



Face painting by the Early Childhood team is always popular at the annual Festival de la Familia Latina.



La Casa Connection

Winter 2013

IN THIS ISSUE

From the Desk of Ray Ocasio, Executive Director

La Casa recently adopted a new strategic plan for the five year period of 2013 through 2018. We looked to the past and projected the future.

Like previous strategic plans, this plan is ambitious and progressive. With many successes and considerable growth over our 40+ year history, our work has always been about change and growth. At the same time, the strategic planning process required the need for a reality check. The national and local economic situation has continued to drag with its recession longer than anyone anticipated. Our funding, while relatively consistent in dollar terms, has reflected a loss or severe cuts in core programs, with temporal increases in critical fractures in the economy such as foreclosure counseling and stemming blight. Government efforts to spread limited dollars resulted in reduced funding to agencies that were asked for greater efficiency. Yet, even prior to these cuts, funding already failed to cover the real costs of providing services. In response to calls for greater accountability and measurable results, funders demanded "performance measures" that were often unrealistic, particularly during a recessionary period. Our development projects were also caught in the financial whirl. Housing developments, traditional development projects and those designed to arrest foreclosure were short on subsidies,

confronted multiple development obstacles and tighter mortgage lending, as the American Dream of owning a home of one's own was drowning.

Efforts to ride out the poor economy and the changing policy winds resulted in a bit of over extension that tightened La Casa's financial position. For the last several months, La Casa's management and board have been implementing a financial reconfiguration plan. A key objective is to reduce expenditures by cutting back or eliminating programs and projects that drain our resources. As a consequence we are reviewing poor performing and financial burdensome programs with the objective of reducing or eliminating the negative impact. We are delaying the construction of the new buildings of the Broadway Broad Project. We are restructuring our debt and working capital to have more manageable debt and improved liquidity. We will also aggressively pursue our collaborative and individual efforts to enlighten our funding partners to have a better understanding of the implications of ill-conceived and poorly financed programs. Areas such as the need for full funding of the six hours Pre-Kindergarten; the recognition of ill-conceived reimbursement policies, and the mismatch of program funding and outcomes all need to be improved.

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Pathways to Citizenship

Read about our success preparing legal residents to become U.S. Citizens.

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Lessons in Affordable Housing

Despite many odds, La Casa is helping people like Sheronda Rogers achieve the "American Dream" of homeownership.

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Board Members Committed to Public Service

Richard Roper, La Casa Board Member since 2002 and Board President since 2012, is a well-known and highly respected figure in New Jersey's public service sector.

From working for federal, state, and local government, including serving as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Commerce under Jimmy Carter, serving for almost ten years at the Port Authority of NY and NJ, retiring as Director of the Planning Department, spending 12 years on staff at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs, to founding several non-profit organizations, Mr. Roper possesses a unique breadth and depth of expertise on a variety of social policy and economic development issues.

With a MA in Public Policy from Princeton University and a BA from Rutgers University, Mr. Roper has made New Jersey his home since coming here as a young adult from Georgia.

Most recently Mr. Roper was appointed to Rutgers University Board of Governors by Governor Christie.



Richard Roper and Iván Arocho

Iván Arocho, La Casa's newest board member is a young professional who since early on has been dedicated to service. In college he volunteered as a missionary around the world, was an adjunct professor and teacher of theology and Spanish, and has volunteered with La Casa since 2010. He is Director of Seton Hall Prep School's Griffin Bridges Program.

Born in Puerto Rico and raised in the Lower Broadway neighborhood of Newark's North End, Mr. Arocho has a BA in Secondary Education from Seton Hall University and a MA in Theology. He is currently pursuing a second Master's Degree in Public Administration. Ivan credits his success to the example, love and tenacity of his parents.

La Casa is in solid hands with well-seasoned professionals and engaged and energetic young professionals to help guide and govern the organization to the future.

A Fresh Look at 317 Roseville Ave

Our home energy center located at 317 Roseville Avenue has a fresh new look just in time for the 2013-14 energy season! Over the summer months the center underwent a major maintenance makeover and now offers attractive information bulletin boards and a flat screen television for the waiting room, a new heating and cooling system, and an updated kitchen. A volunteer staff committee came forward to help guide the project design and color selections.

