



The BRIDGE

east bay community action program

THE BRIDGE to SELF-RELIANCE

Volume 14 • Winter 2010

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Newport Skills Alliance Brings Together Job Seekers, Employers

by David Howard

In a state which has seen its unemployment rate reach over 12%, the highest in Rhode Island in almost 20 years, and one of the highest in the country, the Newport Skills Alliance (NSA) is taking aim at that number, with the hopes of training and preparing Newport County residents for the world of work and the personal success that can engender.

NSA, a program of East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP), is an interagency partnership that includes the Rhode Island Department of Education, Community College of Rhode Island and the Governor's Workforce Board RI. NSA is supported by over three dozen businesses, education, government and social service organizations.

It's a program that has been solidly researched and planned, recognizing that in order to succeed, the right balance of job applicants and employers needing workers must be established.

And while the high unemployment in the state is daunting, it also presents an outstanding opportunity for an alliance-driven workforce development to bring together employers and both unemployed and underemployed workers for high demand jobs.



PRACTICE SESSION: Students enrolled in the Newport Skills Alliance (NSA) Certified Nurse Assistant class practice patient care. From left to right are: Celeste Clairmont, Bonita Fowlkes and Kerri Marshall. (Photo by Elizabeth Lombard)

Liz Lombard, the Newport Skills Alliance Director, said recently that one of her immediate goals is working closely with the Newport County industry partners. "The more engaged they are in creating program plans and training/education course designs, the more committed they will be to insuring success in job attachment, retention and advancement."

She notes that "NSA was created and designed to complement the existing workforce development efforts and not be viewed as an alternative." The goal is to meet employer needs for high demand jobs with qualified candidates. Even before this, though, the NSA set about to research the job market in order to enable the region's job seekers to stay on Aquidneck Island. Data showed that most vacancies were in the healthcare/long term care, hospitality, banking, marine and manufacturing sectors with specific positions such

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Many of us are watching with interest and some concern, the debate in the U.S. Congress over health care reform. Of special interest here at East Bay Community Action Program was the funding the new health care bill would provide for community health centers such as the ones we operate in East Providence and Newport.

As the parameters of the bill seemed to change hourly, community health center funding received an unexpected, but certainly welcome boost courtesy of U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, (Independent of Vermont), who as one of the votes the majority Democratic Party needed to assure passage in the Senate, requested and received an amendment to the bill for an allocation of \$10 billion for community health care centers throughout the country.

Sen. Sander's amendment will face another test as House and Senate committees get together to come up with a compromise bill that will need to pass both the House and Senate. But there is a positive feeling that at least some of the funding will remain as part of the new legislation.

We are optimistic that our Health Centers will receive additional funding after the passage of Health Care legislation. This funding would expand access to the uninsured residents of our state who are presently estimated to represent at least 10% of the state's population.

"This will not solve all the problems of the world," Senator Sanders said upon passage of the bill in the Senate. "But expanding access to high quality primary health care, and low-cost prescription drugs, and mental health counseling, and dental care – which is a big issue – this is a very significant step forward. If you walk into a health clinic and you have no insurance at all they will treat you on a sliding scale basis. So, that's affordable healthcare."

The community health centers – officially named federally qualified health centers – were spearheaded in the 1960s through legislation authored by the late Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA). There are now 1,200 of them across the country with over 7,500 satellites. Twenty million Americans utilize these facilities.

Sanders also said his provision would save Medicaid tens of billions of dollars by keeping patients out of emergency rooms and hospitals by providing primary care when they need it.

We at EBCAP will be watching the next steps for health care reform very carefully, and working hard to attract a portion of this new funding to our centers.



DENNIS ROY
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Newport Skills Alliance Brings Together Job Seekers, Employers

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as Certified Nurse Assistants (CNA), food and beverage service providers, bank tellers, boat building (welding, power and steering systems) and hourly manufacturing laborers being available.

Employers involved in the program had specific challenges in retaining entry level employees, and sought work-ready participants with well-developed job skills. They also found that such challenges that prevented employees from staying in jobs such as transportation, child care, needed to be addressed in the program.

It was out of this dual need that the NSA "On Ramp" was built – to prepare job ready work-seekers with access to real jobs. Components such as case management to eliminate obstacles were important to this process.

The program has graduated 49 individuals from on-ramp training – two classes in Long Term Care – Certified Nursing Assistant training and one in Hospitality. Future plans call for a customer service focused On-Ramp this summer which seeks to prepare individuals to enter the workforce across industry sectors, including hospitality, banking, health care and manufacturing.

