

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: Ray Ocasio

This past year had its ups and downs. Starting in the aftermath of the fire at 75 Park and followed by disappointment performance in some programmatic areas and a threat to our dominant position assisting families with energy issues.

At the same time we had some exhilarating highlights. The rebuilding of 75 Park, the opening of the new early childhood center, the completion of the Lower Broadway Neighborhood Plan, of new and exciting funding sources and continued support from traditional friends. We continue to help people find work and adjust to their changing and challenging lives. When we get knocked down, we reemerge better than ever. We do not quit easily. We saw old friends

leave and excellent people have joined our growing family. Today we are 170 in all. Many of you have heard me speak of wanting to see La Casa go from a "good" to a "great" organization. Whether or not we have gotten to that point is not important, striving to reach that level is what matters.

The peak of performance lies in the quality of service we provide the community. The quality of service we provide is measured by everything we do and don't do. How we greet people on the phone, how we respond to their concerns, treat the children entrusted to us, or the thousands of other things we all do each and every day. I received a letter from someone who came to us for help and was moved enough by her experience to comment. The writer speaks of her homelessness and despair. She was apprehensive about asking for help and

admitted to being "rude and sarcastic" on the phone, wanting other to feel as bad as she felt. The writer continued, "I don't know how she knew what I was going through...the thoughts in my mind...not good ones" that were formulated during moments of desperation, disorientation and frustration. What she found at La Casa was warm, caring attention as well as assistance and encouragement. That is what makes La Casa and each of us "great"; our endless compassion, caring, and doing for others.

Therein lies the secret of the "greatness" that we should all be aspiring for... providing comfort for those who need it, providing assistance when others are in need, providing the knowledge and skills so that others can be self-sufficient, providing encouragement so that others can go on to change what needs to be repaired and to stake out their claim to

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One Thousand Toys

When Fund Development collected the names of over 1,000 children of our participants who were in need of a holiday toy, there was worry about fulfilling the need. We wanted to come through for all of our divisions 100% this year, but 1,000 toys??! It didn't seem possible. But the holiday spirit, prevailed as individuals and organizations from a variety of places came together with incredible ease and grace. We had some assistance from our friends and neighbors at MBNA, Mormax Company, Violator Management, Parsippany High School, Verizon, The Hispanic Federation, Deputy Mayor Jeanette Ramos' office and Telemundo.

These donations were generous, but the La Casa family felt we could do more. Large collection boxes were placed in each La Casa center and slowly our staff began to drop off toys. By December 1, La Casa employees donated approximately 250 toys. This year is the first time we have centralized our toy collection and asked staff to donate to our efforts and we were overwhelmed by everyone's generosity! Thanks to everyone, we met our goal and 1,000 children in La Casa's family had a merrier Christmas.



Wrapping gifts for the children.



Greetings From Our Resource Development Chair

As we start 2005, La Casa de Don Pedro embarks on its most exciting year yet. With more high quality programs than ever before, serving unprecedented numbers of Newark's citizens, we anticipate a year that is busy, progressive and successful. 2004 provided us with ample preparation for the year to come. We overcame a serious fire and the early childhood program that is stronger than ever. We developed an award-winning business plan for La Olla commercial catering, our next social entrepreneurial venture. In the midst of this work, La Casa helped record numbers of Essex County residents endure the bitter winter by providing home energy assistance.

As the Chairman of the Resource Development Committee (RDC), my job is to facilitate the Board of Director's role in attracting the resources necessary to carry out La Casa's mission. Specifically, my role requires me to formulate fund raising goals and action plans in order to support La Casa's goals and objectives and present these proposals to the Board for approval. Our committee works with the Executive Director and fund development staff to define the short-term and long-term fund raising and marketing needs; to help plan funding activities for the Board; to educate the Board on techniques related to fund development, donor cultivation, and solicitation; and to encourage the participation of the full Board in fundraising.