"This has been an extraordinary effort. Our center is looking better now than ever before," says Norma Sessa, Community

Improvement Division Director. "The new look is welcoming, comfortable and more accommodating. A number of our clients have shared how much they like the changes."

Last year La Casa provided home energy assistance to 39,000 Essex County residents and weatherized more than 700 homes. The 2013-14 energy season began October 1, 2013 with applications accepted through April 30, 2014.



Home Energy Assistance Program applicants in our updated waiting area at Roseville Avenue await consultation from our Home Energy Assistance staff.

RECENT GRANT AWARDS ROUND -UP

- USCIS grant for citizenship preparation.
- Center for Hispanic Policy, Research & Research Development grant to provide mental health counseling for children and their families.
- NJ Department of State Office of Faith Based Initiatives grant to support La Olla kitchen into a social venture.
- LISC and City of Newark partnership grant to support resident engagement.
- The County of Essex Department of Economic Development, Training and Employment, Division of Training and Employment Workforce Investment Act Out-of-School grant to assist young adults prepare for the GED.
- The Hispanic Federation Affordable Care Outreach grant to support ACA education and enrollment.
- Capital One Foundation grant to support Project Restart Housing.
- Bank of America Charitable Foundation grant to support workforce development efforts.
- Prudential Foundation to support the Newark Youth Leadership Program's Summer Learning Initiative.
- NJ Department of Community Affairs to support the Weatherization Program.
- Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development in partnership with National Highway Traffic Safety to help reduce behaviors contributing to motor vehicles traffic crashes in the Latino community.
- PSEG Foundation to support the Family Success Centers.
- Newark Public Schools to serve as Expanded Learning Time Vendor.



Amanda Waters shared her testimony at "Burgers and Brew" in September.

"I am not a celebrity, I am not a paid speaker, and I am not an employee of La Casa. I am just a hard working dedicated mom who had the rug pulled out from under me," says Amanda Waters.

Story of Impact: Amanda Waters

Amanda Waters was laid off from her job along with 900 of her co-workers during the economic downturn. She is a divorcee and mother of two children, one of which at the time of her layoff was entering her senior year in high school with plans to pursue a college education.

Along with 50 million Americans, Amanda was unemployed with no prospects on the horizon. She spent the next several months using all of her savings including the money which had been set aside for college to keep her mortgage current, groceries on the table and the COBRA health insurance premiums current.

When it made sense she walked instead of driving her car, negotiated with all of our home service providers such as telephone and internet for a bare essentials plan and even climbed onto a ladder and cleaned her own gutters. Whenever possible she removed from family budget anything they could do without. Still it was not enough and she quickly found herself falling behind on the utility bills. Her budget could not be stretched any farther. Her utilities were shut off for non-payment and reluctantly she borrowed the money from friends to have them restored.

Scrambling to find a way to keep her utilities on Amanda reached out to La Casa de Don Pedro to see if they knew of a resource for people like herself. Amanda was familiar with La Casa and the services they provide to those in need as she had referred many people to them for help, guidance and information. That phone call to La Casa generated a chain reaction of resources now available to her as a displaced worker, a

homeowner, the recipient of unemployment benefits, and with children in the home. Amanda's income had been drastically reduced for an indeterminate length of time and help was available. With La Casa's help Amanda was able to get assistance with paying her utility bills, received food stamps and had energy saving upgrades installed in her home that included insulation, windows, an energy efficient hot water heater and refrigerator to help keep the cost of our utilities down year round. Since the upgrades, most of the winter months she hasn't needed to turn my thermostat above 68 degrees.

Along my journey, I have shared La Casa's contact information with anyone who could use a little help. The weatherization staff was professional, knowledgeable, and supportive and they followed up every step of the way.

I am not a celebrity, I am not a paid speaker, and I am not an employee of La Casa. I am just a hard working dedicated mom who had the rug pulled out from under me.

- Amanda Waters

FAST FACTS

737

Number of Essex County families who received energy conservation measures to their homes through the Weatherization Assistance Program last year.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about our Home Energy Assistance programs visit: <http://www.lacasanwk.org/programs-and-services/energy-assistance/> or call 973-485-0795.

