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The PHA Experience



Philadelphia Housing Authority
Building Beyond Expectations

Issue 16

A Community Newspaper for and About Residents

March 2008

Ludlow reborn thanks to PHA development

Not very long ago, North Philadelphia's Ludlow section was filled with run down houses and empty lots. Now, PHA has brought Ludlow back to life with sparkling new homes for both buyers and renters. Families began moving into PHA's Ludlow development in February. Like all new PHA sites, 10-20 percent of the homes at Ludlow are handicap accessible — which made it the perfect spot for Cedric Pinckney.



"I really feel like PHA is doin' a good job for the disabled people," says Cedric Pinckney, standing in front of his new home in PHA's Ludlow development.

At 49, Pinckney is disabled with multiple sclerosis. He used to live in the Logan neighborhood and had great difficulty climbing the steps to his apartment there. He fell on three different occasions, and his doctors wanted to hospitalize him. Depression had set in because he could no longer do the things he used to do, such as run, play basketball, play the guitar, and handle his daily living activities.

At his new home on North 7th Street, Pinckney no longer has to climb stairs. Everything is at ground level, and it's easy for him to move from room to room because the house

is fully wheelchair accessible. The 2-bedroom home allows him to have a live-in aide who assists him with his daily living activities.

"I love it. I don't have to worry about slippin' and fallin' any more," he says. "I really feel like PHA is doin' a good job for the disabled people."

Pinckney says he would like to have his grandchildren visit him at his new home and enjoy his life to the fullest, without worrying about falling down ever again.

A New Beginning

Elaine Rembert was also among the first to move into Ludlow.

"I love my new home, I really do. It's a new beginning for me and my children," she says.

Rembert, 45, found out last summer that PHA was taking applications for the new development, and she was

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Making Science Fun Page 03



From Roller Derby to Choir Page 04

PHA student poet wins scholarship to Howard

Monique Fortune is a PHA resident who has set a course to make her dreams a reality. She has a positive attitude and wants to be the best at whatever task she attempts. "I have done over and above what is expected of an African American girl my age," she says proudly.

At first she seems like any other high school student. She likes to have fun,



"You are responsible for your future," says student poet Monique Fortune.

hang around with her friends and dream about what she wants to do with her life. But after you talk with her for a while, you realize that she is different. She is strongly focused on what she wants and knows how to get there, regardless of what may get in the way. Her favorite saying is "don't let your surroundings stop you from achieving greatness" — strong words from a high school senior.

Her unique insight into the realities of her life, in addition to her hard work, helped her win a scholarship to Howard University for writing a poem about where she is from and where she was going. (See page 12). "My past, my heritage or 'where I'm from' has made me who I am today," she explains. "My outlook on life and my goals for the future both were influenced by how I grew up and what I've been through. I see it like this,

(Continued Page 12)

76ers GM has fond memories of PHA

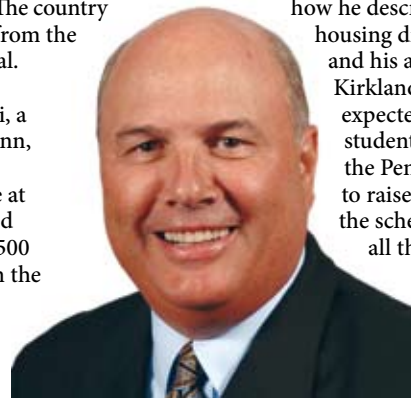
Remember the summer of 1973? Gladys Knight and the Pips were on the "Midnight Train to Georgia." The Phillies were on their way to a 6th place finish. The country was still reeling from the Watergate scandal.

And Ed Stefanski, a sophomore at Penn, was organizing a basketball league at PHA that touched the lives of over 500 children between the ages of 12 to 18.

Today Stefanski is General Manager of the Philadelphia 76ers and spends his time wheeling and dealing with high-price professional basketball players as he tries to build a championship team. But he has

fond memories of the two summers he spent at PHA.

"I was thrown to the wolves," is how he describes the way housing director Tom Kelly and his assistants Dennis Kirkland and John Tatum expected the college students they'd hired off the Penn basketball team to raise the funding, set the schedule and organize all the games for the league.



Philadelphia 76ers GM Ed Stefanski.

The young man found himself in front of the Chairman of the Board of Provident Bank explaining what he was trying to do at PHA.

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Give Your Baby the Best Start.

Start Prenatal Care Today.

Ongoing prenatal care, when started early, can help you have a healthy pregnancy as well as a healthy baby.

Mothers who have early prenatal care are five times more likely to have a healthy baby than those who don't get care.

Keystone Mercy cares about you and the health of your baby.

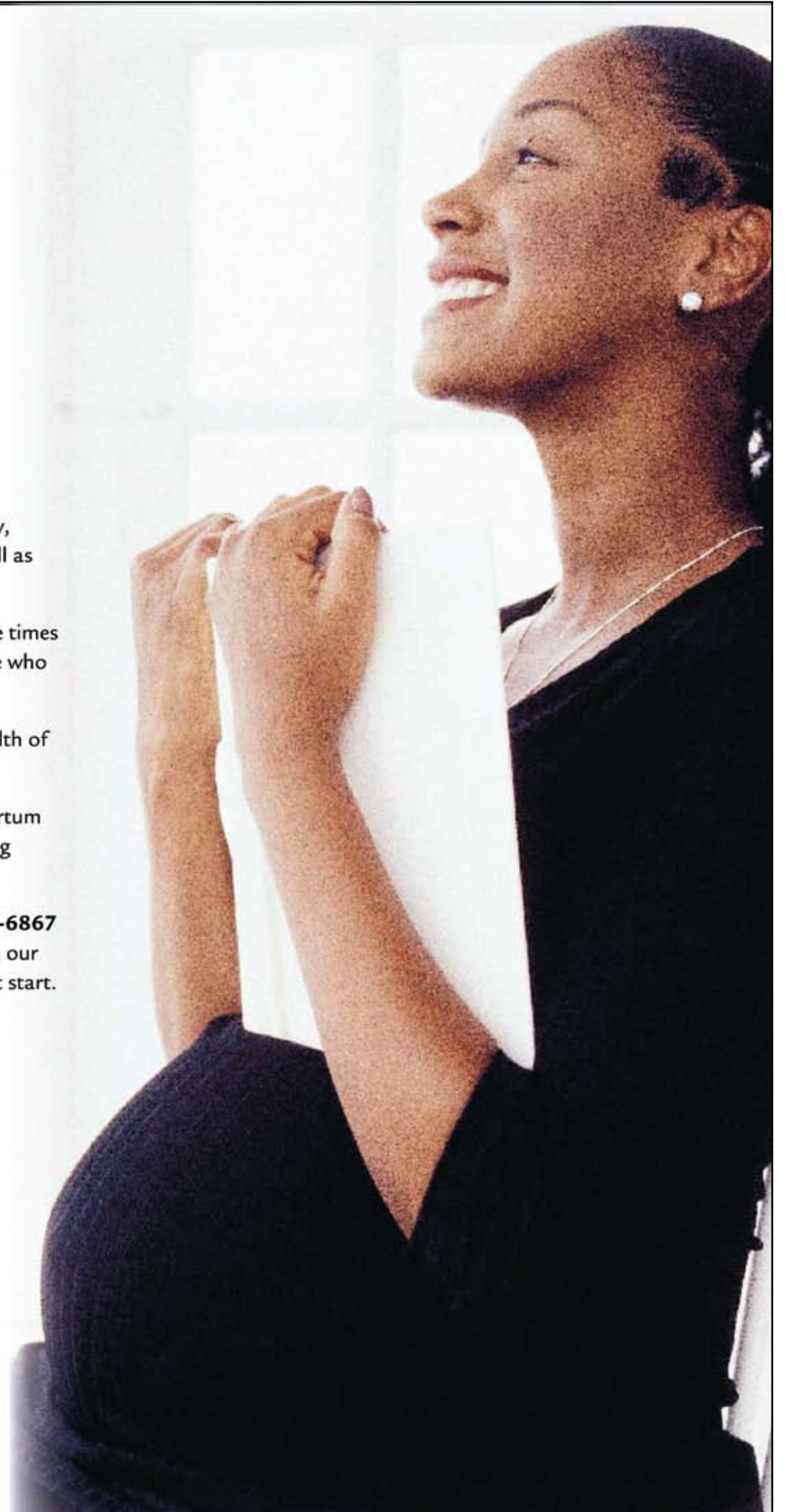
We can assist you with prenatal and post-partum appointments, and other services including transportation.