After the success of our 30th Anniversary Dinner and Concert function, the RDC decided to institute an annual event. Combining the success of an annual dinner with the community appeal of a concert, we chose to alternate those two functions on a yearly basis. The focus of the dinner is as a fundraising activity while the concert will be priced and targeted as more of a community-building event. Consequently, 2005 will see the launch of our Annual Event, "A Night in the Park" taking place at Nanina's in the Park. This venue is located in La Casa's backyard of North Newark and will take place on Thursday, April 28th, prime cherry blossom season in the park. The event will be an exciting night, recalling the days of 'park theater' when our urban parks served as the primary diversion from every day concerns. The entertainment will include activities such as jugglers, Tarot readers, minstrels, magicians, jesters and, of course, card tricks strolling from dinner table to dinner table.

Ralph Izzo, President and COO of PSE&G has already signed on as the Chair of this terrific event, and we're signing on additional sponsors right now. We also hope to get participation from individuals interested in supporting La Casa through this event and invitations will be mailed out in March. If you are interested in getting involved with this event, please contact Alle Ries, Director of Program and Fund Development at 973-482-8312 ext. 536 or Aries@lacasanwk.org.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish everyone a happy New Year and hope to see you on April 28th.

Charles Grossman,
Chairman of the Resource Development Committee

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the good life in an environment that offers a meaningful quality of life.

Clearly it is you, the employees of La Casa that will make the organization a great one! And if one should need acknowledgement, let me return to our grateful participant; "Thank you for the services provided, ...people were very kind and humane with me ... I have to be thankful toward your agency and staff...I'm very happy with La Casa de Don Pedro and their help. I don't know if someday I will need more assistance, but I'm sure that I will feel comfortable because La Casa de Don Pedro has good people with great hearts.

Let me challenge all of you to express your "great heart" in everything you do and I can assure you, La Casa de Don Pedro will be the "great organization".

Grants, Awards & Recognition

- La Casa's Early Childhood Education Division received Newark's Annual Immunization Award for keeping the Immunization Rate 100% for three consecutive years.
- Hispanic Directors Association-Abbott Outreach Initiative
- Prudential Building Neighborhood Assets for capacity building (multi-year grant)
- Bank of America's Neighborhood Excellence Initiative, Neighborhood Builder Award (multi-year grant)
- Citigroup Foundation, for Community Development Work
- Chase Foundation, for Community Development Work
- Kraft Corporation's Salsa Sabor y Salud Program for nutritional well-being
- Lucent Foundation's Newark Youth Leadership Program for local high school students
- Schumann Fund for New Jersey, for FACES Program
- Washington Mutual for Community Development Work

A New Center Is Commemorated

On November 30, 2004, La Casa de Don Pedro hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony for a cutting edge early childhood education center located on First Street. Many supporters spoke at the ceremony about the importance of high quality early childhood education— Michael Rubinger, President of Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), Arthur Ryan, CEO of Prudential, Marion Bolden, Superintendent of Newark Public Schools, Cecilia Zalkind Executive Director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, Newark’s Mayor, Sharpe James, Congressman Robert Menendez, Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo and Raymond Ocasio, Executive Director of La Casa de Don Pedro (all of whom are pictured above).



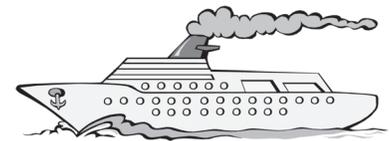
The First Street Center, La Casa’s third early childhood development center, is a redevelopment project with seven classrooms, a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen, a large multipurpose room, and a teacher’s resource room. The center was developed by Don Pedro Development Corporation and constructed by LC HomeBuilders for La Casa who will operate it using the Newark Public School curriculum. The project could not have been completed without development financing from Greater Newark & Jersey City LISC, New Jersey Community Capital and Wachovia. First Street’s center accommodates 105 children, bringing the total number of children enrolled in La

La Casa Dances on the Hudson

The Hudson River hosted more than 200 staff, board, and family members of La Casa de Don Pedro on Monday, December 20, 2004. Aboard the Spirit Cruises for a three- hour tour of New York City, the La Casa crew stole the night in their dancing shoes. This holiday dinner included a night of fun for everyone— dining, dancing, sightseeing and entertainment. The evening offered La Casa a chance to mingle with new and established faces and to celebrate another year of dedicated work.



