individuals. This and the critical work La Casa is engaged in suggests some of the reasons people want to serve on La Casa's Board" noted Board President Zoraya Lee-Hamlin at the meeting.

### **Bellaria Jaramillo, CFP**

Ms. Jaramillo is a Certified Financial Planner and Managing Director of Wealth Financial Group - the 4th largest office of MetLife. Her work is based in Cranford and she services northern and central New Jersey. She was also their 2005 Hispanic Corporate Achiever of the year. She graduated from Jersey City State College and is currently pursuing a Master

of Management and Business Administration. Professionally and personally she has been working to helping low income communities learn financial literacy and helping women and minorities to reach their financial potential.

### **Juan Carlos Ruiz**

Mr. Ruiz is a Newark resident and educator as well as the Principal of Rafael Hernandez School since 2007. He was previously Principal of Peshine Avenue University Prep and is a former elementary teacher. He has a bachelor's degree from Montclair State University and a Masters in Administration and Education from St. Peters College.

### **Rick Thigpen**

Rick serves as Vice President of State Government Affairs of PSEG Service Corporation since 2007. He has a Law Degree from Columbia University and has extensive background in working with local, state and federal government in various strategic roles engaged in both policy work and politics. Rick lives in Montclair, New Jersey.

## **ATTENTION NJ Residents Born in Puerto Rico!!!**

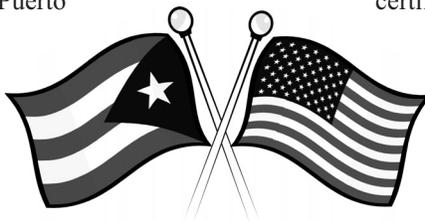
**Beginning July 1, 2010**, under a new law passed by the government of Puerto Rico, NJ residents born in Puerto Rico may have to obtain a new certified copy of their birth certificate.

This new law will limit the fraudulent use of Puerto Rico issued birth certificates to unlawfully obtain a U.S passport, social security benefits, and other federal services. Individual who

After September 30, 2010, all certified copies of birth certificates issued prior to July 1, 2010 will become invalid. After September 30, 2010, US Citizen Immigration Services will not accept any certified copies of Puerto Rico birth certificates (PRBC) issued before July 1, 2010 for the purpose of establishing eligibility for immigration benefit petitions and applications.

If an invalid PRBC is submitted in support of a petition or application, USCIS will notify the appropriate individual and give that individual the opportunity to submit a new, valid birth certificate.

More information and instructions on how to apply by mail can be found at: <http://www.prfaa.com/birthcertificates> or call 1-800-375-5283.



## **ATENCIÓN Residentes de NJ que Nacieron En Puerto Rico!!!**

**Comenzando en Julio 1, 2010**, en base de una nueva ley aprobada por el gobierno de Puerto Rico, personas que nacieron en Puerto Rico tendrán que obtener una nueva copia certificada de su acta de nacimiento. Esta nueva ley

limitara el uso fraudulento de obtener pasaportes americanos, beneficios del seguro social, o programas federales ilegalmente.

Después de Septiembre 30, 2010, todas copias certificadas de nacimiento sometidas antes del 1 de julio, 2010 se convertirán inválidas. Después de Septiembre 30, 2010, Los Servicios de Emigración no aceptarán ninguna copia certificada de nacimiento sometida antes de Julio 1, 2010 para el propósito del establecimiento de la elegibilidad para beneficios migratorio, peticiones y aplicaciones. Si un certificado de nacimiento inválido se recibe en apoyo de una petición o aplicación, Los Servicios de Emigración notificarán a la persona para darle la oportunidad de someter un certificado de nacimiento valido.

Mas información e instrucciones para aplicar se pueden encontrar en: <http://www.prfaa.com/certificadosdenacimiento> o llamar 1-800-375-5283

## Early Childhood Division

During the summer months, the Early Childhood Division will develop many projects to enhance and provide recreational activities in which the children can continue their learning process as well as enjoy and have a lot of fun and excitement. Trips to the park, pool days, arts and crafts festivals, outdoor picnics, pet exhibitions and garden projects are some of the fun activities planned as part of this coming summer. Parents are encouraged to participate in all activities and projects.