"One key segment of NSA," Lombard pointed out "is the case management services, provided for our students by Case Manager Lynne Porreca. They are assisted with challenges such as childcare, transportation and housing that can be barriers in job attachment and sustainability."

Many of the program's past students were referred by local agencies such as EBCAP, Lucy's Hearth, McKinney Shelter, Housing Hotline, the Newport Housing Authority and the Martin Luther King Center. "For 2010 On-Ramps, we will continue to recruit from these agencies, but we are also hoping to cast our net wider to include Women's Resource Center, Head Start and Newport Partnership for Families," Lombard explained.

"Our goal is to assist Newport County residents with obtaining job readiness skills, literacy, employment and educational advancement to climb the ladder of success," she added.

Future plans call for expansion to East Providence and Bristol County communities.

Skills Alliance Success Stories

In its short existence, the Newport Skills Alliance already has had some success stories.

Program Director Liz Lombard shared the following: A graduate of one of the LTC-CNA On-Ramp classes retained her employment as a nursing assistant throughout her training and upon completion of training and testing was promoted to a CNA and she continues to work for the same employer. ➤

Lynne Porreca, case manager for the NSA told about Michael, who came to the program with 17 years of experience in the Hospitality industry, specializing in banquets. His goal upon enrollment was to become a Banquet Captain. Two months after NSA completion, he was promoted to that position where he has been employed since 2007. His hours were increased from part time to full time and he received a salary increase. Michael's long term goal is to own his own catering business, a non-profit one which offers training to men and women leaving prison in need of employment skills. Michael plans to attend Community College of Rhode Island and has been referred to the RI Coalition for Minority Investment to begin gathering information necessary for starting one's own business. ➤

Singing Out Against Hunger Hits Highest Note Yet

by Maggie Laurianno

Singing Out Against Hunger (SOAH), Tiverton's annual grassroots effort to raise money and collect food in support of EBCAP's food pantries, reached new heights last September, yielding a \$22,400 gift and a sizeable donation of non-perishable food items for EBCAP.

Since 2003, SOAH has been coordinating this annual weekend musical event, open free of charge to the public, at local restaurants and cafes to raise critical funds.



SOUND CHECK:
A musician performing in one of the morning concerts at Singing Out Against Hunger does a sound check on stage at Evelyn's Drive In, one of the concert venues for this fundraising event. (Photo by Susan Schenck)

As the public attends the musical performances, they are invited to purchase raffle tickets and bid on auction items donated by area merchants, make monetary contributions, and donate non-perishable food items.

SOAH founders, Jane and Domenic Bitto, are co-owners of Evelyn's Drive-In in Tiverton, and they provide one of the venues for the musical performances – their restaurant – along with leadership to the many volunteers who return year after year.

Jane said they don't recruit volunteers. "It is more like sharing SOAH with people, and they are inspired to do 'what they can' and jump on board." She believes this is the secret to SOAH's success. She said "everyone involved in Singing Out Against Hunger does what interests them." This includes music, technical aspects, correspondence, financial matters, golf tournament, auction

donations, selling raffle tickets, set up, even snacks for meetings.

Jane refers to the musicians who provide the entertainment for the annual event as "amazing at just saying YES to participating." She said that in 2003 when she first shared the idea for SOAH with her good friend Kimmy Lamothe. Kimmy volunteered to organize the musicians to play at the venues. Jane believes that the musicians "enjoy sharing their music with others while helping the community at the same time." Kimmy Lamothe still coordinates the musical performances with Brendan Whipple assisting.

In 2008, SOAH introduced a golf tournament to the fundraising efforts, further improving the event's success. The tournament was initiated by Kim Cordeiro and Domenic Bitto. Jane said of the 2009 tournament "this year was

warm and sunny and the golfers looked like they were having the time of their lives." Besides good spirits, it also raised \$7,800.

When asked about their recent success, Jane noted that this year's actual proceeds neared \$25,000, with some of the funds also supporting a Little Compton organization. She credits fundraising success to the many dedicated volunteers and the addition of both the golf tournament and a special event held at Common Fence Music this year which raised more than \$2,000. Good weather also contributed to an excellent turn out at the event.

Jane explains that the idea for SOAH began with a class she had taken in Boston called "Self Expression and Leadership." The class focused on doing something within one's own community. She said "I was inspired by my favorite musician Ben Harper – 'You can change the world with your own two hands'."