Judy Gonzalez and Enid Mendez from Administration pause from dancing to pose for a photo.



La Casa Keeps Our Community Healthy with Project Vaccinate

La Casa de Don Pedro begins its fourth year of collaboration with the City of Newark’s Department of Health “Project Vaccinate” immunization case management program.

This ongoing effort provides funding for La Casa to provide infants and their families with immunization case management services and education. La Casa also collects children’s immunization data from physicians for the New Jersey Immunization Information System. Project Vaccinate staff have case managed nearly 800 children; providing home visits, immunization assessments, reminder calls, reminder letters, transportation to and from the doctor and other social/health related services.

Project Vaccinate collaborating partners include Newark Emergency Services for Families, Eliza Corporation., Horizon Blue Shield/Cross of NJ, UMDNJ, Essex Metro Immunization Coalition and the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services Immunization Program.

In 2004, La Casa’s Project Vaccinate Program helped more than 50 children obtain health insurance. We assisted expecting moms like Josephine Brito, who came to La Casa when she was 3 months pregnant. “If it wasn’t for Project Vaccinate I wouldn’t know when my son’s

shots were due. You guys have helped me with everything! Thanks to you guys Julian is getting his shots on time”.

“We are very grateful,” says one couple that just gave birth to their first son; “We received important information and, thanks to Project Vaccinate, our son has insurance. “The other great thing is that they remind us when the babies shots are due,” says, Rigoberto Irrizarry and Vanessa Morales, parents of Elijah Irizarry.

Immunization initiatives like Project Vaccinate contributed to the recent increase in Newark’s immunization coverage rate for children ages 19-35 months (see chart).

Between 2002 and 2003, the rate for the 4-3-1-3-3 series increased from 57.5% to 72.7%.

For additional information please contact Sheria Sobers at 973-485-0701 ext.102.



Catherine Cuomo-Cecere, Director of Newark’s Department of Health and Human Services and Ray Ocasio pose with a program parent.

SHOT TYPE	CHILDREN VACCINATED IN 2002	CHILDREN VACCINATED IN 2003
4 Dtap	65%	79%
3 Polio	85%	88%
1-MMR	89%	92%
3-HIB	90%	92%
3-HEP B	87%	93%

Source: Newark Department of Health and Human Services (CDC NIS 2002 and 2003)

Youth and Family Services Division

Seasonal Happenings

In November 2004, the children at Youth and Family Services visited Ort Farms. The children had the opportunity to go on a hayride, pick pumpkins, feed the farm animals, and enjoy farm fresh apple cider and apples from the farm. The following month, the children enjoyed making gingerbread houses and taking a trip to the PNC Arts Center that included: ice skating, hot chocolate, a 'Holiday of Lights' show, pine cone collecting for holiday projects, and a Secret Santa gift exchange.

Staff Trainings

Six staff members of the after school program attended the New Jersey School-Age Care Coalitions annual conference, entitled "What's on the Menu for Afterschool?" On November 12 and 13 at the Doral Conference Center in Princeton, fifty-two workshops on diverse issues of interest to individuals providing programs for children during their out-of-school time were offered. According to Conference Chairman Dennis Groomes, over 540 participants attended the event. In addition, the Youth and Family Services Department will be collaborating with NJSACC to provide training on January 31, 2005 from 10:00am-2:00pm. The training topic will be "activity planning."



A New Season for the Newark Youth Leadership Program (NYLP)

The 2004-05 schoolyear ushered in a new class of NYLP students, and this year's group happens to be all female. In November, the students visited two New Jersey college campuses: Ramapo College and Farleigh Dickinson University. In December, they completed a very successful warm clothing drive, which benefited participants

of La Casa's Housing Assistance Program and the Salvation Army. In addition, these eager young minds helped in the Three Kings Celebration, held by "Newark, Three Kings Celebration, Inc." (Quintana's Office) at Essex County College on Wednesday, January 5, 2005. In February, the NYLP students will begin their "Stand and Deliver" sessions, a program to enhance the public speaking skills of youth.