### ***A feature story about La Casa's Early Childhood Educational Program appeared in the Latino News and it is re-printed here:***

*When an Early Childhood Development Center located in a prime location with a unique educational repertoire lacks the number of students needed to fulfill enrollment, one must ask him or herself, "Do parents even know their children can attend?" Well, Gabriela Molina, Family Worker at La Casa de Don Pedro did just that.*

*When Martha Villegas, Director of the Early Childhood Development Center approached Ms. Molina and informed her that four students were needed immediately in order to complete full enrollment, Gabriela put her drive and passion into gear. She realized that being a Family Worker not only entails enrollment, but moreover introducing the community to the benefits of early education. Given the short time frame, waiting for parents to come in through the front door was not an option. Going out there and finding them was a necessity.*

*That week, during her lunch break walking down the street with two co-workers, Gabriela approached a woman with two small children and introduced herself. After inquiring about the children's ages, and whether they were enrolled in a school, she explained the possibility and benefits of attending La Casa's Early Childhood Center. Within 24 hours, the mother met with Gabriela, provided all necessary documentation and both children were enrolled at La Casa. As luck would have it, Gabriela's dedication did not stop there; she continued the journey to enroll additional students and later that week managed to get two more students! As Gabriela points out, despite the fact that these students have never stepped foot in a classroom, they easily adapted and absolutely love it!*

*Gabriela Molina's actions are a clear example of what thinking and acting outside of the box means. Not only is our purpose to educate our children but also the parents; informing and providing access to available services. The goal is not only to meet full enrollment, but also to involve, encourage, share knowledge and assist families in our communities, this is what makes it all worth the while.*

*Gabriela Molina's actions are a clear example of what thinking and caring about the work we do is critical to meet our objectives. Not only is our purpose to educate our children but also the parents; informing and providing access to available services irrespective of the venue or time of day. The goal is not simply to meet full enrollment, but to, inform, encourage, motivate, and assist families in our communities to be self-sufficient, to empower them and to revitalize our community. It is what makes our work all worth the while and even rewarding!*

### ***This article was written by D. Kemp, a visitor who was moved by the caring staff of the Family Outreach Program at La Casa de Don Pedro.***

*While visiting the Family Outreach Program (FOP) at La Casa de Don Pedro, I was delighted to be able to attend one of the parent/child activities. Parents came and together with their children painted and decorated frames and were then treated to a Valentine photo to take home. It was such a tender moment.*

*While there I was introduced by Family Worker, Cristal Burgman to Patricia Coronado. Patricia is the Parent Coordinator at the center. Later that day I had the opportunity to talk with both Cristal and Patricia and learn more about their recipe for joy and learning in preparation for our FOP presentation. I also asked about the role the family workers have at the center. Patricia answered by sharing how in her own interactions with the family workers, especially Cristal, she found support to deal with her concerns as a parent, as well as feeling encouraged to develop her own abilities. This exchange is exactly what she does now with the parents and families that come to the center. She is so welcoming and has a great sense of humor. When Patricia described all the possible ways she can be found helping, it was apparent that Patricia is multitasked. There is no doubt in my mind that she will be a model leader for other just starting out.*

*I am grateful for the opportunity to speak with Cristal and Patricia and see the center from a fresh perspective, hearing how a feeling of support and encouragement can be the best place for learning to happen for everyone in the family. They and all the staff contribute to making it worthy of its name, La Casa, a feel at home place where everyone is welcomed.*

### **CO-PAYMENT Coming Soon:**

This coming year as part of the State fiscal crisis and tight budgeting a co-pay will be introduced that will weigh heavily on the working poor and may affect the number of children who attend Pre K. If this prediction holds up then the improvements that Pre K education has demonstrated over the last ten years may be compromised and as a society we will be marching backwards.

