

Neighbors Link

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

LaTEENa Empowerment Conference Inspires Local Young Women to Claim their Future Through Education

In May, hundreds of young Latinas, including fifteen teenage women from Neighbors Link, got a glimpse of how bright their futures can be. At the Mercy College campus in Dobbs Ferry, Hispanic girls from across the county gathered to attend Westchester’s first-ever Latina teen empowerment conference entitled “LaTEENa: Claim Your Future!” The goal of the day-long conference was to inspire, inform and empower the girls towards achievement.

The Neighbors Link contingent of high school-aged girls enthusiastically participated in workshops, heard success stories, and were inspired by the event’s ‘can do’ theme. Adult chaperones Jennifer Fuenzalida and Norma Pereira-Mora accompanied the group, acknowledging that they benefitted as much from the day as the teenagers did.

Jennifer Fuenzalida, a Fox Lane High School Spanish teacher and former Westchester Community College ESL instructor, said she was inspired by the girls’ ambitions. “It’s all about



Photo by Jennifer Fuenzalida

A spirited group of local high school girls heard inspiring success stories from Latina role models at the “LaTEENa: Claim Your Future!” teen empowerment conference.

having the confidence to pursue your goals—and the education to open doors.”

More than 50 Latina mentors were present to share their accomplishments, including keynote speaker Sofia Quintero, a filmmaker, writer and social activ-

ist raised in the Bronx. Admissions and financial aid representatives from area colleges were also on hand to offer advice to many teens who may be the first in their families to consider higher education.

Small group discussions kept the girls

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Photo by Marilyn Shapiro



Women’s ESL Class Off to a Great Start

This summer, Neighbors Link introduced English as a Second Language instruction for women enrolled in our Eco-Cleaning program. This new twice-weekly ESL course is modeled after our Thursday evening tutoring program and is taught in small group sessions with adult tutors. Our Job Bank and Outreach Coordinator Rodrigo Fuenzalida, also a Westchester Community College instructor, developed the curriculum. Thanks to WestCOP Head Start for making their space available.

College intern Emily Pantel (right) tutors women in English as part of the new Eco-Cleaning program.

Meet Our Outreach and Job Bank Coordinator, Rodrigo Fuenzalida

A schoolteacher in his homeland of Chile, Rodrigo became the first in his family to emigrate to the U.S. He worked as a day laborer when he arrived in this country and taught ESL classes at Neighbors Link. Rodrigo has come full circle, now placing workers in jobs he once filled.

His role as Outreach and Job Bank Coordinator is twofold, matching skilled workers with available jobs and introducing immigrants to the center's many offerings. When he is not at Neighbors Link, Rodrigo can often be found on the street talking with people, encouraging them to stop by to learn English and work skills, visit the Open Door dental van, or connect with other immigrants and families. "We try to get them involved in Neighbors Link in many different ways," he said. "Because I can relate to them and they can relate to me."

Rodrigo's bilingual and teaching skills make him a trusted teacher and leader within the Latino and day worker communities. He served as ambassador to the public for the recent U.S. Census campaign, and his effectiveness was key to encouraging a high census turnout among area immigrants.



Workers excavate and level the site, preparing for the installation of the Neighbors Link 10' x 12' stone patio.

The Patio that Teamwork Built

As its annual spring gardening project, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Westchester took on the ambitious task of creating a welcoming and comfortable patio at the entrance to Neighbors Link.

Gayle Hudson, chair of the fellowship's Social Action Committee, described it as a "team effort," thanking the big-hearted volunteers who rolled up their sleeves and made the dream a reality. The project benefitted greatly from the involvement of UUFNW member and professional landscape designer Deborah Phillips, together with families of the religious education program, and friends Ranji Lachmansingh, Martha Gingrich and Ken Stern.

Clients of Neighbors Link contributed their labor and skills to the construction of the stone patio which includes mosaic tile stepping stones hand-crafted by children in attendance at Neighbors Link Family Night and at the UUFNW Religious Education Program.

"This was a great opportunity to illuminate to our congregation some of the things that go on at Neighbors Link," said Gayle. "It's so great that this wonderful organization is right in the midst of our community and it works so well."



Timbers, pavers and plantings are installed, then the team enjoys a well-deserved break on the newly finished patio.



LaTEENa Conference *(Continued from page 1)*

focused, and gave them ample opportunities to think and talk about their hopes for the future. "Being a young teenage girl in any community can be difficult interpersonally," said Jennifer. "It's good to see the girls among other teenagers with similar stresses in their lives that they can relate to."

Norma Pereira-Mora, who is a mother of a teenage girl and a parent outreach staffer at Neighbors Link, said she was eager to chaperone the Neighbors Link teens. "Just like Sonia Sotomayor, Frida Kahlo and other Latinas who play major roles in society, these girls want to be someone in the future. Not just for themselves, but for their parents, who did not have such opportunities."