Provider Training

The Family Day Care Providers Network is a component of the FACES/Success By Six Program. The Network has formed the Senior Mentor's Network, a group composed of members who have been involved in the childcare field and with La Casa de Don Pedro for many years. The Senior Network offers mentoring and support to recently registered providers. Members of the Senior Network assist with facilitating group meetings, technical assistance, and workshops on child development and other pressing topics.

On November 9 and 10th, 2004, FACES in collaboration with Programs for Parents, held a two-day pre-registration training, in which 23 candidates participated in classroom instruction and two site visits to the provider's Family Day Care centers. The State requires that individuals pre-register in order to obtain their certificate of registration as family Day Care providers. In order to expand the quality of childcare services offered in the North End of Newark, FACES aims to service over 100 candidates on their waiting list by June 2005!



On October 9th, 2004, the Family Day Care Providers Network enjoyed a day of apple and pumpkin picking at Terhune Farms located in Princeton, NJ.

Community Development Division



Community Development Participants Honored

More than 75 residents who are active with the

Community Development Division attended a Christmas celebration on December 14, 2004. The party was held “potluck style” and several critical activists were recognized and honored.

Get Out The Vote

Thank you to the more than 40 volunteers from La Casa who assisted with the November Get Out the Vote push. We touched over 3,000 residents in the target area, encouraging residents to exercise their right to vote.

Personal Development Division

Resources for Job Seekers

The Personal Development Division offers jobseekers who need access to the internet a valuable resource. The Independent Job Search Station located in the Personal Development Division’s lower level can be utilized by anyone undertaking an independent job search. This station is not staffed by personnel, however a list of job-search websites is posted in the room. Individuals interested in using the station should be familiar with the internet. Individuals must register with the reception office on the second floor of 39 Broadway before being admitted to the Job Search Station.

La Casa Launches a New Program

The Homeless Prevention Program works with TANF clients who receive temporary housing subsidies known as Temporary Rental Assistance [TRA]. Since this subsidy is only temporary, La Casa provides intensive case management – setting concrete goals with clients so they will have permanent housing once the subsidy ends. We hold workshops for clients that cover topics such as personal budgeting, tenant rights, domestic violence, and affordable housing alternatives.

Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Celebrates Young Explorers Program

La Casa de Don Pedro’s preschoolers demonstrated their growing technology skills during a recent press conference celebrating a unique partnership between IBM, United Way of Essex and West Hudson and La Casa. Special guests Maria Vizcaronda–DeSoto president of the United Way of Essex and West Hudson, Martin Laird from IBM, Deputy Mayor. Ron Rice and City Councilmen Charles Bell and Hector Corchado looked on as the three and four year-old students played on colorful computer learning centers called Young Explorers. With a computer made by IBM, software created by The Learning Company and furniture created by Little Tykes, these centers make learning computer skills easy and fun for young students. IBM has



Martin Laird from IBM, and Early Childhood Education Director Martha Villegaro watch as students play on the Young Explorer System.

donated over 700 of these students throughout New Jersey, and the United Way facilitates the distribution process to local early childhood centers. La Casa currently has two of the learning centers and will be receiving 2 more this year.

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La Casa Co-Hosts Teacher Recruitment Fair

Over 120 bilingual would-be teachers crowded into the Robeson Student Center at Rutgers University in October to learn more about becoming early childhood teachers and finding a job. There is a critical shortage of bilingual teachers across the state, an issue of particular importance to Latino children whose first language, in many cases, is Spanish. As a result, The Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey (HDANJ) asked La Casa to hold a teacher recruitment fair to link potential employers, school districts and community education centers, with teacher candidates. An emphasis is also placed on informing teacher candidates about the certification process.

In the last two years, HDANJ has identified 540 prospective teachers through a total of 6 recruitment fairs. La Casa's event was a huge success, drawing prospective candidates from throughout the Newark and New York area. Interested candidates can get valuable information about the teacher certification process by logging onto HDANJ's website, www.hdanj.org or by calling them at 732-828-7606.