**NAEYC Accreditation Training in Washington, DC.**

The “Mark of Quality” is a system for early childhood to help families find the best care for their young children and to provide the early childhood education that meet standards of excellence. The Early Childhood’s Center and Division Directors attended NAEYC’s intensive two day training in Washington D.C on April 27 and 28, 2010 regarding the new

NAEYC accreditation reinvented system. Currently the 3 centers have successfully enrolled in the Self–Study step with the NAEYC Academy. It is the first out of four steps for a systematic improving quality process. The four steps: enrollment/self-study, application/self assessment, candidacy and meeting the program’s standards/accreditation are designed to ensure excellence for an early childhood program.

Other Activities



*A Hawaiian Dance was performed by a group of children on Self-Expression Day.*



*The kids at 75 Park Avenue are proud of their garden and love to watch it grow every day.*



*Self-Expression Day is an opportunity for the children to demonstrate their motor skills and learn about other cultures.*



*The Magic Show for the children of 39 Broadway was full of surprises.*



*It's always the perfect time for Ice Cream!*

## *Youth, Health and Family Services Division*

### **Summer Enrichment Day Camp**

We are so happy to be celebrating the 37th year of our Summer Enrichment Day Camp Services. Over the years, La Casa de Don Pedro has impacted the lives of thousands of children.

Summer Enrichment Day Camp 2010 is a very exciting and memorable time of the year for all involved ! We have a fun filled summer planned with new educational activities such as the New Jersey Audubon Society Nature Program, where the children will be able to participate in week long day camps to explore, discover and enjoy nature. Youth Empowerment America will be providing an educational and instructional mud-brick building activities. Horizon is providing *A Dancing for Your Health Program*, where the children will participate in nutritional workshops along with dance as a physical activity. The campers will also visit vari-



*Playing with mud was not only fun but showed the kids how nature's elements can be used to build shelters.*

ous amusement attractions to Six Flags, Dorney Park, Camel Beach Water Park and Tomahawk Lake. We thank all our parents for allowing your children to spend the summer with us. We truly appreciate the opportunity to play a role in each camper's successful development.

If you have any questions about our Summer Enrichment Program please call 973-483-2703

### **Fostering Women's Achievement Program**

As its name suggests, the Fostering Women's Achievement Program promotes the achievements of women with its focus on helping women develop their own skills and learn what they can accomplish by their own efforts and dedication. With that goal in mind many activities were planned during 2010 including educational and enjoyable excursions where the clients were able to explore the knowledge and skills they possess. They discovered that they each had a particular skill or trade that they did not practice such as cooking, decorating, etc...

Four incredible clients who have exceptional craft skill voluntarily facilitated workshops to share their talents with the group by teaching how to make home-made Columbian style cheese, succulent fruit arrangements, custom jewelry, and aromatic handmade soaps and skin care products. The jewelry workshop received the most enthusiasm from the group so they began working as a team to develop different kinds of jewelry designs and decided to display their work at an exhibition. On June 23, 2010 the group held a "Craft Exhibition," at La Casa de Don Pedro's 23 Broadway where their work was not only displayed, but purchased by guests. As a result, this motivated members to form a group where they meet to find locations where they can sell their jewelry such as flea markets. A second "Craft Exhibition" took place at La Casa's Main office at 75 Park Avenue on July 28, 2010 and was a success. The group is hoping that more invitation are extended to display their work.



*Displaying their home-made cultural arts and crafts gave the participants pride and confidence in their talents.*

## *Personal Development Division*

### **New Program – Financial Opportunities Center**

In July the Personal Development Division launched its Financial Opportunity Center [FOC]. The FOC bundles financial literacy, income support, and employment services

in a holistic approach to increase family income and assets. This program allows clients to improve their financial situations through short-term solutions and long-term planning.

The Local Initiatives Support Coalition is providing funds for a Financial Coach who will be working

one-on-one with clients to develop a budget and a financial plan as well as offering financial literacy workshops. The program is being pilot tested with our Prisoner Reentry participants allowing for the leveraging of our existing Income Support and Employment Services into the work being done by the new Financial Coach.