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Former Millcreek resident now a hip-hopping chemist

Tyraine Ragsdale says he had plans to become a Major League Baseball player when he left PHA's old Mill Creek development for the University of Pittsburgh in 1983. Instead, he ended up becoming a chemist with Johnson & Johnson on the corporate fast track with a corner office. He'd bring friends from Mill Creek (now rebuilt and called Lucien E. Blackwell Homes) to his office in suburban Spring House to show them that "this is what you can do."

Ragsdale, however, had a higher calling: to start his own business and give back to the community. His boss was livid. After all, J & J had created a position for him when none existed, and he was a rising star in the company. But for Tyraine, it was "time for me to go to the next level" after five years on "the best job anybody could ever want."

"I had made a commitment that I had never told anyone about," he says. "I said if ever I'm in a position to give back, then I would do it."



"I'm just like you," Grand Hank tells his students as he demonstrates the wonders of chemistry.

While he was still working at Johnson and Johnson, Kelly Woodling of the Franklin Institute asked Ragsdale to help with a visiting scientist program that was getting started. Woodling was impressed with Ragsdale's credentials and felt he would be ideal for a program designed to interest young people in science and careers in science. Ragsdale agreed and took on the Saturday program.

During one of his presentations, Tyraine says he experienced "an epiphany moment." He was talking to 100 middle school students, and he could see he was losing their interest. The former college DJ known as Grandmaster Hank "kicked a rap song," and the educational rap lecture was born.

Ragsdale's reputation spread, and he kept getting invited to various locations across the country to talk to young people about staying in school, getting an education, and getting ahead with a satisfying career in science. He realized that "this rap thing could be big. This could be a business."



Grand Hank's wide-eyed students are fascinated by science.

Grand Hank Productions, Incorporated, was born in 1989. Tyraine says the business just took off.

"I would be traveling to other cities at night, flying back during the day, going to work. I'd use all my vacation up, use all my sick time. I'd use everything I could get my hands on and my business was just growing," he says.

Eventually, the money from his company matched the salary he was making at Johnson & Johnson, where he still worked. He was torn between getting a doctorate in chemistry and growing his company. Ragsdale, who had learned all he could about the corporate world and business while at J & J, prayed on it. He received his answer in the middle of the night and went on to invest his life in his business.

"If you want to be the smartest scientist in the world, then you need a PhD.," he says. "But if you

want to be in business, then you need to go and do business."

Ragsdale left J & J in 1994, just five years after he started to pursue his dream. He recalls that a company secretary told him when he first started that he would not be there long because he had something inside that "these walls cannot hold." The company, by the way, was willing to let him work just three days a week so he could pursue his business interests!

Today, The Science Lab of Grand Hank Television Series and 11 other programs are produced by Grand Hank Productions located in Mount Airy. An estimated 3.5 million people in 15 states, including Pennsylvania, have used them.

Tyraine Ragsdale appreciates the time he spent growing up at Mill Creek. He says living there helped him develop skill sets that other people didn't have to compete and survive. And he never thought of himself as poor. Even though the neighborhood has changed dramatically, Ragsdale still has friends there.

"I said if ever I'm in a position to give back, then I would do it."
Grand Hank

"Grand Hank" spends his time today urging young people to excel at whatever they choose to do, pointing to Africans and African-Americans who were great scientists, builders and inventors without some of the advantages we have today. Struggling, Tyraine says, is part of the path to success. He points to himself saying, "I'm just like you. Remember, I came from these projects,

Security is a priority for residents and PHA police

The best offense is a strong defense, and PHA residents can help create more secure housing sites by taking a strong stand against crime and assisting the PHA Police Department.

"Housing residents are our eyes and ears," says Richard Zappile, PHA's Chief of Police and Director of Public Safety.

"People should not let unknown people into the buildings," adds Zappile. He also urges residents to report security guards asleep on

the job or other security issues by calling 215-684-1911.

Protecting housing residents is a priority. The PHA Police Force currently consists of 45 patrol officers, down from about 110 before the 2007 layoffs. One of those officers, Craig Kelley, was shot last month. Kelley opened the door of his

"Housing residents are our eyes and ears."
Chief Richard Zappile

Queen Lane Apartments security booth, and a teen with an assault rifle began firing at him. Kelley was saved by the bulletproof vest he was wearing. Two subsequent bullets were stopped by the bulletproof booth walls.

"Police responded immediately," notes Zappile. Officers flooded the area, and arrested 17-year old Zahir

Boddy-Johnson, who has since been charged with attempted murder.

All PHA police are fully certified as municipal police officers and receive the same Police Academy training as the city's police. In addition, PHA also uses security officers from two companies - Top of the Clock and Oakley - to regulate who goes into high-rise buildings. Zappile emphasizes that these guards have a specific purpose.

"They control access. They don't

control the floors," explains Zappile, in response to resident requests that the security officers should do rounds of the buildings. "They are not supposed to leave their posts." Again, he repeats that residents should report any suspicious activity to the police.

PHA also deploys 340 security cameras at high rises and new developments. Many of the cameras are connected by the web into police computers for easy monitoring. Zappile says that PHA is currently working to upgrade the camera system.



Former roller derby star is now gentle PHA choir leader

Anyone running into Rick Dreden, the director of the resident choir at Wilson Park, would hardly suspect that this gentle and pleasant man had another life that was not so gentle and, at times, not so pleasant.

Long before Dreden took up residence at Wilson Park to form the choir and do other good deeds, he played in the Roller Derby.

Dreden, who grew up in West Philadelphia, first became interested in the sport after seeing it on TV. Channel 48 used to televise Roller Derby from the old Philadelphia Arena near 46th & Market, which was home to the Derby from 1967 through 1976. Eventually, he attended a training school run at the Arena by the league.

In 1972, after a year of training, Dreden began skating for his first



Rick Dreden today.

team, the Texas Outlaws. He would skate for several teams, including the Eastern (Philadelphia) Warriors and the Chicago Hawks. He says the league freely transferred players between teams.

Dreden's first coach with the Outlaws was Jim Trotter, a star in the sport who also skated for the Warriors, the league's star team during its glory days.

So what prompted Dreden, a compact but muscular man, to get into this sport?

Played as a jammer

"The physical contact. I always wanted to play football, but I was too little," Rick says. He played as a jammer, the only position allowed to score points. The jammers left the pack of skaters, making a lap to the back, then pulled their way through packs of skaters called blockers. Jammers scored a point for each lap.

Each Roller Derby team had 10 skaters; five men and five women. Each position had a male and female skater, for a total of four jammers and six blockers. Blockers had to keep the other team's jammers from making it through, while at the same time clearing a path for their own jammers. Each jam lasted one minute. The men skated the first jam, followed by the women, and they rotated back and forth for eight 10-minute periods.