La Casa's Students Celebrate the Holidays with Song, Dance, Television, and Theater

Students enrolled in La Casa's Early Childhood Education programs were quite busy entertaining for the 2004 holiday season. Cisco Baez from the Administrative office was transformed into Santa Claus for a Christmas Show with the students at the 75 Park Center. Marlene Cruz's classroom rehearsed their performance of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer for over a month. Their performance also included a bachata dance to El Burrito Sabanero, while parents attended to celebrate Christmas with refreshments and presents.

For Three Kings Day, students at the First Street Center participated in a storytelling with Liz Gonzalez from Telemundo Channel 47, which aired on January 4, 2005. All of the children enrolled in La Casa' Early Education Program received toys this year from a variety of sources, including La Casa's staff, MBNA, Mormax Company, Parsippany High School, Verizon, and Deputy Mayor Jeanette Ramos' office.

Community Improvement Division

Universal Service Fund Eases Traffic at 317 Roseville

The Home Energy Program received over 6,000 applications as of November 1, and December 31, 2004, mostly through the mail instead of in-person. In the past, applicants would flood La Casa's 317 Roseville center. However, now that Home Energy applicants can use the same form for their program as the Universal Service Fund, the amount of in-person applications has decreased, freeing the staff to process applications. Once an application is completed with La Casa's Home Energy program, the individual is automatically enrolled in the Universal Service Fund, which is a program established by the Board of Public Utilities to forgive arrearage.

The Universal Service Fund places a participant on a payment plan to meet heating expenses. The Home Energy Program anticipates an application increase of up to 5% because of this program, which will be available all year round. Alternatively, Home Energy accepts applications

between November 1, 2005 and April 30, 2005. The State of New Jersey developed a new database to accommodate these changes. As a result of implementing this new system, some delays are occurring in check processing. Please be patient!

Residents Seek Weatherization Program

The waiting list for weatherization assistance has gone up from 90 to 130 applications. This jump in the waiting list is due to a general lack of funding. Essex County residents who are income eligible may receive assistance weatherizing their homes. For more information, tenants and homeowners may call Marisol Santana at 973-485-0701.





Board Spotlight, Zoraya Lee-Hamlin

For Zoraya Lee-Hamlin, serving her community is part of her birthright and a commitment she is passing down to her own children. She is the second generation of the Lee family to work with La Casa.

Lee-Hamlin's mother, Rosa Lee

was the first director of the Hispanic Women's Resource Center (HWRC) in North Jersey, over fifteen years ago. Mrs. Lee left La Casa two legacies, first, legislation securing permanent funding for the HWRC and second, instilling a sense of commitment to the community in her daughter. "Zoraya wanted to go into business like her father," said Mrs. Lee. "She saw me doing social service work and realized that it was worthwhile and very needed work."

Since her days at Rutgers School of Management in Newark, Zoraya Lee-Hamlin has dedicated her career to advancing nonprofit organizations. For example, she chose to accept an offer at the Urban League of Essex County (ULEC) over a more lucrative opportunity with a large corporation. She was invited onto La Casa's Board of Directors during this time to bring the perspective of other Newark service providers. Throughout her tenure at the ULEC, Lee-Hamlin honed her skills in fund development, specializing in unique events as well as marketing, evaluation systems and administration that eventually led to her appointment as the Interim President/CEO. She moved onto the National Urban League where her public policy responsibilities included bridging the digital divide in urban communities by developing computer labs, creating employment opportunities in partnership with corporations

and delivering financial literacy skills to Urban League constituents.

As a member of La Casa's Board of Directors, Lee-Hamlin recognized that La Casa was at the vanguard of community development work and encouraged the organization to join other progressive nonprofits around the country in the arena of social entrepreneurship. She supported La Casa's general contracting venture, LC HomeBuilder. In 2002, she was named President of La Casa's Board of Directors.