**Family Picnic for Prisoner Reentry Participants**

On June 11th the Personal Development Division hosted the first Newark Prisoner Reentry Initiative Family Picnic at Lake Hopatcong. Thirty participants and their families gath-



*The family picnic was both fun and vital for families to reconnect and rebuild.*

ered for a day of barbeque, swimming, and workshops. This event provided an invaluable opportunity for our reentry clients to reconnect and rebuild the family connections that are often compromised during incarceration.

From March through June the Personal Development and Youth, Family, and Health Services Divisions collaborated to facilitate a 12-week responsible parenting class to clients housed at Kintock Group. The class was led by Luz Mayor with the help of Anibal Alvelo.

**Family Life Improves With A Job**

One of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of reentry work is job placement. Employment is a major deciding factor in whether or not a reentrant recidivates. La Casa has placed over eighty reentrants into employment over this past year. Eight of those are currently employed by General Glass International in Secaucus, NJ.



*Finding a job is a key factor in improving family life.*

**Community Development Division**

**Saving One's Home – Preventing Foreclosure**

La Casa continues to receive an average of 25 calls each week for foreclosure prevention assistance. The first wave of clients consisted of families primarily attempting to modify adjustable rate mortgages (ARMS) that reset in 2008 or 2009 to unbearably high levels. While this is still a common challenge, many families are now facing this crisis due to unemployment and under-employment. These dramatic events also affect families and put strains on relationships, which can lead to separation or divorce, which generates additional financial concerns and can also lead to foreclosures.

Many families are experiencing foreclosure silently and wait too long before seeking assistance. Most of the clients La Casa sees are behind on their payments by 12 months or more. Early recognition of economic altering events and the consequence requires early action to mitigate the tragic loss of one's home.

Homeowners who face economic hardship or have received a foreclosure notice should contact La Casa's Foreclosure Counselors. By calling for an appointment they can complete an intake form and provide vital documentation

related to their foreclosure and financial position that will help us to understand the nature of the foreclosure. They can then meet with a counselor who creates a work plan. Often these plans involve reaching out to the lender and even going to a court-appointed mediator. Often a temporary modification can be obtained but the homeowners must stay current on their payments so as to request a permanent modification with assistance from the counselor.

With every situation there are some individuals who will take advantage of others. This crisis has brought out a number of "Loan Modification Specialists" who charge families a fee to help with a modification of their mortgage. Often these companies take the client's money (sometimes thousands of dollars) and promptly close up shop. Others offer to help by requesting that you transfer your home to them, only to find out that they then sell your home to others.

La Casa and other non-profits are funded by the government to assist families confronting foreclosure and these services are free.

A number of families were able to save their homes with La Casa's help. When "Maria" came to see La Casa's Senior Housing Counselor, Sofi Cordero, she had an adjustable rate



**Foreclosure Counselor Sofi Cordero participates in the "Loan Alert Scam" with the City.**

mortgage (ARM) with an interest rate that went from 9.5% to 16%, well above market rates. The single mother of 4 was a school teacher in the Newark Public Schools who had lost her job and was nearly 2 years delinquent on her mortgage. She had tried to modify her loan repeatedly by herself without success. A friend referred her to La Casa's Foreclosure Prevention Program.

After working with La Casa's counselor, Maria was approved for trial reduced payments to show affordability. Because Maria was able to demonstrate her ability to afford a modified loan, the counselor filed for mediation to obtain and enforce the trial modification. Maria's payments went from \$3,059 to \$1,884 per month, a 39% reduction. Through constant follow up by both Maria and La Casa's, the bank finally agreed to make her modification permanent in July of 2010 with a 2% interest rate for the first five years and no more than 4.58% in interest for the next 25 years.

If you or someone you know is a homeowner in crisis and facing foreclosure, La Casa can help by working closely with them to obtain the best possible outcome, which ideally would be to save their home.