2013 Special Events Series a Success

More than 4000 people enjoyed La Casa's 2013 Special Events: *La Casa es Su Casa*, *Burgers and Brew*, *Festival de la Familia Latina*, and *National Latino AIDS Awareness Day*.

At *La Casa es Su Casa*, held April 11th at NJPAC Newark Mayor Cory Booker, a community organizer, and aspiring teenage artists showcasing photographs of their neighborhood joined with leaders of greater Newark's businesses, non-profits, and La Casa friends and family. With *Good Day New York* personalities **Mike Woods** and **Ines Rosales** as event emcees, the reception and silent auction proved entertaining and lively.



Mayor Booker with teenage artists at *La Casa es Su Casa*

The sold out inaugural *Burgers and Brew*, hosted by **NBC 4 Anchor/Reporter Pat Battle**, was held September 19th at McLoone's Boathouse in West Orange. Guests enjoyed live music by The Nick Pablo Thang, a magnificent silent auction, unlimited burgers and seasonal brew all alongside a bonfire overlooking the beautiful Orange Reservoir in Essex County South Mountain Reservation.



The Harvest Moon ambiance at *Burgers and Brew* at McLoone's Boathouse

The fundraiser was held in partnership with **The County of Essex**, and a portion of the proceeds will benefit the **Essex County Turtle Back Zoo**, in honor of its 50th Anniversary.

Held in collaboration with the **City of Newark** with Presenting Sponsor **OneMain Financial**, more than 3500 people celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month in late September at the 6th Annual *Festival de la Familia Latina – Latino Family Festival*. Bright blue skies and unseasonably warm weather ensured the event, full of live music, entertainment, food, art and fitness activities, cultural exhibitions and more was one for the history books.



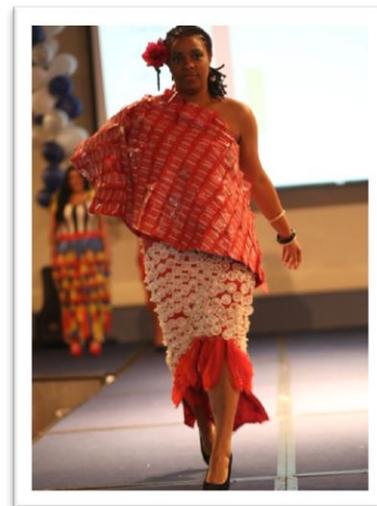
Peruvian dancers at the 6th Annual *Festival de la Familia Latina*

The Special Events Series concluded in October with the first ever "Dress to Impress, Dress to Protect," fashion show on October 18th at the Robert Treat Hotel. The event, held to recognize **National Latino AIDS Awareness Day**, garnered nearly 500 guests and raised awareness about the severity of HIV/AIDS cases in the community.

The high-energy runway event showcased fashions inspired by the colors and dress from eight countries with the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS. The fashions were made primarily from condoms and designed by Newark's Berkeley College Fashion Club and modeled by representatives from local HIV/AIDS agencies.

The Series was made possible by sponsors: Prudential, PSEG, McCarter & English, LLP, North Jersey Federal Credit Union, Popular Community Bank, Verizon, Wells Fargo, and WithumSmith+Brown. City National Bank, Horizon NJ Health, McManimon, Scotland and Baumann, LLC, and PNC Bank were **La Casa es Su Casa** Friend Sponsors. NBC 4 NY and Telemundo Nueva York were *Burgers and Brew* Friend Sponsors. *Festival de la Familia Latina* was made possible by Presenting Sponsor OneMain Financial, Friend Sponsor TD Bank, among other supporters. A grant from **The New Jersey Department of Health, HIV/AIDS, STD and**

TB Services helped support National Latino AIDS Awareness Day.



Fashion Show Contestant at NLAAD

Event photos can be found on La Casa's Flickr album at www.flickr.com/lacasadedonpedro.

JOIN US FOR OUR 2014 SPECIAL EVENTS SERIES

May 1, 2014

La Casa es Su Casa Annual Event

September 2014

Burgers and Brew

September 21, 2014

Festival de la Familia Latina

October 2014

National Latino AIDS Awareness Day

For information about sponsorship opportunities contact Tenisha Malcolm, Fund Development Associate at 973.482.8312.