One workshop entitled "Where Am I Going? Life After High School," challenged teens to explore their options and expand their expectations by exposing them to a group of empowered women. Panelists, including Neighbors Link Program Director Luisa Granda, were Latina role models from all sectors of the workforce who shared their stories, challenges and journeys. A second session, "Building a Vision," brought girls together to compare personal experiences and articulate their visions for a successful future.

The event was sponsored by Girls Inc. Westchester, the YWCA of White Plains and Central Westchester, and PepsiCo, with support from the Westchester County Hispanic Advisory Board.

Norma hailed "LaTEENa: Claim Your Future!" as a catalyst for change in the lives of Latinas. "No one can do it alone. We need parents, schools, and local organizations like Neighbors Link to work as allies, accessing information and providing support to help our children succeed." ■

Everyone Counts in 2010 Census Effort



In the U.S. population census conducted once each decade, everyone counts.

At Neighbors Link, the 2010 Census was an important opportunity for our clients to perform a civic duty that benefits everyone who has made America their home. Supported by a Westchester Community Foundation census outreach grant, Neighbors Link took a lead role in encouraging participation among area Latinos.

In October of 2009, staff and instructors began to weave Census 2010 into each program at the center, including the ESL curriculum, Family Night Program, community outreach and recreational events. For many months, participation in the census became the centerpiece of our activities. Each person that entered Neighbors Link was exposed to the census through banners on the wall, flyers and staff reminders. Neighbors Link also hosted an on-site Census 2010 government worker for several weeks.

Neighbors Link staff member Rodrigo Fuenzalida led the effort to encourage participation in the census. He designed a comprehensive bilingual presentation that carefully walked participants through each question of the census and gave specific examples for answers.

Neighbors Link is pleased to have played a part in this important outreach effort to the Hispanic community.

Neighbors Link Volunteer Award Winners

The 2010 Neighbors Link Volunteer Awards were presented in May at celebrations honoring hundreds of our valued volunteers.

Photo by Marilyn Shapiro



Agnes Hassell Youth Leadership Award

Sam Heffernan of Mount Kisco, who recently graduated from the Hackley School and is attending Princeton this fall, was chosen to receive the 2010 *Agnes Hassell Youth Leadership Award* for his “exemplary leadership as a student volunteer.” He demonstrates exceptional leadership in multiple Neighbors Link programs and is an active ambassador to the community. Sam is shown here with his mother, Lisa Endlich Heffernan, and Carola Otero Bracco, Executive Director of Neighbors Link.

Neighbors Link Student Volunteer Award

The *Neighbors Link 2010 Student Volunteer Award* for “outstanding contribution and dedicated service” was presented to Torie Recalde, a recent graduate of Horace Greeley High School. Torie was selected to receive the award for her dedication to serving the elementary school children in the Neighbors Link “Learning Links” after-school program. She is shown with a proud group of students at Mount Kisco Elementary School.



Photo by Shirley Buontempo

“Neighbors Link is a gift to me and to all who have been lucky enough to work and study here. Teaching English and encouraging high schoolers to tutor is a joy.”

--Sarita Roy, Mary Weiss Volunteer Spirit Award Winner

Photo by Marilyn Shapiro



Mary Weiss Volunteer Spirit Award

Sarita Roy of Pleasantville is the recipient of the first-ever *Mary Weiss Volunteer Spirit Award* for her years of service as an adult volunteer ESL instructor at Neighbors Link, as well as her work in coordinating the weekly high school ESL volunteer tutoring sessions. The volunteer chosen for this award demonstrates “leadership, compassion and dedication” to Neighbors Link clients while impacting multiple programs and activities through their work. Sarita, on left, stands beneath the center’s new mural with Mary Weiss.

Neighbors Link Welcomes New Board Members



From left to right, Poppy Cummings of Bedford, Agnes Hassell of Chappaqua, Cynthia Brill, Esq. of Katonah, John Bailly, Esq. of Pound Ridge and Martha Palomino of Bedford are the newest members of the Neighbors Link Board of Directors.

NEIGHBORS LINK. LEARNING TOGETHER, LIVING BETTER.

To make a donation, go to www.neighborslink.org

LATIN LINKS

CELEBRATING CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

save the dates
2010

Tuesday, Sept. 28

SCREENING OF 9500 LIBERTY

Followed by a discussion with the film's director, Eric Blyer. Includes pre-film and post-film receptions.

JACOB BURNS FILM CENTER 6:15 PM
Pleasantville NY

Friday, Oct. 15

SPEAKER MARIA OTERO

A conversation with the Bolivian-born Under Secretary of State to Hillary Clinton for Global Affairs and Democracy. Reception.

Complimentary event; reservations required

KATONAH MUSEUM OF ART 7:00 PM
Katonah NY

Friday, Nov. 12

LATIN MUSIC & DANCE EVENT

A special evening of Latin Music and Dance, with Latin rhythms to move you through the night! Drinks and hors d'oeuvres.

RIPPOWAM CISQUA SCHOOL 7:00 PM
Rippowam Campus, Bedford NY

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www.neighborslink.org

Looking for help around your home or yard? Call Rodrigo Fuenzalida at 914-666-3410 X17 to learn more about using our hiring site or job bank.



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