## Transforming Lower Broadway

In April, La Casa working with LISC and its Greater Newark Neighborhoods Program was excited to welcome over 200 Lower Broadway residents, students, clergy, community leaders and other community partners to the "Transforming Lower Broadway" community event. There, participants came together to share their ideas, challenges and vision for Newark's Lower Broadway Neighborhood. This event kicked off an exciting project designed to further empower local residents to improve the quality of life for all in their neighborhood.

Transforming Lower Broadway was kicked off by performances from Dynamic and Impact, two La Casa supported youth dance groups. After the entertainment the work began. Individuals worked at separate tables facilitated by professionals and discussed the neighborhood's strengths, challenges and vision.

This was a unique forum in that the participants were the contributors and evaluated what was said, determined its validity and then they were able to prioritize different issues and concerns. In the small group discussion participants were able to be more specific in terms of their comments. For example, while safety continues to be a top concern overall, residents were able to share specific issues within safety that concerned them the most. This approach increases the effectiveness of the response because it defined the specific reasons why individuals and families feel unsafe. As part of the efforts the groups developed suggestions on how to deal with their issues and concerns.

In the end, all participants agreed to continue to work together to ensure we not only list issues but also create a plan to solve them. From the continuing efforts by these stakeholders and La Casa a "Quality of Life Plan" will be created to guide many aspects of community building within the Lower Broadway Neighborhood moving forward.

## Community Improvement Division

### Record Breaking Assistance for LIHEAP/USF

With another successful and record breaking season behind us, Home Energy is already gearing up for the next season which begins on November 1st. This past season some 73,000 actions were taken during the 2009-10 LIHEAP season. In the coming year this number is expected to increase due to the expectation of a slow recovery from the continuing economic recession. Another reason adding to our efforts will be the year round open register for the Universal

Service Fund that will help families with lower incomes or experiencing financial hardships.

As part of La Casa's efforts to better serve our clients a new satellite office will be opening on Central Avenue in East Orange. Repairs to this storefront satellite will be undertaken during the summer and it should be operational by late August. This should prove more accessible to many households in East and West Orange as well as Irvington.

## LIHEAP Eligibility

To be eligible for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program [LIHEAP] benefits, the applicant household must be responsible for home heating or cooling costs, either directly or included in the rent; and have gross income at or below 225% of the federal poverty level. Income eligibility requirements are subject to change. Persons who live in public housing and/or receive rental assistance are not eligible unless they pay for their own heating/cooling costs directly to the fuel supplier. The amount of the LIHEAP heating benefit is determined by income, household size, fuel type, and heating region.

An eligible household that heats with natural gas or electricity may have its benefits directly forwarded to its utility company. Otherwise, in most cases eligible households di-



*A happy Weatherization client with her new refrigerator.*

rectly responsible to a fuel supplier for payment of home heating costs receives a two-party check in the name of the applicant and the fuel supplier. Households whose heating costs are included in their rent receive a single party check made out to the eligible applicant. A household receiving medically necessary cooling benefits also receives a single party check. This year, the medically necessary cooling assistance benefit is set at \$200.

## Universal Service Fund

USF is a program created by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities to help make natural gas and electric bills

more affordable for low-income households. If you are eligible, USF can lower the amount you pay for gas and electricity. To be eligible, a household income must be less than 175% of the Federal Poverty Level based on family size, a household would have to pay more than 3% of its annual gross income for electric, or more than 3% for natural gas. If a household has electric heat, it must spend more than 6% of its annual gross income on electricity to be eligible. For more information about USF, call 1-866-240-1347.