In her role as President, Lee Hamlin has sought to help La Casa diversify and grow its funding sources, "As President, I have really continued the work my mother taught me, fulfilling my responsibilities to my community." She sees social entrepreneurship ventures as a key strategy for La Casa's ongoing development and growth. In addition, she has encouraged more proactive board engagement in fund development strategies including individual giving, 'friend-raising' and utilizing personal networks to heighten La Casa's profile and database of donors.

With a young son and daughter at home, Lee-Hamlin chose to pursue business ventures that were closer to home and her family. As she notes, "many of my day-to-day decisions are centered around managing my business as well as my family". Her consulting business, RayZo Management was "born out of my experiences in marketing, strategic planning and consulting for entities both non-profit and for-profit." Commitment to family and a social conscious with an entrepreneurial flair come together to guide Zoraya Lee-Hamlin's work as both a volunteer and a businesswoman.

The 2004 Holiday Season Was Bountiful

For this holiday season, many efforts came together to ensure happy holiday meals for La Casa's families struggling through the winter. In the days before Thanksgiving, Sheria Sobers organized a food basket giveaway through donations from Americhoice. Because of her organizational mastery and many La Casa staff volunteers, 250 food baskets were distributed at the North Reform Church. Employees from MBNA's Newark branch also created and donated 50 beautifully prepared and wrapped Thanksgiving food baskets. These baskets were equally distributed between La Casa's five divisions and given to La Casa's families most in need this season.

The Christmas season brought additional bounty for La Casa participants. Coors and The Hispanic Federation generously donated the resources to assemble 400 food baskets. Working with 35 volunteers from MBNA, Seton Hall, and Celebrity Detective Agency, these baskets were assembled and distributed to families most in need over four days.

On behalf of the La Casa families, senior citizens and disabled participants, we thank Americhoice, the Celebrity Detective Agency, Coors, the Hispanic Federation, MBNA and Seton Hall for offering their time and resources to make this year's holiday celebration more festive for so many families.



A family picking up their holiday basket poses with La Casa's Executive Director, Ray Ocasio, the Hispanic Federation's Executive Director, Lillian Rodriguez-Lopez and two volunteers from Coors.

By the way....

NEW STAFF

Community Building

Ivelles De Leon joined the team as an Economic Builder.

Vivian Rivera is employed as Data Processor.

Early Childhood

Walter Atkinson, Sonia Baez, Gracite Blanco and Blanca Herrera all joined the Early Childhood team while Dominga Vazquez was promoted from Assistant Teacher to Group Teacher.

Youth and Family

Welcome to the new FACES Parent Educator, Luz Mayor, Youth and Family Counselor, Michelle Vargas and Domestic Violence Counselor, Karina Viera. Yulitza Candelario was recently promoted from FACES Administrative Assistant to Housing Counselor, Glenda Andrade was promoted from part-time classroom Instructor to FACES Administrative Assistant and Ysaura Fernandez was promoted from Housing Counselor to FACES Social Worker.

Fantastic college students completing their internships:

Juan Moreno, a senior at Kean University, and Diane Martinez, a senior at Rutgers University. Both interns are majoring in Social Work.

Personal Development Division

Gloria Garcia-Gonzalez recently joined the Homelessness Prevention Program and Grace Wright joined the STEPS Program staff.

CONGRATULATIONS

- Sodette Plunkett gave birth to her first child, Jaden in November.
- John Singh became a father again in December with the arrival of Ricky James Singh
- Lisselote Rivera from Community Improvement recently purchased her first home.
- Ysura Fernandez recently married and is now proudly known as Ysaura Rivera.

UPCOMING EVENTS

School board elections will be held on April 19, 2005. These elections offer parents an opportunity to have a say in their children's educational future. For more information please call 973-733-7333.

SEEKING TUTORS

Deputy Director of the Personal Development Division, Carlos Mercado, is looking for tutors to teach the reading of writing of English for a low literacy class held during the day. He is also looking for a math tutor for the GED program. Carlos can be reached at 973-481-4713, ext. 222.

LA CASA ON THE WEB!

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

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Executive Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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