

Goddard Riverside News

Building Communities, Keeping Traditions, Tile by Tile



(Clockwise) Juan Olivencia, Freddie Gonzales, Eduardo Munero and Demetrio Rosario play a game of dominoes in the Senior Center at Goddard Riverside.

“Capicu!” One of the domino players was just awarded 100 points because the last tile played had the same number of dots as the two open ends. “Capicu” is a traditional expression of success in the game.

Devoted domino players gather every afternoon in the lounge of Goddard Riverside’s Senior Center on 88th Street and Columbus Avenue. While they play, their world is concentrated on 28 small ivory rectangles with black dots. They are oblivious to the hustle and bustle of the Senior Center around them. There could be a noisy birthday celebration down the hall, a group of chattering elders on their way to a museum, an art class going full-steam in the studio, the senior chorus rehearsing or a talk-filled workshop on finance. But in the domino room, all they hear are tiles being plunked on the tables, with comments in Spanish and English. Sometimes, when the game heats up, the players’ voices grow loud and the tiles slam the table. For these men and women, it is a game of passion, strategy and camaraderie. It is also a part of their identity.

Sixty-two years ago when Carlos Justinian’s family moved to the Upper West

Side from Puerto Rico, the neighborhood was filled with Italian and Irish families. Eventually he met another kid from Puerto Rico, Abraham Rodriguez. They have been friends and domino partners ever since.

They remember the older generation teaching them how to play – often setting up outside on street corners. “We always watched the old guys,” said Abe, “And now we are the old guys ourselves.”

Another regular domino player, Ida Jimenez, loved dominoes as a youngster but didn’t play until about 15 years ago because, “It was a man’s game.” She is thankful that now things have changed and she has a place at the table too. Ida recently played in a tournament in Puerto Rico.

After the Marine Corps and college, Carlos and Abe returned to the neighborhood and began their careers. They rekindled their friendship and played dominoes. Neighbors would come to watch them play outside. Carlos and Abe saw kids born and grow up as they shuffled the tiles.

Over the years, the neighborhood changed, and they witnessed the current site of the Senior Center transform from a supermarket, to an administration center,

and then an empty lot when urban renewal came and knocked it all down. In 1983, Goddard Riverside built the senior residence Phelps House and put the Senior Center on the first floor. When Carlos retired from the Transit Authority as Director of Labor Relations and Abe retired from a career in mental health, they found a place to reconnect – at Goddard Riverside where Abe had worked for the youth program in the ’70s.

Longtime friends and new players congregate every afternoon from around 1:00 to 5:00 and partner up, four to a table, with four or five tables in action most days. Erika Teutsch, Director of the Senior Center, says they are the most dedicated group she has ever seen. Rarely do they miss an afternoon, and there is a collective groan if they have to leave early because an event requires use of the room.

Some players are in their eighties and nineties. Others are wheelchair-bound. Their careers ran the gamut from professional saxophone player to typesetter. Many come from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. One woman is from China and doesn’t speak any English, but knows a few words in Spanish. In dominoes, body language easily transcends the spoken word. Abe likens dominoes to chess because there are always new moves and strategy to develop. Carlos describes the game as one of symmetry and beauty.

“Abe and I were youth workers together,” said Executive Director Stephan Russo. “Each time I pass the domino players and see him at one of the tables, it makes me smile. He and his fellow players are keeping a tradition alive right here in our Senior Center.”

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Staff Highlights

Staff Development

Under the auspices of United Neighborhood Houses, which brings together staff from settlement houses throughout New York City for professional development, Goddard Riverside participated in the Institute for Not-for-Profit Management at Columbia University's Graduate School of Business. This year, three program directors attended the intensive sessions which focused on supervision, team building, budgeting, strategic planning and organization: Doris Colon, Director of Social Services at the senior residential facility Phelps House; Debby Kaplan, Director of TOP Opportunities, the employment training and placement program for formerly homeless adults; and Bruna Herzfeld, Director of the Day Care Center at our affiliate, St. Matthew's and St. Timothy's Neighborhood Center. Alumni from past years include staff from our housing and youth programs.