SOAH Co-Presidents: Dom and Jane Bitto have served as Co-Presidents of Singing Out Against Hunger since the event began in 2003. (Photo by Evelyn Williams)

And they have set about to change the world. The impact they have had on EBCAP's food pantries is immense. Susan Schenck, EBCAP Chief Operating Officer, said "We would not be able to supply our Newport County food pantries with the types of food that our clients need and deserve without the Singing Out Against Hunger donation. It also supports our Newport County holiday food basket program for households which provides a bountiful holiday meal as well as additional food for the household."

Official plans for the 2010 event will be underway soon, with the first meeting taking place in February. But as Jane notes "everyone's brains are clicking as soon as the event is complete."

2009 SOAH Committee Members include:

Jane & Dom Bitto, Co-Presidents; Lisa Machado, Vice President; Michelle Angell, Treasurer; Gary Fish/Sue Sission, Little Compton Liaisons; Kimberly Lamothe, Music Coordinator; Brendan Whipple, Stage Manager; Kim Cordeiro, Golf Tournament; Justin Reynolds, Audio/Video; Susan Schenck, EBCAP Liaison; Jennifer McCabe, Middletown Liaison; Supportive Members: Gerry Lamothe, Mike Lavoie, John Puniello, Mike Angell, Anna Silva, Fred Souza; Donation Team: Wendy Helger-Wahl, Coordinator; Allison Picard, Ashley Mello.



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Permit #130

The Bridge is published quarterly for friends of East Bay Community Action Program by the Development & Public Relations Department, Susan Schenck, Chief Operating Officer. Editorial: David Howard and Maggie Laurianno.

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www.ebcap.org

Current Resident or:

Bob Rock Brings Police, Social Service Experience to Board

by David Howard

Robert Rock, a member of the East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP) Board of Directors since 1997 brings experience as a police officer and in working with the elderly to the board, a background, he feels, that has prepared him for the many decisions a non-profit board must make.

When he was a member of the East Providence Police Department he spent many years in the community relations program of the department, and in the final years of his police career served as the community relations officer. In that position, Bob, as he is called, worked with several families and organizations in East Providence. "I attended numerous community meetings, and feel I gained a good understanding of the community and its residents in that role," he noted. After retiring from the department, Bob applied for and was named the director of the East Providence Senior Center which opened in 1998, a position he still holds.

"The center and EBCAP work closely together," he said recently, noting that EBCAP's meals for the elderly program is held at the center and that the organization's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) and Foster Grandparent Program have offices in the senior center building. "With 2,700 people coming to the center, and only four full time staff people," he explained, "the RSVP volunteers are a big source of support."

"Without RSVP," Bob said, "our programs would be much more difficult to run, for we have over 100 volunteers from that program helping out here."

Bob has been on the EBCAP board since before the 2004 merger of Self Help, Inc. in East Providence and New Visions for Newport County. "I saw the dramatic growth that the merger brought about, and how successfully it was accomplished," he added.

He sees many advantages to the make-up of EBCAP's board and its mixture of members representing public service, consumer, business, education and minority organizations. "We bring diverse views and different expertise to all of our discussions, and we are given solid information from Dennis (CEO Dennis Roy) and the senior managers to help our decision making." Bob said



EBCAP BOARD MEMBER
ROBERT ROCK

he asks a lot of questions as a board member because it helps him "gain a clearer perspective on the many issues facing the board." He feels the board's diversity is a big advantage in viewing the issues before them.

Bob cited EBCAP's acquisition of the former St. Brendan's Church Convent by EBCAP for permanent housing for the East Bay Coalition for the Homeless and the classrooms of Head Start, as a major board decision. "We discussed the pros and cons of the purchase before approving the proposal."

His experience in 12 years of directing the senior center in East Providence has given him insight into the concerns that affect everyone. "I see the impact today's economy has had on all our lives, and I appreciate even more the work that EBCAP does in our communities."

Bob cites the organization's grant writing skills and success as so important these days. "With funding for programs facing cuts, the need for new grants becomes even more crucial," he said.

He sees, on a daily basis, the work two EBCAP programs accomplish in the senior center he directs. "I know the importance of RSVP and it providing worthwhile opportunities for our elderly residents, as well as the convenience and nutrition the meals program provides to our seniors."

Bob is active in other community organizations and is a member of the Board of Directors of the East Bay Center, the area's mental health counseling organization.

His daughter is a member of the East Providence Police Department and son is a staff member in the office of the Rhode Island Secretary of State. "We have made it a family affair here at the senior center," Bob adds, "as my wife, Madonna, is a volunteer in the center's library."

And his service to EBCAP shows a special commitment as well, one which brings his own special insight and experience as a retired police officer and elderly center administrator to the EBCAP Board of Directors.