

# Journey from Homelessness to Hope

(Continued from page 1)

ESL Level One five years ago, she has been one of my biggest supporters. She has always had faith in me even when others didn't and I will forever be grateful for that. Because of her I came into contact with Neighbors Link. Neighbors Link was there to help me find a place to stay until I left for college. I found something more than that...I found a family.

Everything happens for a reason. I am not an immigrant. I am an American and a Fox Laner. Although I was raised in Guatemala and came here as a non-English speaking freshman as Fox Lane, I was born in Mount Kisco and sent to live with my grandmother in Guatemala when I was less than a year old. I lived there until she passed. That brought me back here to live.

Yes, my blood family turned away because Fox Lane has helped me understand that just "getting along" was not enough and having an education was my highest priority. Perhaps being rejected by my blood family was not so tragic. Because of it I met two remarkable role models, Kim and Michelle. These two women took me in, supported me and believed in my future. They also made me part of their family. There is no greater gift.

Others have helped me...Fox Lane, Latino U and the Bedford Presbyterian Church and others...

There are too many to mention, but a few include Mrs. Boccia, Mrs. Abt, Mrs. Belanger, Mr. Mathews, Mrs. LaCour, Ms. Colen, Mrs. Dunne and Shirley Acevedo. These people and my many other friends make up the vertebrae of my backbone. Do yourselves a favor and choose to walk with those who believe in you and who you believe in.

We all know the story of Tinkerbell and how she needed others to believe in her so she could live and fly. Sometimes I feel like her, feeling like I would not be here except for those at Fox Lane and other places who pushed me and believed in me.

I think...and I hope that I am right...that being a success is not just achieving your dream. It is also being willing to reach down when you have

achieved success and help those who are on the journey.

For me, having others who see something special in you is one of the greatest things in life. No matter how many "no's" you hear, you can—with the right help and the right attitude—achieve whatever your heart desires.

All of us face challenges...I certainly have. But no one will ever want what you dream of more than you. That makes it your job. Be willing to take the responsibility. Be willing to learn more about the challenges you



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—KEVIN TEJADA

face, and maintain an attitude filled with the positive and perseverance.

I've done what we all are capable of doing. I take the tragic and turn it into magic. Take the good with the bad and anything that's just plain negativity, you just let it roll off you. Don't carry around negativity, life's too short.

Fox Lane has taught me that I am the only one who can dictate what I want for my future. Fox Lane has been a journey of discovery. Fox Lane has been both ups and downs. And the friends I have made I will hold in my heart for a lifetime. I feel like I can go anywhere and do anything. Anything.

My journey is my own. You will have your own, as well.

Should you ever feel like the journey is too steep or too long simply do what I have learned to do. Place your hand over your heart... Feel that? It's called purpose.

We are all here for a reason...

Find yours. ■

## Eco-Cleaning Program Enhances Workers' Skills



As more and more homeowners take a green approach to household cleaning, Neighbors Link is training domestic workers for the job. The Neighbors Link Eco-Cleaning program has now trained and certified 123 women to clean homes and businesses using organic cleaning products that are not harmful or toxic to themselves or the environments in which they work.

Developed by long-time Neighbors Link supporter and Board Member Kim Manocherian, the three-week course runs four times yearly and covers basic business management, customer service, cleaning skills and the making of eco-cleaning products (mixed from safe, common ingredients). The final class of each session is a "clinical," in which Eco-



Cleaning students get hands-on practice using learned techniques in a home setting. Said Kim, "It is our goal to change the mind-set from worker to professional. We want women to know they can make healthy choices and secure dignified jobs in house cleaning."

The class serves as a networking system for participants who continue to meet monthly to share information and ways to market themselves to potential employers. According to Neighbors Link Program Director Luisa Granda, "We hope to continue to build their customer service skills and their confidence in the Eco-Cleaning approach to work with dignity."



NEIGHBORS LINK FAMILIES & SUPPORTERS CELEBRATE FAMILY CENTER GRAND OPENING



Left, NY State Assemblyman David Buchwald and Mount Kisco Village Trustee Jean Farber join the fun at the Family Center Grand Opening.



The Friends of Neighbors Link invite you to

## LATIN LINKS 2013 CULTURAL SERIES



**HARVEST OF EMPIRE (A FILM) THE UNTOLD STORY OF LATINOS IN AMERICA**  
OCTOBER 21, 2013

JACOB BURNS FILM CENTER

6:30 pm - Pre-Film Reception  
7:30 pm - Screening, Panel and Q&A

A post-film reception will immediately follow the discussion.

**WOMEN AND THE GLOBAL IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE: PRESENTATION AND LUNCHEON**  
NOVEMBER 6, 2013

GLEN ARBOR GOLF CLUB

11 am - Private Sponsor Reception with Maria Otero  
12 pm - Presentation and Luncheon

Tickets online at [www.neighborslink.org/events](http://www.neighborslink.org/events). For more information, please contact Katie Graves-Abe at [kgraves-abe@neighborslink.org](mailto:kgraves-abe@neighborslink.org) or 914-666-3410 (ext. 20).