Connecting the Community to Affordable Health Coverage

Committed to improving health outcomes and reducing health disparities for North Newark residents, our Healthy Living Initiative (HLI) team has been leading efforts to help ensure residents, especially our Spanish speaking neighbors, have access to affordable healthcare coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace established under the Affordable Care Act.

Through support from the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, The Horizon

Foundation for New Jersey and a special affordable care outreach grant from The Hispanic Federation, our HLI team has led 12 free pre-enrollment workshops to close to 250 people. We have also spoken one-on-one with more than 500 people about the health insurance marketplace. La Casa is a Certified Application Counselor organization through the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid, which qualifies us to educate, inform and enroll community members.

La Casa's strategy has always had a grassroots focus; we organize educational events and activities on topics that matter to our constituents, we meet residents where they are, and educate them in a way they can understand. We have also partnered with local agencies such as The Newark Community Health Centers (NCHC). Twice a week a NCHC Navigator visits our 76 Clinton Avenue and 23 Broadway locations to help guide prospective applicants through the enrollment process. Many qualified families

need that extra helping hand and follow up to ensure their applications are processed correctly, and we are there every step of the way.

"We know there are an unsettlingly high number of people unaware of their health care options," says Edward Hernandez, Director of the Youth Family & Health Services Division. "We are thrilled to be one of the agencies in the city that has the ability to engage, inform, and help reduce the barriers people face when signing up for affordable health coverage."

To learn more about the Affordable Care Act, to discuss organizing an information session with your constituents, or to attend an information/open enrollment session please contact Anakaren Millan, Healthy Living Initiative Coordinator at 973.624.4222.

Pathways to Citizenship

Hundreds of people have achieved their dream of becoming U.S. citizens through a two year grant from the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS). The incredibly successful program run by La Casa's Personal Development Division consisted of two parts – naturalization assistance and citizenship preparation classes. The program served 585 permanent residents from 28 countries across the globe. We surpassed our enrollment goals by 130% and to date 88% of our students who have taken the naturalization exam have passed.

A diverse group of people completed the program, from Dominicans and Ecuadorians who together made up more than half of our program participants, to many from Central

and South America and the Caribbean, to a growing number of residents from African countries like Liberia, Cape Verde, South Africa, and Ghana.

Supporting residents to become U.S. citizens is just another way we achieve our mission to foster self-sufficiency, empowerment, and neighborhood revitalization. We look forward to serving more residents through our USCIS citizenship grant renewal and making the community stronger.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Gregory Hodne, Deputy Director, Personal Development Division at 973.481.4713 for assistance.

Letter from the Executive Director Cont.

This corrective action has not diminished La Casa's vision for the future. Our strategic plan has five major goals:

1. Execute an integrated service delivery system that enables constituents to better achieve our mission
2. Strengthen the organizational infrastructure to build capacity to efficiently and effectively manage services, programs, and facilitate day to day operations
3. Become recognized as a practitioner and leader of evidence-based, data driven programs focused on the provision of services responsive to human development and the mission
4. Strengthen fund development to diversify the funding base, advance fiscal well-being and improve the financial position;
5. Undertake meaningful and relevant program activities based on positive, defensible economic foundations

These broad measures, agency-wide and at programmatic levels, all have clear goals, objectives, strategies, timeframes and responsible parties. The strategic plan sets the agenda to continue La Casa's mission to serve a large cross-section of the Newark community and beyond and sets a high bar for excelling in the work we do.

To all who've accompanied La Casa over its many years of service, the strategic plan is clear. La Casa de Don Pedro's work continues, even more committed and relevant than at any time in its history.



Citizenship class students

Lessons Learned on the Labor of Love that is Building Homes People Can Afford

I am blessed to have purchased a home from La Casa de Don Pedro. I had been looking for many years, but it was so hard to find something within my budget that I felt comfortable in. But I found this one, and it was completely renovated, with new appliances and a new heating and cooling system. As a first time home buyer, the home fit my needs and my budget.

– Sheronda Rogers

Since La Casa de Don Pedro's mission expanded to neighborhood revitalization in 1988, we have maintained a consistent pipeline of affordable homeownership projects. Demand for homeownership in our target community of Lower Broadway was always high due to the stability of the neighborhood relative to other areas of Newark. Before the housing crisis we had a waiting list of 500 interested buyers for the 11 homes we built in 2008. While it still required plenty of follow through and home buyer education, there were qualified buyers for our homes, as long as what we built was affordable. Homeownership was still the premier "American Dream".