Rick Dreden enjoyed the travel, and the money wasn't bad either, starting out at \$275 a week and ending at \$500 a week. And his family could come to the Arena to watch him.

"I remember an incident with my mother when I skated against the Warriors and Jim Trotter had joined the Warriors. My mother was trying to get up on the track and say (to Trotter) 'Don't beat up my son,'" Dreden says with a laugh.

The most serious incident he remembers is a fight with Little Richard Brown of the Warriors who kicked Rick in the head, but he avoided serious injury.

Derby career ended

Dreden's career with Roller Derby ended in 1976. The league ended operations in Philadelphia, but continued in California for several years. Fortunately, Rick had other skills. He worked for several companies handling data entry until injuries he received while skating finally caught up to him, forcing him to retire at an early age with disabilities.

Since coming to Wilson Park 15 months ago, Dreden has stayed as active as he possibly can by organizing the resident choir and volunteering to do cleanup work in the cafeteria, the halls, the lobby and the elevators. It's his home, and he wants the place clean on weekends when visitors come.



Too little for football, Rick Dreden, seen here with teammate Lorna Young, joined the Roller Derby.

"I love helping the people here," he says. "I started the choir to bring up the spirits of the older seniors here."

Dreden, who also sings at the Love Zion Baptist Church in North Philadelphia where he's been a member for 16 years, would like to

start a youth choir, too. He loves singing and performs solo at other places, but has no plans to go on "American Idol."

"I'm too old!" he says with a laugh.

New activities for seniors at the Wilson Park Community Center

With PHA's support, St. Agnes LIFE has expanded its program services to include a number of recreational activities at the Wilson Park Community Center, including yoga classes, arts and crafts and a pet therapy program, Caring Paws. These activities are available at no cost to Wilson Park residents and community members.

"Our partnership with St. Agnes LIFE has provided us the opportunity to offer additional programming and socialization to our customers," says Charmaine Morton, PHA's director of senior programs. "It not only warms the heart to see our customers enjoying the programs and services, but the benefits are great!"

The arts and crafts program is offered the first two Friday

mornings of the month. Projects include sand art, pine cone projects, customized greeting cards, painting and embellishing boxes and birdhouses and painting sun catchers. "When I come to these classes I find I have imagination that I never knew I had," says resident Mildred Branham.

The monthly Caring Paws program brings Marjorie Shoemaker and Fleur, a golden retriever service dog from Canine Companions for Independence, to the center. She also has 20 other animals to stimulate the senses of the elderly. The guinea pigs, for example, purr loudly — great for someone with hearing impairment. For the visually impaired, petting the hairless guinea pig, velveteen, or angora rabbits brings a wonderful satisfaction. The ferrets are also quite entertaining as

they push a ball through a tunnel and enjoy licking vitamins off participants' fingers.

Yoga classes are now offered on Mondays and Wednesdays.

According to www.seniorfitness.net, yoga can help address sleep, strength, arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, excess weight, mood and anxiety, chronic pain and breathing difficulties.



Seniors enjoy the arts and crafts class at Wilson Park.

St. Agnes LIFE (Living Independently For Elders) has been providing medical and social services to older adults in Philadelphia for over nine years. LIFE helps chronically ill or disabled adults age 55 and older by promoting independence at home. The program provides primary medical care, social work services, physical and occupational therapies, assistance with personal care at home, transportation and much more.

To find out more about the recreational programs at Wilson Park, please call 215-684-4895.

To find out more about LIFE, or to learn if you or someone you know is eligible, please call St. Agnes LIFE at 215-339-4747.

Pay your rent and pay yourself

Each month PHA is supposed to collect over \$1.5 million in rent. PHA counts on the rent paid by residents for over \$19 million each year. That's more than five percent of the agency's budget. The revenue generated by rent has become even more critical as the federal government cuts funding for public housing.

"PHA's employees take great pride in providing the best possible customer service, but we have reduced our work force by almost one third since January 2007," says PHA Executive Director Carl Greene. "It's not easy maintaining the same level of service when you lose one in three workers. Having customers pay their rent on time helps in that effort."

Most PHA households do pay their rent on time, but those who do not are hurting service for everyone else. Managers have to spend time tracking down people who are late and that leaves them less time for other tasks.

In January, PHA sent out Rent Reminder calendars. "Uncollected rent has been a big problem for the housing authority," says Greene. "The calendars were a gentle reminder of how important it is to pay your rent on time. We understand the tremendous

financial strains many of our customers face, but we want to make the point that keeping a roof over their families' heads should be their highest priority."

Reason for Eviction

Late payment or no payment of rent is the main reason residents face eviction, and PHA has sped up the eviction process dramatically. Jacqui Wilson, the attorney who supervises the Lease Enforcement and Compliance Unit, says it used to take about six months to complete the process. The time frame has been cut in half.

Wilson says PHA has its own arrangement with the City's Municipal Court that allows the agency to handle 50 eviction cases a week. Every Wednesday PHA has courtroom 4-B all day just to process eviction cases.

"We've gained a lot of respect because we're very efficient in how we handle our cases," Wilson says.

Filing the necessary papers electronically has also sped up the process. Of the cases filed each week, Wilson says between one-third to one-half of the residents pay off their judgments before they have to face the judge.

The faster processing motivates some residents to pay up.

"Many of our residents are single parents and nobody wants to see a single mom with small children put out of her home," Wilson says. "Once we take them to court and we get a judgment against them, even if they pay it off, it still shows up on their credit reports."

This hurts residents when they look for a loan or a mortgage if they decide to buy a home.

Linda Staley, PHA Executive General Manager for Property Management, says the agency has little in the way of a reserve fund and is required by the federal government to collect 98 percent of the rents due.

"The rent calendars were sent out to let residents know this is a serious matter with all the federal cutbacks that have occurred," she says. "To move into self-sufficiency, you have to get accustomed to paying your rent on time."

New budgeting classes

Staley says PHA plans to start budgeting classes to help residents do a better job of managing their money, including paying their rent on time. PHA is working with Wachovia Bank on this special project.

"Lots of times we find people will spend money if they have it in hand. If we can get them to put some of it into savings or checking

"Uncollected rent has been a big problem for the housing authority."

*Carl R. Greene,
PHA Executive Director*

Don't Let a Few Dollars in Unpaid Rent Stand Between You And Your Home



January 2008

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PAY	YOUR	RENT	ON	TIME	LATE FEE DUE	RENT IS
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
NOW	PAST	DUE				
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Saving Your Home



accounts, they're less likely to spend that money," she says.

The new course will also teach residents how to become better shoppers and get more for their money.

"Paying the rent pays themselves," Staley says. "If you're paying the rent, the PHA has money for the staff and services that you're requesting."



A near tragedy hit the PHA family in February when one of our police officers, Craig Kelley, was shot while manning the security booth at Queen Lane Apartments. Thankfully, Officer Kelley was able to slam the door to the booth shut

before the gunman fired a second and third shot. Those shots hit the bulletproof glass, and Officer Kelley was able to dial 9-1-1. Philadelphia police arrived on the scene within minutes, and a suspect was taken into custody a short time later.

A PHA officer being shot on duty is not a common occurrence. The last time it happened

was 1997. But an incident such as this one again magnifies the issue of security. Public safety drives me to build as much modern affordable housing as possible. The

"PHA will continue to do its part to safeguard our properties."

Philadelphia Daily News recently devoted three pages to a story describing the transformation that occurs when PHA knocks down an old-style public housing site and replaces it with a townhouse community. Crime plummets.