Current Resident or:

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U.S. Postage  
PAID  
White Plains  
Permit No. 49456

27 Columbus Avenue  
Mount Kisco, NY 10549  
Tel: 914-666-3410  
[www.neighborslink.org](http://www.neighborslink.org)



Looking for help around your home or yard? Call Connor McCarthy at 914-666-3410 x 17 to learn more about using our hiring site or job bank.

Fall/Winter 2013

# Neighbors Link



VOLUME 20

OUR MISSION: To strengthen the whole community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of immigrants. OUR STRATEGY: Educate, Empower, Employ



## LATIN LINKS 2013 CULTURAL SERIES

**HARVEST OF EMPIRE THE UNTOLD STORY OF LATINOS IN AMERICA, FILM & DISCUSSION**  
JACOB BURNS FILM CENTER  
October 21st 6:30PM



**WOMEN AND THE GLOBAL IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE PRESENTATION & LUNCHEON** with Maria Otero, Former Undersecretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights to Hillary Clinton  
GLEN ARBOR GOLF CLUB  
November 6th 12:00PM



Friends and neighbors celebrate summer at the Neighbors Link Family Day Festival.

## Family Center Celebrates Opening with New Programs, New Opportunities



On September 24th, over 150 donors, supporters, volunteers and families attended the opening of the Neighbors Link Family Center. The event celebrated the Family Center as a place dedicated to engaging whole families in their children's academic success. Said Neighbors Link Executive Director Carola Otero Bracco, "We believe that parents are their child's first teachers."

## A Journey from Homelessness to Hope

I am known by many as the kid who is always smiling. That is usually true. I am smiling right now. There was a day when I could not smile. Six months ago, on New Year's Eve, my only family relative in this country told me to leave her house. On that day I became homeless and I did not smile...I cried.

The next day I wiped away those tears and began not only a new day, but a new year. My grandmother, who raised me, would say, "Al mal tiempo Buena cara"... "When everything goes wrong you should keep on smiling." Being alone on the street I had no time to be sad because that would solve nothing.

The first person I went to for support was Mrs. Boccia. Ever since I walked into her classroom for

Continued on page 5



Fox Lane Senior Class Speaker Kevin Tejada addresses his classmates at Caramoor in June. His uplifting speech (transcribed left) was delivered with his trademark smile. Kevin volunteered as an administrative assistant at Neighbors Link over the summer and is attending Bates College this fall.

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—KEVIN TEJADA



Our Summer Links program blends academic and enrichment activities to keep low-income students engaged and striving. High school volunteers, working alongside teachers, are the heart and soul of the program and essential to its success.



## NEIGHBORS LINK OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING



Above, a computer class at Neighbors Link.

Right, Neighbors Link hosts a Financial Literacy and Immigration Reform Workshop presented by the Guatemalan Consulate and the not-for-profit organization, Qualitas of Life Foundation.



"I LOVED WORKING WITH THE KINDERGARTNERS. IT WAS SO REWARDING TO SEE THEM ALL GROW AS STUDENTS."

—JENNA KIRSCHENBAUM, SUMMER LINKS STUDENT VOLUNTEER



"SUMMER LINKS WAS AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE. I ENTERED NOT KNOWING ENTIRELY WHAT TO EXPECT, YET LEFT THE PROGRAM FEELING MOVED BY THE CHILDREN AND HAVING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND PURPOSE."

—KACY FISHMAN, SUMMER LINKS STUDENT VOLUNTEER



## NEW FAMILY CENTER OPENS DOORS



The Neighbors Link Family Center offers a whole family approach to parent education and helping children learn. Key priorities are to strengthen families and improve academic readiness and achievement for immigrant children in our community.



THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS FOR MAKING THE DREAM OF A FAMILY CENTER COME TRUE.



Parents are a child's first teachers. The Family Center's Parent-Child Together program recognizes that children thrive when parents are engaged in their education, and that bicultural children benefit from parenting that respects both cultures.



Left, new mothers learn about early childhood development in the Family Center.

Right, a family works with a laptop from the Mobile Technology Classroom donated to the Family Center by the Edelman Charitable Trust.



Pipeline Scholars, Neighbors Link staff, and Police Officer Eddie Ramirez root for the home team at a New York Yankees game against the Boston Red Sox.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO FRANNIE'S GOODIE SHOP OF MOUNT KISCO. Always a community supporter, Frannie's is donating a percentage of its July through December proceeds to Neighbors Link.



Left and above, friends and newcomers gather at the Neighbors Link Family Day Festival. Together with good food and fun, the day offers opportunities for recent immigrants to strengthen community ties.

## MAKING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Participants in the annual Neighbors Link Community Cleanup cleared litter from the streets beside the Mount Kisco courthouse, police station, Kisco River and all of Lexington Avenue.