**PLEASE NOTE:** *The FFY 20 10 the LIHEAP application is also an application for the Universal Service Fund (USF) Program. Therefore, you apply for two energy assistance programs at the same time. For more information about LIHEAP call La Casa at 973 485 0701 or to locate the nearest application agency, you can also call 1-800-510-3102. For additional information or an application, you can visit [www.energyassistance.nj.gov](http://www.energyassistance.nj.gov). Review with Norma, perhaps we should mention that applications will soon be available on our website!*

## Weatherization Assistance Program

Big Goals and Lots of Work Getting Done! The Weatherization program has ramped up for outreach and production with a target of over 1000 homes to receive weatherization services to improve the energy efficiency and save residents from high energy bills. We are well on the way to meeting our goals with more than 350 units completed under one contract with the Department of Energy. In addition, 135 heating systems have been repaired and/or replaced throughout Essex County under the Heating Improvement Program. Outreach is a major focal point for the Summer by participating in summer community activities, health fairs and other major events [high energy bills are an indication of poor energy efficiency] including door to door canvassing to reach out to property owners and tenants throughout neighborhood in Essex County.

## Air Conditioner for Seniors

The Division on Aging Program is also now accepting referrals for eligible senior citizens, age 60 and older who need an air conditioner this summer. You may contact the Community Improvement Division for more information at 973-485-0701.

## FAMILY SUCCESS CENTERS I AND II UPDATES

La Casa's two Family Success Centers have been keeping busy with a variety of workshops and activities throughout the past school year. Some of the many activities included a health fair, parenting classes as well as the Parent Advisory Board meetings.

### Closing Ceremony

At a closing ceremony for both centers provided an opportunity to highlight some of the interesting activities

throughout the year. It also provided an opportunity to recognize the accomplishments and achievements of some of the participants and its leadership. An important message for

*Family Success Centers (continued from page 9)*

all the participating families was to have then continue working with La Casa and the important tasks they have shown tremendous interest in and taken critical steps to gain knowledge, build confidence and move closer to self-sufficiency.

La Casa's Executive Director, Raymond Ocasio was present and recognized the parents for their accomplish-

ments. He also shared with them the impact and implications of the economic crisis and the State's fiscal crisis. He suggested that despite the budget cuts being experienced by La Casa, we would continue to find ways to serve the community while highlighting the importance of their engagement with their representatives at all levels of government and to exercise their rights and duty to vote conscientiously.



**FSC I hosted a Mother's Day Dinner with both staff and moms bringing in a delicious dish. A special gift made by the children was presented to the moms.**



**Fathers of FCS I were taken to Liberty State Park for Father's Day and enjoyed some great weather, company and food including a performance by the US Air Force.**



**FCS II catered a luncheon for the participants and their mothers, and the children provided the entertainment by performing music and dancing for their moms. The children and fathers worked hard and were excited to surprise the mom's with their performances.**



**Everyone from the FCS II enjoyed the day at Tomahawk Lake in Sparta to celebrate Father's Day. These activities reward our clients for their dedication and consistent participation in our programs.**