Residents play a more active role in keeping their communities safe. They feel proud, safe and secure.

The flip side of the story is that crime remains high in Philadelphia's older distressed neighborhoods and at older PHA developments. Building and managing quality housing

is our top priority at PHA, but the security of our customers is also critically important. We are grateful to the Philadelphia Police Dept. for responding with lightning speed in the case of Officer Kelley. We should all have a similar sense of urgency about the safety of our communities.

All residents need to be suspicious about strangers in our buildings and around our sites. When you suspect that an illegal activity is occurring, you need to report it to the PHA Police. Simple things, like making sure lobby doors close completely behind you, will increase everyone's security.

PHA will continue to do its part to safeguard our properties. We will continue to enhance our strong relationship with the Philadelphia Police Dept. But we can only truly be successful with your help.

Thank you,

Carl R. Greene

A message from the Executive Director



How can residents keep their community safe and secure?



Dominique Able

– Cambridge Plaza

“People need to keep track of what is going on in their neighborhood. They need to work to find a proper environment for the kids and stuff like that.”



Keith Stephens

– Richard Allen

“The police are always patrolling but more is needed. Neighbors need to patrol also. Parents should take more control of their children and make them stay off the corners. The government needs to get out of the business of telling parents how to handle their children.”



Kathleen

– Richard Allen

“We need more recreational facilities for the youth and after-school programs for the younger children. It seems there is little long-term investment in our kids.”



Minister Anthony Lunch

– Richard Allen

“We should meet with the youth and get their ideas, let them help decide what is in their best interest. Calling for community meetings is as important as getting children more involved with the church.”



Malinda Tucker

– Richard Allen

“Getting the police more involved and establish a town watch in different sections of a neighborhood.”



Denise

– Cambridge Plaza

“The kids need somewhere to go to get them off of the street. They need a recreation center where they can learn a sport or get involved with a constructive activity. When there isn't anything for them to do, that is when they get into trouble.”



Alyce Thomas

– Cambridge Plaza

“It has gotten better but kids still hang out especially on the weekend. But they still disturb people who are trying to sleep on the weekend. Perhaps a recreational facility will provide the proper environment.”

www.PHA.PHILA.gov

Neighborhood Network Computer Labs

There are four Neighborhood Network Computer Labs offering eight-week computer classes on an ongoing basis.

These classes cover basic computer concepts in Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. **SIGN-UP TODAY!**

Classes Locations:

Blumberg Apartments - Thursdays 1:00pm - 2:30pm

2311 W. Jefferson St., Philadelphia, PA 19123

Johnson Homes - Tuesdays 3:00pm - 4:30pm

25th & Norris Sts., Philadelphia, PA 19122

Spring Garden - Mondays 2:00pm - 3:30pm

715 Brandywine St., Philadelphia, PA 19123

Wilson Park - Tuesdays 1:30pm - 3:00pm

2500 Jackson Street, Philadelphia, PA 19145

Computer Labs Also Available At:

Hill Creek - 5573 Hillcreek Mall, Philadelphia, PA 19120

John F Street Center - 1100 Poplar Street, Philadelphia, PA 19123

Westpark Apartments - 300 N Busti Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104

White Hall - 4729 Tackawanna Street, Philadelphia, PA 19124

To Sign-Up Contact:

Monet Williams

Neighborhood Network Coordinator

215-684-4628 or

monet.williams@pha.phila.gov



Philadelphia Housing Authority
Building Beyond Expectations



Top of the class for Skills For Life

As the incident rate among youth continues to rise in Philadelphia, PHA's Skills for Life program provides a safe haven for high school students. Funded by PHA, Skills for Life helps students with many aspects of their lives and enables them to look to the future without apprehension.

"It is a great program," says UniquECA Flynn, who was required to do mandatory community service and was attending the Southwest Community Center when she voluntarily enrolled in Skills for Life. "I participated in some of the programs [at the Center] and I really liked this one, so I joined."

Along the way, she came across one of the directors, Sanchia Gomez who she describes as "the BEST!" As a result of her relationship with Gomez and participation in Skills for Life, UniquECA's grades improved dramatically. She became more involved in the community. On a personal level, expressing her feelings and interacting with others on a different level has become easier. Most importantly, UniquECA plans to graduate at the top of her class in



UniquECA Flynn

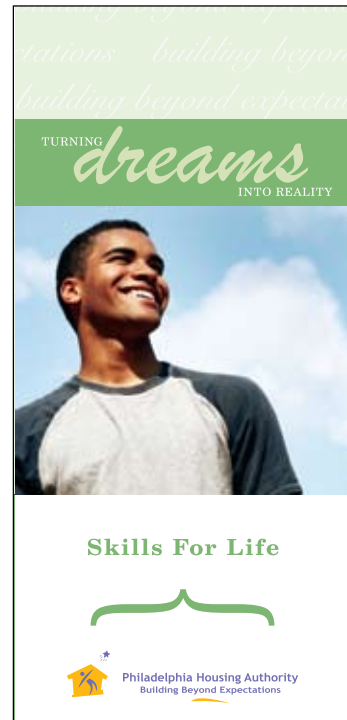
June 2008 from John Bartram High School and intends to pursue biology pre-med in college. So far, she has received four acceptance letters after applying to seven colleges. She plans to attend her first choice, Spelman University in Atlanta.

Another outstanding graduating student, Wyneisha Barrett, of the Diversified Community Services site, says, "My grades were always good" but Skills for Life has helped her be consistent and given her something to be involved in.

Wyneisha is now focused on preparing for college, but she is still deeply involved with Skills for Life. She is currently helping to plan this year's summer program highlighting Africa. "They will look at the culture of Africa, and dance from the origination into modern dance," says Wyneisha, who will not be working at the summer camp. Instead, Skills for Life has helped her find a job to fill the months until she leaves for college in the fall.

Preparing for college

During Wyneisha's time with Skills for Life, she was given the opportunity to attend Temple University's Temple Voices program, which is like an internship and part of her curriculum. Skills for Life has helped her prepare for college by applying for scholarship and financial aid, and has supported her decisions for her future. Wyneisha will be graduating from Pratt Charter High School in June and will attend Penn State's Schuylkill Campus. "I have not picked my major yet but I like science for biology or chemistry and criminal justice for forensics."



Skills for Life provides resources and outlets to assist in personal, social, and academic areas through the help of knowledgeable staff and directors at each site. Students have built long-lasting relationships with some of the directors who they will keep as mentors as they pursue their dreams and utilize their skills for life.

Create a G.R.E.A.T. video and win a great trip

Do you hear Hollywood calling? If creating films and video is your hobby or your career goal, G.R.E.A.T.'s video contest is for you. Students in grades 4th through 8th are invited to submit original videos based on "My G.R.E.A.T. Experience." The videos should show how the program has affected your life. (G.R.E.A.T. stands for Gang Resistance Education and Training.)

The National contest winner and up to three guests will be flown to the 2008 National G.R.E.A.T. National Training Conference in St. Louis. The winning student will speak and present the video to the more than 600 attendees.

"This is a great way to get young people involved and get the anti-violence message out," says Cpl. Daniel Richmond, who runs PHA's G.R.E.A.T. program.

"It will help kids step up and take ownership."

The videos should be between one and three minutes long. Once you finish your video, fill out the entry forms available online at www.great-online.org, and mail two copies of the video to:

G.R.E.A.T. Program
Attn: Fran Gingell
Institute for Intergovernmental Research
Post Office Box 12729
Tallahassee, FL 32317

For more information, check out the G.R.E.A.T. website or call 215-684-1069.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE 60'S WHEN DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING SPOKE AT PHA'S HAWTHORNE COMMUNITY CENTER?