Since then, that "American Dream" has been on the backburner for most of our constituents. While non-conventional loans like the FHA require only a minimal percent down and there have been a variety of incentives to purchase homes in Newark and other urban communities, the interest has waned. Not only is homeownership more difficult to achieve with the financial constraints people face, but after witnessing the destruction foreclosures have had on families and neighborhoods, many people are simply scared to make the investment. From 2010-2011 just 40 families completed our first time homebuyer class. In 2012 this increased to 85 families, and fortunately, we are optimistic that the tide is starting to turn for the better; as of November 122 families completed our course in 2013.

While there is growing hope, community development corporations like La Casa that build and sell affordable homes face greater challenges than ever before. First, it's a competitive, "buyer's market". Qualified families ready to buy can now be much more

selective about their purchase because homes [including homes outside of Newark] are more affordable and offer greater conveniences such as off-street parking and greater land area. A completely renovated home that lacks a particular amenity on their wish list [such as a hard to come by garage in our neighborhood] isn't as desirable as it was five years ago.

Second, because La Casa is mission-driven, we concentrate our housing efforts with a goal to stabilize the community, so we limit our housing development to our traditional service area and to moderate income households. This means we are more selective where we build our homes.

La Casa and other Community Development Corporations acquired foreclosed housing using funding from the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program. While the number of foreclosed housing in Newark is high, much of it is older housing stock requiring substantial renovation to renew them to provide long term livability. Costly renovation requires substantial subsidies to sell them as affordable housing. Much of the foreclosed housing available to La Casa was among the most deteriorated with serious renovation and redevelopment challenges. Making it more challenging, government subsidies from the Federal, State and City government to reduce the actual costs of housing to make them affordable are currently very limited.

With the depressed buyer interest, tougher lending by the banking sector and limited subsidies, even our attractive and affordable homes are not selling as quickly compared to before the current recession.

La Casa's homes are known in the local industry for our great design and high quality housing with great amenities such as sizeable rooms, high quality cabinetry, hardwood floors and energy efficiency. But this doesn't necessarily ensure our homes will be sold. Even with quality investments, our renovated homes often lack the driveway and garage or the big backyards. Two homes with stunning, quality materials rehabbed in 2012 are still for sale for the current discerning buyer.

There are some lessons we learned. Building and rehabbing homes is always costly, particularly when providing affordable homes for working families. Nevertheless, buyer's demand is subject to needs, taste, location, as well as the economic environment which affects demand, the

availability of mortgage financing and subsidies. These considerations are standard in any development, but they are particularly challenging for affordable housing builders during tough times. For La Casa the decision of where, what, when, and the costs of development will be examined with greater scrutiny. Moving forward La Casa will actively consider limiting for sale homes and look to rental housing. This will require greater efforts and more sophisticated expertise and subsidies.

On the bright side, the Neighborhood Stabilization Program provided just the subsidy needed to advance our new construction project in 2012-2013. When our homes on Mt. Pleasant and Victoria Avenues broke ground, Shalonda Patrick and Sheree Farmer, two of our wait listed folks from back in 2008 were ready to buy, and Sheree benefited from the Wells Fargo CityLIFT, a homebuyer down payment assistance program. Sheronda Rogers was the perfect fit for the two-family attached substantial rehab home on Garside Street.

Another positive light is an affordable homeownership row-house project combined with home improvement program we're developing in partnership with the City of East Orange. We've learned that in the current market knowing the needs of the potential homebuyers, and being smart about marketing and pre-selling our homes is key to successful development.

With all of these challenges, why do we continue building homes people can afford? We're realistic optimists. We do this work because of the Shalondas, Sherees, and Sherondas. There are others just like them waiting for the opportunity to be a homeowner or tenant in Newark, and we plan to be there for them with high quality homes at affordable prices. We will also continue our commitment to building communities that provide a quality of life that individuals and families desire and deserve.