NYC Street to Home Program Workshop in Ohio

Kristen Edwards, Director of the Manhattan Outreach Consortium, presented a workshop on April 14 at the Housing Ohio 2008 Statewide Conference on the new homeless outreach initiative of which Goddard Riverside is the lead agency in the borough of Manhattan. Even though the homeless population is significantly different in Ohio than in New York City, the attendees were very interested in our street to home model and the collaboration of the seven partners in the consortium.

Workshop on ACT Treatment Models

Alison Arthur, Director of our ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) Team, presented a workshop on how to develop and implement a new ACT model at the April 29-30 Innovation Institute in Boston: "Next Generation of Behavioral Health and Social Services." She discussed issues of staffing, the team approach, money management, field communications, training and technology.

A Night of Makeup Brings Unity

It wasn't a picnic or a birthday party that drew our program staff and participants together – young and old, formerly homeless women, and teen workers – but rather a night of beauty sponsored by The Estée Lauder Companies. Tables and chairs were arranged in a u-shape in the Senior Center and each of the 55 women was given expert tips by the Estée Lauder team. After

the session, each participant was presented with gift bags stuffed with makeup and invited to a reception with very tasty treats. "I love this makeup night. It's a chance for all the women in our programs to come together, mingle, and feel good about themselves," said Doris Colon, Phelps House Director of Social Services and the event's organizer.



Students Get a How-To On Social Work

Every spring a new group of students and advisors from the Syracuse University School of Social Work visit Goddard Riverside to get first-hand knowledge about the breadth and operations of a settlement house. In March, a group of 20 toured our organization, in addition to Mt. Sinai Hospital, the U.N and the Tenement Museum.

This special relationship has been cultivated over many years by two alums: the late Bernie Wohl, former Executive Director and also the recipient of the university's prestigious Arents Award for excellence in the field of human services, and former board member Bobby Mirken, the late wife of longtime supporter and current board

member, Alan Mirken.

Stephan Russo, Executive Director, and Carolyn Nash, Associate Director, led a general discussion about social work and shared the experiences that led them to Goddard Riverside. Afterward, the group visited some of the programs for youth and seniors, including OPTIONS, the Senior Center, and Phelps House.

The students were impressed by the passion of the staff and the quality and diversity of our programs. Goddard Riverside hosts groups like this frequently, including guests from outside the United States who are learning about our system of social services.

Congratulations Goddard Riverside West Side SRO Law Project

We are very proud of our attorneys, organizers and neighbors who give a voice to tenants and who recently were key advocates in gaining them the right to sue landlords for harassment in housing court. The City Council approved a bill that gives tenants this right in February and the Mayor signed it into law in March.



713

The number of college applications that were submitted this school year to 177 different colleges by students in OPTIONS, our college counseling program.



A Gallery of Hardship and Hope

A man in a bright yellow shirt stands alone against a backdrop of clouds. Below, a young man, sitting on a bench is taking a coffee break. Far right, an older woman stares at you, as if startled by the camera. And then there is the peaceful-looking woman in a coffee shop, perhaps waiting for a friend. Who are they and why are their photos side-by-side?



treatment models are ill-equipped to deal with individuals who have complex functional problems and suffer from persistent and severe mental illness. In effect, ACT becomes the safety net, the program of “last resort.” ACT is a national model created in Wisconsin in the '70s to provide a non-traditional and more flexible approach to meet the unique needs of this particular population.

They are the faces and stories of participants in our ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) program. Each has been diag-

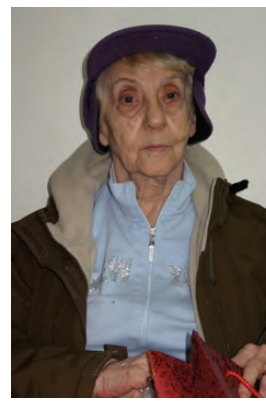


nosed with the most disabling of mental illnesses, including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. They are also encased in layers of health, legal, financial, family, and/or housing difficulties. And yet, despite the obstacles and hardships, resiliency and determination abound in their daily lives.