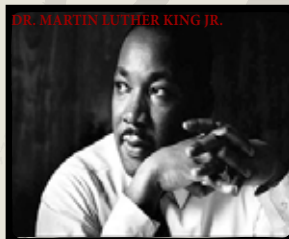
Looking for info or photos

Who: Dr. Martin Luther King

When: In the 1960's

Where: Hawthorne Community Ctr.

What: Speech by Dr. King



WILL YOU HELP US BRING KING'S MEMORY TO LIFE?

Martin Luther King spoke in south Philly at the Hawthorne Community Center (now MLK) in the 60's. We are placing a plaque at the site in honor of this historic event.

But we need your help. Please let us know if you have first hand information or pictures of the event. If so, please call Tracey Harriette at 215.684.4108. Help preserve the image and legacy of Martin Luther King at PHA. Thank You.



Kids - are you ready to win a fun contest?

Spring has arrived! That means going to the park and having fun at the playground. And now there is a contest you can enter that will help keep that playground clean.

Grab your markers and paper, it's time to create, An essay or poster we can all celebrate Your art and words will show us the way To keep your playgrounds clean places to play.

To enter you must be a PHA resident. There are three age categories: 6-8 years old, 9-11 years old and 12-14 years old. Kids may enter either the essay or poster contest or both.

All essays should be on the topic of playground safety. The theme this year is "Go Green, Keep Your Playground Clean." Ideas might include explaining why a clean playground is important and safe.

All posters should be drawn on standard 22" x 28" poster board or smaller. In addition, all posters

and essays must have participant's full name, age, and address.

All participants will receive recognition certificates for their contribution in promoting playground safety from the Housing Authority Insurance Group.

There are three prize levels awarded in each category for national winners: \$100 gift certificate for 1st place, \$40 gift certificate for 2nd place and a \$25 gift certificate for 3rd place from Wal-Mart or Barnes & Noble Bookstore.

The deadline for submitting your essay is Friday, May 16th 2008. Send all entries to:

Philadelphia Housing Authority
Tracey Harriette
12 South 23rd Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103

We'll review all your entries. The best of the best will receive gifts and prize. So show us how much a clean playground is worth. Pick up trash, recycle and help save planet Earth.



MOVING FORWARD

COMMUNITY PARTNERS TRAINING PROGRAMS



Administrative Assistant Job Readiness Program

Community College of Philadelphia
1700 Spring Garden Street
Philadelphia, PA 19130
215.496.6125

Home Maintenance Repair Program

Orleans Technical Institute
1330 Rhawn Street
Philadelphia, PA 19111
215.728.4725

Personal & Financial Development

MET
3801 Market Street Suite 2002
Philadelphia, PA 19104
215.747.2781

Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Medical Billing Pharmacy Technician

Professional Healthcare Institute
1333 West Cheltenham Avenue
Melrose Park, PA 19027
215.782.8810

Hospitality Training Programs

Opportunities Industrialization Corp. Inc.
1231 N. Broad Street 4th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19132
215.236.7700 x324

Self-Employment Program

Enterprise Center
4548 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19139
215.895.4078

Commercial Drivers License Customer Service Training Environmental Services Training

New Wave Resources, Inc
1321 Arch Street 6th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215.496.9388

Job Placement/Job Coaching

Educational Data Systems Inc.
42 South 15th Street Suite 300
Philadelphia, PA 19102
215- 684-8052

To register, please contact your Economic Self-Sufficiency coordinator (see page 12). Tuition is free for PHA residents.

Medical Billing

Creative Urban Educational Systems
121 N Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215.782.8810



Philadelphia Housing Authority
Building Beyond Expectations



PHA Homeownership Program still helping residents buy homes

The subprime mortgage crisis has two million people across the nation facing foreclosure in the coming year. But here in Philadelphia, PHA's homeownership program is using education to help residents purchase their own homes. The agency has put over 800 families or individuals into new or existing homes since 2000.

Some of these people are public housing residents while others are simply first-time homebuyers. They all have one thing in common - PHA requires them to go through pre- and post-purchase counseling.

Buying a home takes time and planning. Some of the buyers that the agency helps have poor credit history, insufficient down payments, and/or lack of knowledge about home financing and closing costs. Malvin Reyes, who supervises PHA's homeownership program, says it can take up to three years before a person is ready to become a homeowner.

"We're always educating our clients," Reyes says. "We also have programs about home maintenance, too. Once they purchase (a home), we have a 12-week course that teaches them how to fix things without spending a great deal of money."



PHA works with financial institutions, housing counseling agencies, and realtors to fully educate potential homebuyers, so they don't lose their investment.

"If people are committed, dedicated and willing to make sacrifices, it will work," Reyes says. "Education is the key."

Tina Coates, who has six children, began saving for a home seven years ago. She built up \$20,000 in savings through PHA's Family Self-Sufficiency program. However, before she could use her savings to purchase a home, she needed one year to fix her credit.

Coates was impressed with PHA's homeownership workshop. "It helps you see the things that you do need and the things that you don't need," she says, noting that she quickly learned the three danger words associated with mortgages: floating rate, flexible and balloon.

Workshop helps buyers

Overall, it took Coates about 18 months to complete the purchase of her home in Northeast Philadelphia.

"The best thing you can do is be patient and do your homework," she says. "The Internet is there, and you have to use it [to check prices]," she says.

PHA provides both one-on-one and group workshops to people who want to become homeowners. Individual sessions can run for a total of two to 12 hours, while group sessions range from two to eight hours with an additional six hours of follow-up services. Those who attend the workshops learn about financial planning, credit review and repair, affordability, getting pre-qualified for a mortgage loan, and identifying real estate agents, among other things.

Kizzy Anderson, who has five children, completed the purchase of her home last November. It took her a year to find the four-bedroom house where her family now lives in the Cobbs Creek neighborhood.

Before looking for a home, Kizzy's biggest hurdle was establishing credit. She was working, but had very little in the way of a credit record. The solution for her turned out to be secured credit cards, that is, credit cards secured by a deposit by the cardholder. By using the credit cards carefully and paying on time, Kizzy established credit.

"There will be barriers (to buying a home), but you have to stick with it," Anderson says. "Pull your credit (rating). Dispute everything on there that you know is wrong. Go from there. Once you hit that 620 (credit score), hey, start shopping."

Good credit is green light

Anderson looked at 25 or 30 homes before she found the one she now lives in. She also went through several realtors before she found one that met her needs.

PHA's Reyes says once someone from the program buys a home, they're required to go to post-occupancy counseling. The service helps them become self-sufficient in their responsibilities as homeowners and may last up to three years.

"At closing, we make them put down \$150 to make sure they go to post occupancy counseling training, which is designed to help them keep up their loan," he says. "They get their \$150 back whenever they complete counseling."

"The best thing you can do is be patient and do your homework,"
Tina Coates

PHA installs Big Bellies to eat up lots and lots of trash

PHA is taking its beautification campaign to the next level by installing Big Belly trash cans at nine of its sites.

The trash cans are bolted to the ground and weigh 300 pounds. They have a capacity of 32 gallons and feature a solar-powered trash compactor.

The cans open like a mailbox, preventing animals and people from getting at the trash. They send out a wireless notice when it's time to empty them. The Big Bellies also seal themselves once they're completely full, so no one can stuff more trash into them.

"The compacting of trash makes

daily removal of the can's contents unnecessary," says PHA's Dan Quimby, Executive General Manager of Operations. "We figure

"The compacting of trash makes daily removal of the can's contents unnecessary,"

Dan Quimby,
General Manager of Operations

we'll empty these trash cans 33% less often than traditional wire baskets. That's critical because we have fewer maintenance workers now than we did

just over a year ago and we have to work more efficiently. And the solar powering of the trash compactor saves us money, too."