30 MLK Blvd. Rehab Project

Summer 2013 Highlights

Summer at La Casa is always a time of intensified activity. This past summer we had a range of recreational and learning pursuits for children, youth and families. Here's a sampling of what occurred.

Parent-Child Academy Graduation

On June 21st, we graduated our second Parent-Child Academy (PCA) class. Since 2011, the nine month long parenting program has worked with about 120 parents with children ages 0-3. The program educates parents on how to successfully raise their children, while at the same time their children are cared for in a safe and comfortable environment. Ivania Chimbo spoke for the class at the graduation. "As PCA participants we have been enriched by the wisdom and knowledge of our teachers, who patiently taught us to be better parents, many of whom are parents for the very first time. We learned about first aid, proper nutrition, discipline and behavior techniques and more. This was a wonderful experience and I am very grateful to have been a part of it."

Photos from the graduation can be viewed at: www.flickr.com/lacasadedonpedro.



More than twice the number of children attended the Early Childhood Summer Program compared to the year before.

Youth Summer Enrichment Program

124 children ranging from ages 5-17, spent eight eventful weeks in our jam-packed summer enrichment program. The children joined their peers in fun, learning, play and more with activities such as cheerleading, Zumba and arts & crafts. This year La Casa collaborated with local universities and organizations to offer a wider range of unique activities.

Kean University's Department of Occupational Therapy's, PAR FORE NJ

Chapter program in collaboration with The First Tee of Metropolitan New York addressed issues of gang recruitment and involvement by using golf as a tool to teach how to be better students, friends, family and community members.

Montclair State University's Newark-Montclair Urban Teacher Residency Program offered Junior Achievement's financial literacy workshops. The Girl Scout Hearts of New Jersey provided life skill sessions, character development workshops and arts & crafts.

Transforming Lower Broadway: Our Quality of Life Plan

Through a grant from Brick City Development Corporation and the Newark Office of Sustainability our Community Economic Development and Youth, Family & Health Services divisions conducted a tree inventory in North Newark. As a result of the

inventory, 200 new trees will be planted in the area, including a "Cherry Blossom Row" along 7th Avenue.

Summer Health Fair

In early June, La Casa's Healthy Living Initiative hosted a Summer Health Fair at our 23 Broadway Family Success Center. Over 65 participants learned about healthier eating choices, prenatal care, social security benefits, lead poisoning prevention, Medicaid services and more. Health care providers offered free testing and screenings for glucose and blood pressure, HIV testing, glaucoma and more.

Photos can be viewed at:

www.flickr.com/lacasadedonpedro



The summer health fair offers important health services in under-served communities.

Each year our summer programming is unique and offers plenty of excitement and learning. We look forward to another successful and adventurous summer next year!



PCA Graduate with her son.

Early Childhood Summer Enrollment

More than 170 children attended our early childhood summer enrichment and literacy program, more than double from the year before, thanks to the availability of state funds, parent outreach and support from our family workers.

Over an eight week period the youngsters participated in a variety of fun recreational activities including dance lessons from Premiere Dance Theater, outdoor picnics, arts & crafts and more.

JOIN OUR SOCIAL NETWORK

 "LIKE" US ON FACEBOOK

 FOLLOW US @LACASANWK

#GIVINGTUESDAY™

Join in the Celebration of Giving

***We have a day for giving thanks.
We have two for getting deals
...and we have
#GivingTuesday™ for giving
back to the community!***

On December 3rd La Casa de Don Pedro, among 5000+ partners around the world jump started the holiday season with #Giving Tuesday™, a national movement that inspires people to take collaborative action to improve their local communities and give back in better, smarter ways during the holiday season.

If you haven't already made your contribution to #GivingTuesday, it's not too late! We're still accepting donations. Thank you.

TO MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION

Donate online at www.lacasanwk.org/news-and-events/givingtuesday/ or with the enclosed donation envelope. Contact Tenisha Malcolm at 973.483.8312 or tmalcolm@lacasanwk.org for more information.

You and/or your company can help us meet our #GivingTuesday goals to:

- Raise \$10,000 to support our programs and services
- Fulfill holiday toy wishes for 1,000 children
- Provide holiday dinners for 500 families in need
- Fulfill wishes for our community centers.

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A QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER FOR
FRIENDS OF LA CASA
DE DON PEDRO