Doors to mental health programs are often closed to our participants. Traditional

In 1998 Goddard Riverside embraced this national model and created an ACT Team to provide services to mentally ill people in the community, especially homeless individuals. The ACT Team consists of 11 case workers, social workers, nurses and psychiatrists who cover the area from West 59th Street to In-

wood, including Central Park. ACT Team members are specially trained to provide onsite intervention, helping each person in their care cope with the challenges of daily living, become more independent, and function as fully as possible in the community. There are 68 men and women in the team's caseload, and each person is visited twice a week in his or her



home. With mental illness, there are no boundaries by income or race and home may be a park bench, an Upper West Side co-op or a single room occupancy (SRO) building. During each visit, the focus is on general well-being, in addition to medication and money management. Team members also carry out diverse tasks such as cleaning an apartment, escorting a participant to

a doctor's visit, attending a court hearing or planning a birthday party. Our team has been recognized by the New York State Office of Mental Health for effectiveness in engaging participants and has been selected as a model for other ACT Teams to shadow.

“We become extended family,” comments Derrick Manigo, a vocational specialist. After working with this group for nearly ten years, he can't imagine any other type of job. A former actor and singer, he uses his thespian skills to engage clients and loves to capture them with his camera, as shown on this page. “The photos show the soul of the person,”



commented Alison Arthur, the director of the program since its inception. She hangs Derrick's photos on the walls of the team's office on Columbus and 107th Street. “They remind us that finding a place in the community and having an extended family for support is important to every single one of us.”

Memorial for Pioneering Break Dancer Wayne Frost

Wayne Frost (a.k.a. Frosty Freeze) used to attend Goddard Riverside's youth programs in the early '80s and went on to become a famous, talented, dare-devil break dancer featured in music videos and documentaries. He even made an appearance in the hit movie, *Flashdance*. His untimely death at the age of 44 shocked and saddened our community. On Friday night, April 11, about 500 friends, musicians and dancers gathered at Goddard Riverside's Bernie Wohl Center where Wayne's life was celebrated. Here, some of his childhood buddies, who grew up together in Goddard Riverside's youth programs, flock around a memorial poster. (See: *The New York Times*, Dance Section, April 4, 2008)



Photo Alex Allen 2008

Welcome Sal Uy



We recently underwent a formal review of our management structure to determine how to best utilize our staff and resources to maintain the excellence of our programs and meet the growing demands for accountability. As a result, we created a new position, Associate Director of Operations. Filling that role is Salvador Uy, former Senior Vice President at Safe Horizon and COO of Empire Lawyers Service. In the late '90s, he also served as Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Homeless Services. A lawyer by training, he has a J.D. from Columbia University School of Law and an A.B. from Princeton University, magna cum laude.

Calendar

Neighbor to Neighbor Dinner

Saturday, May 10
Goddard Riverside, 6:15 pm
RSVP to vfaison@goddard.org
(212) 873-6600, ext. 301

Spring Cocktail Party and Auction

Monday, May 12
Midtown Loft & Terrace, 6:30-9:30 pm
For tickets & information:
gverkaik@goddard.org
(212) 873-6600, ext. 312

Annual Meeting

Tuesday, May 20
Goddard Riverside, 5:30-7:00 pm
RSVP to smacaluso@goddard.org
(212) 873-6600, ext. 300

Family Council

Thursday, June 5
Goddard Riverside, 6:00-7:00 pm
"City Budget Update" with
City Councilmember Gale Brewer

**Visit www.goddard.org
for details on all events.**

You know it's Spring at Goddard Riverside when...



...the **Green Keepers**, horticultural workers from our social purpose business, start heading out to local parks and residences to plant, spruce up, weed, and install fencing. If you need gardening work on a rooftop, in your home or on your terrace, call (646) 505-1088.



...the **Softball League** starts practicing with boys and girls ages 8 to 13 from Goddard Riverside's youth programs.



...the **seniors parade** in the annual Easter Bonnet competition in our Senior Center.



...a **busload of Goddard Riverside staff and participants journey** to Washington, DC for a day to advocate for housing and Medicare, and to enjoy the Cherry Blossom Festival.



...**youth in our after-school programs perform** at the annual Spring Event. This year's theme is "endangered species."



Thanks to staff for photos: Alex Allen, Valerie Faison, Derrick Manigo, Yarrow Willman-Cole

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