Quimby became intrigued when he first saw a Big Belly on display. The manufacturer then lent one to PHA to test it out for several months at Wilson Park.

"It worked very well. We're hoping that by placing them in high traffic areas, residents will take advantage of them, helping us make our developments sparkle," Quimby says. "We'll watch the usage of these cans for the next year, and we may buy more of them, depending upon the results."

Residents of Bartram Village, Blumberg, Fairhill, Germantown House, Harrison Plaza, Hill Creek, Raymond Rosen, Westpark, and Wilson Park now have the Big Bellies in several locations. You can't miss them. They feature a big purple "Keep PHA Beautiful" message on the front.

Picture on right: Big Belly solar powered trash compactors like this one at Westpark Apartments are now at work, gobbling up trash at nine PHA sites.





Mount Olivet



PHA Homeowners



Greater Grays Ferry Estates

PHA MTE Family Services Program

Homebuyers Club Workshops

WORKSHOP 1

Sponsored by Citizen's Bank

Strawbridge Building

8th & Market sts. 13th Floor

Community Area

Wednesday, April 2 at 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Thursday, May 1 at 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

First Time Homeownership Orientation

Budgeting & Money Management

Wednesday, April 9 at 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Thursday, May 8 at 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Credit Repair / Home Inspection

WORKSHOP 2

Sponsored by Wachovia Mortgage Corp.

John F. Street Center

1100 W Poplar St.

Saturday, April 12 at 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Thursday, May 22 at 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

First Time Homeownership Orientation

Budgeting & Money Management

Saturday, April 19 at 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Thursday, May 29 at 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Credit Repair / Home Inspection

To register call Mr. Gilbert Vega at 215.684.2057 or Ms. Barbara Stewart at 215.684.3124.

Please plan to attend both sessions when registering.



WORKSHOPS DESCRIPTION

First Time Homeownership Orientation

Learn how to use your Housing Voucher (Section 8) to purchase a home.

Budgeting & Money Management

Learn how to define income and expenses.

Credit Repair / Home Inspection

Learn how to establish, maintain and repair credit, and tips on how to pass home inspection.



Philadelphia Housing Authority
Building Beyond Expectations

A process that solves problems

While PHA strives to provide the highest quality service to its customers, you can't please all of the people all of the time.

As a result, PHA tenants file about 26 grievances a month, according to Jacqui Wilson, a PHA lawyer who handles the grievance cases.

The good news, Wilson reports, is that almost all the complaints are resolved at PHA's arbitration hearings and only rarely do residents appeal to the city's court system.

"It's not about PHA winning," explains Wilson. "The test of a win is that we can deal with the problem."

"We do a good job explaining what the tenant is entitled to. Normally, common sense prevails."

The grievance process is straightforward. If a resident has a problem that they feel is not being resolved, they report it to the property manager. The manager immediately schedules a hearing and, at the same time, begins working to find a compromise to satisfy the resident.

Ruth El Juliet recently left her grievance hearing very satisfied with the outcome. The Paschall Apartments resident had filed a complaint that she had no heat.

She also requested a transfer to a different site following a break-in that left her feeling unsafe. At the arbitration hearing, PHA resolved to fix her heating problem and transfer her to a different apartment when it is possible. "They were nice and helpful to me," says Juliet of the arbitration process.

"And I went to the hearing, and they helped me. I had no heat, and they got that resolved."

Another case involved a resident who claimed that she had had mold in her house for over a year that had created holes in her kitchen floor and caused her roof to cave in. PHA was able to document that the tenant herself had damaged the floor over and above normal wear and tear.

"But we have a good environmental department," points out Wilson, "and we had them analyze the mold and fix the problem."

So both parties left the arbitration feeling satisfied. PHA did not have to replace the tenant's floor, and the tenant's mold issue was resolved. To Wilson, that is a win-win situation.



A PHA arbitration hearing is in progress.

All hearings are held before an independent arbitrator, who is also an attorney. The decision of the arbitrator is binding upon PHA, but not upon the tenants, who are free to appeal at no cost

to themselves. Which makes the fact that only two cases have been appealed in the past 12 months even more remarkable.

New museum to preserve Public Housing Legacy

Do you have a story to share about your experience living in public housing? If so, the planned National Public Housing Museum in Chicago would like to hear it.

Public housing residents in Chicago have taken action to create a museum that would preserve the stories of public housing residents for future generations. Last fall, efforts began to raise \$14 million to establish the National Public Housing Museum in the last remaining building of Jane Adams Homes, the first federally funded housing site in Chicago. The museum will be modeled on the successful Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York.

The Chicago Housing Authority has agreed to turn the historic building over to the museum if they can secure financing by June 2008. Sunny Fisher, who sits on the museum's board of directors and is a member of the housing committee, urges all current public housing residents to support the museum.

"If every housing resident donated a dollar towards the museum, we would be able to reach our goal," said Fischer in an interview.

An archive of oral histories will be a major part of the Museum.



In the 1940's, kids play at a Chicago Public Housing playground.

Planners are asking current and former housing residents all over the country to share their stories, photos and other mementos of public housing. The museum will have apartments containing furnishings from each of the eight decades of public housing, plus the art, music, politics, and economics of those periods.

Visitors could step into, for example, the home of an Italian-American family in the 1930s or a Jewish family in the 1940s and feel what it was like to live in that era.

Museum planners hope to create a research center offering educational programs about affordable housing and contemporary issues such as

gentrification. Space for community gatherings is also planned, along with commercial and retail spaces.

One of the museum's goals is to contribute to a better understanding of public housing by encouraging public discussion about the way the United States and other countries address the housing needs of their most vulnerable members. It will explore the effects of economic, political, and social forces on individuals and entire communities. The museum will promote the values of public participation, tolerance, and social equity.

For more information, visit the museum's website: www.publichousingmuseum.org.



a father's LOVE

heals the soul of a child

Calling all fathers...

DO YOU WANT TO:

Erase Back Child Support?

Get Free Job Training?

Become Eligible for Homeownership?

For more information, please call 215-684-4416.



Philadelphia Housing Authority
Building Beyond Expectations



PHA student poet wins scholarship

(Cont. from Page 1)

you may not have been responsible for your heritage, but you are responsible for your future.”

Monique, a Housing Choice Voucher resident, participates in PHA's Skills for Life Lighthouse program, which helps enrich the lives of young adults by building life skills. Members receive a stipend, tutoring, and a SEPTA Transpass while making friends, getting homework help and learning career options. She also meets weekly with a group called Teen Shots, a program that helps girls tweak their research and social skills.

Monique eventually wants to earn a degree in business and education and work for the school district helping children who need extra assistance. She believes that when you reach the top, you can't forget to reach back and help somebody else.

Where I'm From and Where I'm going

By Monique Fortune

*I'm from a place I'd like to call home,
But some call it the ghetto.*

*I'm from boring church hours at Baptist Church
No matter how tired you are, "You better not go to sleep!"*

*I'm from "Shake what ya mama gave ya!" and
Block parties that served as family reunions.*

*I'm from trips upstate, cross state to penitentiaries
Jail visits because this fool just didn't get enough!*

*I'm from Ring-Around-the-Rosie, Tootsie Rolls, Nerds, and Peanut Chews!
I'm from Catch-a-Girl-Freak-a-Girl, our own Hide-and-Seek.*

*I'm from vacation bible school and overnight camps,
Two weeks full of songs and arts and crafts,*

*I'm from Sheena and-well, Sheena.
Mama's baby and Papa's never mind, although he told me he loved me.
I'm from junk food dinners, but still satisfied.
I'm from determination and the will to survive.*

*And although I am from a baby having a baby,
I am still the dream and the hope of the slave.
I'm from statistics that say I should be somebody's baby mamma.
But instead I'm somebody's scholar.*

*You may not be from where I'm from,
And you're certainly not going where I'm going.
My eyes are on the prize and I won't let "Where I'm From"
Stop me!*

76ers GM has fond memories of PHA

(Cont. from Page 1)

And Provident signed on as a sponsor, as did PECO. "I didn't realize at the time it was going to help me down the line," Stefanski says.