## Welcome Aboard

Adela F. Tormin  
*Summer Instructor*

Ayele Z. Benissan  
*Housing Counselor*

Dalianis G. Puentes  
*Administrative Assistant*

Daniel Kravetz  
*Program Assistant*

Diana Herrera  
*Summer Instructor*

Ivon Vasquez  
*Wrap Around Instructor*

Maria J. Salas  
*Summer Instructor*

Melissa Ramos  
*Program Assistant*

Norma Mendoza  
*Summer Instructor*

Rafaela Mistry  
*Summer Instructor*

Raquel D. Merlino  
*Chief Financial Officer*

Saida Alvarenga  
*Outreach Worker*

Veronica E. Perez  
*Summer Instructor*

Wilson J. Munoz  
*Summer Instructor*

Zulayka Ruiz  
*Family Worker*

## Farewells

Abigail Santiago  
*Group Leader*

Adeline Criado  
*Case Manager*

Alex Ceron  
*Group Leader*

Americo E. Sanchez Laguard  
*Outreach Coordinator*

Angela A. Arboleda  
*Group Leader*

Anyelis C. Cordero  
*Program Coordinator*

Barbara D. Colon  
*Mental Health Clinician*

Carla M. Ruivo  
*Group Leader*

Carlos Acosta  
*Driver*

Catherine Nunes Martins  
*Group Leader*

Christian Valentin  
*Group Leader*

Craig B. Allen  
*Case Manager*

Cynthia Jacob  
*Admin. Assistant*

Cynthia M. Vera  
*Group Leader*

Diana M. Moreno  
*Family Worker*

Ebonee M. Johnson  
*Carrera Group Leader*

Guadalupe Colorado  
*Group Leader*

Guillermo Roman  
*Job Developer*

Jose Luis Solis  
*Janitor*

Juan E. Escobar  
*Counselor*

Julio Martinez  
*Group Leader*

Karla Quintero  
*Group Leader*

Lindsay A. Huff  
*Instructor*

Marybel Joven  
*Asst. Coordinator*

Mavie A. Bravo  
*Assistant Teacher*

Niladri N. Bagchi  
*Chief Financial Officer*

Nilda Sanchez  
*Admin. Assistant*

Nora F. Ocampo  
*Administrative Assistant*

Patricia Anthony  
*Instructor*

Patricia L. Cunas  
*Group Leader*

Ramon S. Ortiz  
*Janitor*

Roberto Cabanas  
*Counselor*

Rouxana D. Pellicier  
*Program Coordinator*

Sonia Cordero  
*Outreach Worker*

Stephanie Crespo  
*Group Leader*

Violeta Vergara  
*Group Leader*

Yenny Pestana  
*Group Leader*

## Bundles of Joy

Carrie Puglisi Lara  
*It's a Boy!*

Mayra Jimenez  
*It's a Girl!*

Michele Gonzalez  
*It's a Boy!*

Raymond Tavarez  
*It's a Girl!*

Silvia Aguirre  
*It's a Girl!*



A Special Farewell To  
Niladri Bagchi  
We Wish You a Happy and  
Healthy Retirement



## Topics of the Quarter

### Health Insurance Renewals

La Casa underwent an extensive review and renewal process and decided to maintain its current health and insurance policies with Horizon Blue Cross/Blue Shield and Aetna Dental. The life insurance carrier was changed to Mutual of

Omaha. All policies became effective on July 1, 2010.

### 401K New Enrollments

A total of 5 employees enrolled in the 401K program in the past quarter.



**La Casa's Board of Directors pose for a group picture at NJPAC.**

***La Casa Es Su Casa (continued from page 1)***

Treasurer and CEO of City National Bank, Louis Prezeau. Mr. Bagchi was presented with a unique and fitting plaque created by children from Glass Roots and using as the model, a mosaic made by La Casa's children depicting La Casa headquarters and our community.

# La Casa de Don Pedro

Raymond Ocasio, *Executive Director*

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Zoraya Lee-Hamlin  
*President*

Richard W. Roper  
*Vice President*

Louis E. Prezeau  
*Treasurer*

Jesus Mercado, Jr.  
*Secretary*

Bellaria Jaramillo  
*Finance & Asset Management  
Committee*

Dan Czemiawski  
*Finance & Asset Management  
Committee*

Juan Carlos Ruiz  
*Policy/Planning Committee*

Lanny Kurzweil, Esq.  
*Resource Development, Policy  
Planning and Board Governance  
Committee*

Donna Lorenzo  
*Resource Development and Policy  
Planning Committees*

Ivette Mendez  
*Resource Development and Policy  
Planning Committees*

Rosalind Murphy  
*Finance & Asset Management and  
Resource Development Committee*

Maria Ortiz  
*Board Governance and Policy  
Planning Committees*

Gloria Ramos  
*Chair, Board Governance and  
Executive Committee*

Rita Robles-Navas  
*Board Governance and Policy  
Planning Committees*

Nicholas Scalera  
*Finance & Asset Management  
and Policy Planning Committees*

Gail P. Stone  
*Chair, Resource Development  
Committee*

Kenneth Zimmerman  
*Policy/Planning Committee*

Richard T. Thigpen  
*Resource Development Committee*

Kenneth H. Zimmerman  
*Policy Planning Committee*

# La Casa de Don Pedro

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# La Casa de Don Pedro

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