"From a business background, it was a dream come true."

But he adds that he got the most satisfaction from watching the kids play ball.

With the money he raised, Stefanski arranged to fix up the basketball courts on the sites, hired referees and arranged for busses to bring the kids from one site to another for the games.

"The kids really enjoyed it," Stefanski recalls. "It was great for them to meet kids from

other areas. It was safe. We had fun."

They played a 10-game season followed by playoffs. At the end of the season, PHA held a banquet for the players at the legendary Palumbos' restaurant.

After the '74 season, Stefanski graduated from Penn and went on to become a mortgage broker. But basketball was in his blood.

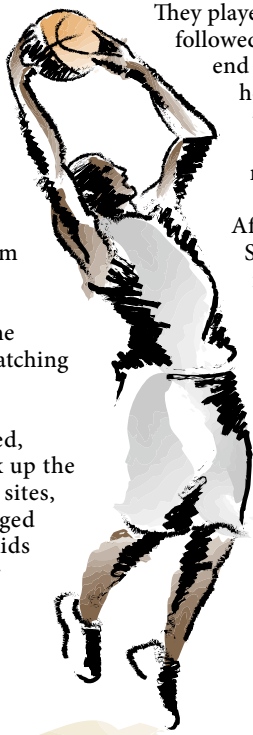
A self-described "gym rat," Stefanski notes, "I was never a

great player, but I've always enjoyed being part of the team."

He slid back into basketball by becoming a scout and eventually joined the NJ Nets, where he rose to General Manager. In November, the 76ers lured him back to Philadelphia.

"The Sixers were my team growing up," he says. "And being with them is a thrill. I love the team and the organization."

He pointed out that both the Sixers and Comcast-Spectacor are very active in charities and there is a chance he could get involved with PHA once again.



PHA Self-Sufficiency Contacts

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Blumberg Staff

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215-684-4628 (Fax #215-684-8080)

Barbara Stewart

Amnesty Hotline
215-684-4416

Gilbert Vega

ESS Coordinator
215-684-2057 (Fax #215-684-8080)

Audrey Hickmon

FSS Coordinator
Phone #215-684-2682

Team A

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Team B

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Crystal Marshall - ESS Coordinator
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Team C

Northwest Germantown Office

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Edwina Young - ESS Coordinator
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Team D

North Philadelphia Office

642 N. Broad Street
Nyla Jones - ESS Coordinator
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Zip Codes: 05, 06, 07, 08, 21, 22, 23, 25, 30, 33, 34, 40

Team E

Northeast Philadelphia Office

4346 Frankford Avenue
Michelle Henderson, Marlena Smith
ESS Coordinators
(215) 684-1559 & 2414 (Fax #215-684-1340)
Zip Codes: 11, 14, 15, 16, 20, 24, 35, 36, 37, 49, 52, 54

Historic agreement to help disabled clients

PHA is demonstrating its commitment to the physically disabled in a dramatic new way. The agency has agreed to provide 100 special Housing Choice Vouchers to help people confined to wheelchairs find new homes.

PHA's partner in the program is Liberty Resources – a group that advocates for independent living for its wheelchair-equipped clients. Liberty will refer clients to PHA, many of whom now live in nursing homes.

“People confined to wheelchairs face challenges every day that the rest of us can only imagine.

We are proud and gratified to form this partnership with Liberty Resources to help these courageous men and women live independently,” said PHA Executive Director Carl Greene.

The PA Dept. of Public Welfare is providing the funding for 75 of the vouchers for the first two years of the program. After that, PHA will assume the cost.

Because wheelchair-equipped clients need special features in their apartments, these vouchers can be used to pay higher than normal rents. Clients, with Liberty's help, will have to locate



Carl Greene and Liberty Resources CEO Tom Earle sign the agreement.

apartments that meet their needs. PHA then will inspect and approve the units, just as it does for all HCV clients.

Liberty's CEO Tom Earle says

he already has clients lined up and ready to go. PHA's Keith Caldwell, says his staff will move quickly to help these clients move out of nursing homes and into their own homes.

Focus on fathers helps families

Focus on Fathers is an ongoing program offered by Resources for Children's Health to provide support and education for fathers in the community and help them meet the needs of their children.

The program's goal is to increase the participation of fathers and other male caretakers in activities that support family life. Research indicates that fathers have a strong impact on children's self-esteem and school performance. Families with fathers can also be linked to reduced teen pregnancy and drug use.

This program starts with the premise that fathers want to take an active role in their children's lives and must be supported in their efforts.

Focus on Fathers offers:

- A formal parenting course
- Individual case management
- Discussion and support groups
- Educational and social activities

There is no charge, and programs are available in English and Spanish. For more information, contact Sulaiman Wood at 267-765-2324 or swood@phmc.org.

Community and police should work together

PHA resident leaders met with Deputy Police Commissioner Patricia Fox at their Police Advisory Board meeting to discuss a key resident issue - public safety. Resident leaders also wanted to know how the Philadelphia Police planned to fill the gap left by a reduced PHA police force.

New Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey is from Washington D.C. and has spent more than 40 years in law enforcement. Fox said from his first day on the job Ramsey began to apply pressure on his police force to get to know the people they serve, especially the children who are often the suspects or victims of crime.

Fox said that with a new police commissioner comes a new way of reducing crime. But she made it clear that progress can only be made with resident help. She also said citizens have to overcome their fears about being called a “snitch” when they give police information.



“If there is anything we can do to make our future better, it's working with the kids now.” Philadelphia Deputy Police Commissioner Patricia Fox told PHA residents.

“We know that before you can trust us, we have to make you feel safe. That's our job. Your job is to try to get the communities where you

live to understand that unless they help us, there is only so much we can do.”

Fox said that helping the police doesn't mean putting a life on the line or testifying in court. She said information can be offered anonymously. “We want to open lines of communication. Without that, we can never make things better.”

Fox says with the help of the community, the police will get “up close and personal” with children. “If you want to know what you, as a community, can do [to reduce crime], it is work with the kids. And, if you have a problem, you need to let us know so we can make sure we get police involvement. It's important that young people see the community and the police working together, trying to make their lives different.”

If you have information that could help stop or solve a crime, Fox urges everyone to call the police. They will help you, not hurt you.

Lifeline 135 program keeps telephone lines alive

Having trouble paying your phone bill? There are programs available to help keep your telephone service connected, reduce monthly bills, pay connection fees and avoid shut-offs.

The Lifeline 135 program can help customers of all qualified telephone service providers. Under the program, customers

who participate in certain public assistance programs, or who have income at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (currently \$28,620 for a family of four) can receive a discount on their monthly local phone service for one telephone line. For information about Lifeline 135, call your local telephone company.

The discounts are paid out of the federal Universal Service Fund that all telephone customers pay into.

Verizon customers have additional programs to help reduce monthly service and connection charges.

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission has developed

an informational brochure, “Follow the PATH to PA Telephone Help.” The brochure provides information about Lifeline and other available programs for limited-income telephone customers. Copies of the brochure can be obtained by calling the PUC at 1-800-782-1110.

Prison Runs

If you need to visit a loved one in prison, please contact **J&H Transport, LLC.**

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PHA & PECO help residents save energy and money

On a cold, sunny day 65 volunteers from PHA and PECO celebrated the Martin Luther King Day of Service by helping 500 families near the John F. Street Community Center save money and better manage their energy usage.

The volunteers distributed an energy-saving care package of four compact florescent light (CFL) bulbs, assistance and energy-saving information from PECO and PHA. CFLs use about 75 percent less energy and last up

to 10 times longer when compared to incandescent bulbs.

Kerry Bizzell, who works in PHA's Contracting Department, took part in the Day of Service with her daughter, Zaria. She thought the event was a great way to give back to the community, have some quality time with her daughter, and teach Zaria about the value of service.

"The day of service makes them appreciate the things they have and

teaches them to give back to those who are less fortunate," she said.

Malvin Reyes, who directs PHA's Homeownership Program, felt the event was the best way to honor the memory of Dr. King.

"It's all part of giving back to the community and helping out people who are underserved, giving them the hope they need," he said. "We're blessed in a sense that we're able to assist families in need."

For Michele Henderson, an Economic Self-Sufficiency Coordinator for PHA, the Day of Service really was a special event.

"I had a wonderful time and made it a family affair with my three children, sister and niece attending also," she said. "The children, Nia and Joshua, enjoyed setting up the children's area and of course playing. Jade even became involved and took charge during our door-to-door quests."

Monica Hawkins, a former PHA employee who now works at HUD's Office of Public Housing,



PHA's Kerri Bizzell prepares children's energy kits during the MLK Day of Service with her daughter Zaria (left) and Nia Long (right), daughter of Michelle Henderson of PHA. Bizzelle says it's important to teach youngsters the meaning of service to the community.

volunteered for the Day of Service with her nephew.

"This is my way of making this a 'day on' and doing something with the community, doing something constructive, something that gives back," she said. "Our blessings aren't meaningful if you don't share them and create opportunities for other people to become blessed as well."

"We have been emphasizing energy conservation both in the

way we build our new houses and in information we present to our residents. We try to make a positive impact on people's lives every day, but we feel especially strong about it on this day when we celebrate the life of Dr. King," said PHA executive director Carl Greene.

PHA has been building all of its new developments to the federal Energy Star standard and is currently building its first all "green" apartment building, Nellie Reynolds Gardens, in North Philadelphia.



PHA's Pat Noto gives instructions to volunteers from PECO and PHA during the MLK Day of Service. Families were given an energy saving care package of 4 compact florescent light (CFL) bulbs, assistance and energy saving information from PECO and PHA.

Parenting program helped mom put life on track

Crystal Castle is a hard working mother of three lovely daughters; 17-year old Nilajah, 13-year old Yaminah and six-year old Shevon. Her oldest daughter is looking at college, and the younger two are doing well in school. For about a year she has worked as a medical office assistant in Northeast Philadelphia and receives a housing voucher from PHA that allows her to live in a home near Roosevelt Blvd. For someone looking at her life from the outside, it appears Crystal is enjoying the American dream. But life has been a struggle, and Crystal says that she traveled a long way to get to where she is today.

She says although she was blessed with people who had a positive influence on her childhood, life was hard as she grew up with her brother in a one-parent home. Crystal says, "We didn't have much, and life wasn't easy. As a teenager life was hard, and when I became pregnant with my first child it became much more difficult."

Trying to raise a baby while going to school and looking for a job seemed impossible. At the time, Crystal felt as though she had

fallen into a huge pit with no way to climb out. She knew there was help, but didn't know where to find it. Then, on the advice of a friend, she spoke to someone at PHA who told her about the teen-parenting program. Crystal made an appointment and learned what services were available.

Teen parenting focused on helping young mothers like Crystal take control of their lives. Most young women who get involved need a sense of purpose or direction that will enable them to become successful. Crystal says, "They showed me how to care for my child, budget my money and how to improve my life in the mists of confusion. And they also convinced me to go back to school and earn my GED. They basically helped me get my life in order."

The next hurdle was deciding what she wanted to do in her life. One day while reading the PHA Experience, she read about a training program for people interested in a medical billing course. She signed up for the eight-week course and was placed on the waiting list. About a month



Crystal Castle, who turned her life around, is seen here with daughters Shevon and Yaminah. She also has a 17-year-old daughter Nilajah.

later she started taking the course. Crystal liked the course so much she now plans to go back to school and pursue medical billing as a career.

The future now looks brighter than ever. Crystal wants to buy her own house and increase her

income by running a medical billing business from home. But for now, she will continue to enjoy the work at the medical center. Her advice to others who want to get ahead is to "take advantage of opportunities while you have them and get an education."

Ludlow is reborn

(Cont. from Page 1)

looking for a change. She has two children and a grandson who lives with her and wanted a better environment for them. Ludlow, which is located between Center City and Temple University, seemed to offer just that.

Rembert's 3-story, 3-bedroom home has central air conditioning, three large bathrooms, a utility room on the second floor for her washer and dryer, and a new refrigerator. She has purchased a new Energy Star washer and plans on buying a new Energy Star dryer to hold down her utility bills.

Rembert, who works at both Project HOME and the Community Partnership School, takes a lot of pride in her new home. She was cleaning trash and other debris from the parking space behind her home when she spoke with her.

"It's brand new, and that's how I want to keep it," she says.

Quality housing for residents is job one for PHA inspectors

PHA residents can count on finding safe, quality, affordable housing, thanks to the work of the agency's inspectors. Why? Because PHA has Housing Quality Standards (HQS) that are much higher than those set by the federal government. Inspectors were reminded of that during a training and certification session held at Johnson Homes.

Inspector Ed Seitzinger says, for example, that PHA requires doors for all rooms and closets while the federal standards don't require them for closets or bathrooms. He adds PHA requires that all windows in a room must work, but federal standards do not.

In fact, to get the certification test questions right, inspectors

found they have to forget about the agency's standards and give answers that match the lower federal standards. Not that they're going to forget PHA's requirements when they're on the job.

Inspector Chris Thomas says residents receive a major benefit from the higher PHA standards.

"Safety. We demand a higher level of security for the unit. We demand a higher quality standard when we do our initial inspections," he says.

Ariayn De Leon, an asset manager based at the Housing Choice Voucher Germantown office, who also took part in the training and certification, says residents should be assured they're getting a quality home or apartment.

"The inspectors are knowledgeable to make sure the residents are receiving quality standard housing. The asset managers down to the service reps are informed of what the inspectors are doing."

And Erica McNeil, a technical aide who works at Hill Creek, says PHA's standards compete with those of



PHA housing quality inspectors Ed Seitzinger, Chris Thomas, and Ruby Jones get instruction on the location of electrical outlets from housing quality training John Richmond during a session at Johnson Homes. PHA has stricter rules on the placement of these outlets than the federal government does.

the private market. She says it's another example of how the agency goes the extra mile when it comes to customer service.

"They [the residents] should feel great because we are really concerned about them. It's not like we're just putting them in any old facility. We do care," she says.

"We're just making sure that it's safe and decent for the tenants, whether a building is owned by PHA or owned privately."

After that, McNeil and the other inspectors say, it's up to residents to take care of their homes.



Housing quality standards trainer, John Richmond, listens as inspector Chris Thomas asks a question during classroom training at Johnson Homes. Thomas says safety is the major benefit that residents receive from PHA's housing quality standards, which are much higher than those issued by the federal government.

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