Residents Play Vital Role in Plan NYCHA

By Eric Deutsch

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Sheri Clemons, the Vice President of the Stapleton Houses Resident Association (RA), does not pull her punches when she speaks to her neighbors about the future of public housing in New York City. Ms. Clemons was at the Plan NYCHA resident engagement meeting held at the Stapleton Community Center in Staten Island on March 19. NYCHA has been meeting with residents all over the city to outline the Authority’s strategic plan for preserving public housing.

“The agency is 78 years old, and the way that things were done before is not working,” NYCHA Commissioner Margarita López told the crowd. “We need to adjust to survive.”

A major adjustment NYCHA is stressing is the importance of resident involvement. Whether it is getting involved in a Resident Association or spreading the word to neighbors or lawmakers, residents have the chance to influence the future of their homes now more than ever.

“We have to alert residents that this plan is going to be moving forward and we can join the movement,” said Brenda Charles, the RA President at Mariner’s Harbor. “If there are things we must do, then we must do them, even if it’s downsizing to a smaller apartment.”

Downsizing, or right-sizing, focuses on residents who live in under-occupied apartments, with more bedrooms than are needed by the families that live in them, to move into appropriately-sized homes. (To read more about this, please see the Chairman’s Message on page 3.)

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A large part of NYCHA’s current situation stems from a shortfall of $2.2 billion in capital and operating funds since 2001, said NYCHA Acting Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Andreas Spitzer. Plan NYCHA features numerous ways to try to address the funding shortfall, including ensuring every resident is paying their fair share.

Resident Gardeners Grow Their Green Thumbs at Annual Conference

By Heidi Morales

The room was buzzing. They clapped and wooped, and pumped their fists in the air. The excitement could be felt like current of electricity jumping off the walls. A whole year had gone by and NYCHA’s resident gardeners had been waiting with anticipation. The 10th annual NYCHA Grows with its Gardeners conference on March 22 at the Johnson Community Center in Manhattan drew hundreds of resident gardeners from all five boroughs to increase their knowledge about gardening, share ideas and support and celebrate each other and their efforts to beautify their developments.

The NYCHA Grows with its Gardeners conference has become a symbol of residents’ collective efforts to live more environmentally sound lives. Gardeners have made great strides not only in beautifying their community, but also educating their fellow residents about the benefits of planting for themselves and the environment.

Ametha Singleton from Ingersoll Houses in Brooklyn is the garden leader at her development, which has more than 40 gardens stewarded by her neighbors. “I love beauty. I love God’s creation. I love working with my hands. For me it’s the best exercise. It gives me joy,” said Ms. Singleton, 71, who grew up on a farm in North Carolina. She added that gardening comes naturally to her, and believes everyone should take part in it to help keep their community clean and beautiful.

Joseph Benjamin from Stuyvesant Gardens in Brooklyn likes the peace that gardening makes him feel. “I like planting. I feel good when I garden,” he said.

NYCHA Board Member Margarita López, who leads the Authority’s environmental efforts, praised the gardeners for their contributions to their developments and the “Green” movement. “You gardeners are very special. Thank you for doing what you do, because that will allow us to make Mother Earth whole again,” she said.

Many resident gardeners spoke of the satisfaction they felt of being part of something bigger than themselves and becoming cleaner, greener and healthier.

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Residents' Voices

March 1, 2012
(via e-mail)

Ed. note: the writer attended the Plan NYCHA Residents’ Engagement Meeting at Queensbridge Community Center.

I would like to thank you for a very well planned and informative meeting last night. For me it was a glimmer to what the future can have in store for NYCHA and for myself.

The audience in large part focused on the 30% rent guidelines. I can say that at times I paid less than 30% of my income for my rent. Paying less than 30% afforded me the ability to send my oldest to a top notch Catholic school, and now an elite boarding school where he is in the top 5%, and has received numerous accolades for his work. As for my youngest, I am able to pay his tuition which is way more than my current rent. For me it about my legacy, being able to give my boys roots and wings.

From NYCHA I went through the Housing Youth Training Program. Through NYCHA I was able to be a resident business owner. Through NYCHA I became a resident leader. Now I work for a large bank as an Executive Assistant to a one-percenter who grew up in NYCHA. I am a member of Community Board 8 in Queens, a Queens Congress Civic leader, Queens College Advisory board member, Girl Scout troop leader and a Farm School NYC student. All because NYCHA has given me roots and wings.

Monica Corbett, Pomonok Houses
Resident Association President

Tell us what is on your mind!

Residents’ Voices accepts letters, photographs, poems, drawings – anything that allows you to express yourself!

Please include your full name, development name, address and phone number. We will print only your name and development on our pages, we need your address and phone number for verification purposes only.

Please limit written submissions to 250 words. The Journal reserves the right to edit all content for length, clarity, good taste, accuracy, etc. Because of space limitations, we must limit all contributors to one letter per person per issue.

There are many ways to share your thoughts with us at the Journal:
Send an e-mail to: Journal@nycha.nyc.gov
Send a snail mail to: NYCHA Journal Letters to the Editor 250 Broadway, 12th floor New York, NY 10007
Send a Tweet on Twitter at: twitter.com/NYCHA_Housing
Post a message on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/NYCHA

Doreen Williams, the Resident Watch Supervisor at Todt Hill Houses, speaks during the Plan NYCHA resident engagement meeting on March 19, 2012: "We can get things done if people get involved."

“I have to go door-to-door and hold meetings on every floor to get people involved,” she said. “I tell people ‘You can’t come out now? Well here's my phone number, call me.’”

To learn more about Plan NYCHA and how to get involved, go to plannych.org.

To see more photos from the Plan NYCHA resident engagement meetings, point your smartphone’s camera here.
NYCHA is proud to be a place where families can grow, thrive and build a life around the assurance of an affordable home through both good and bad times. While our mission always remains the same, we have transformed over the years to better serve New Yorkers and the great city we call home.

Just as NYCHA evolves, so do the lives of residents. Families expand, children grow into adults, people move on and move out, and their housing needs change. NYCHA and residents share a responsibility to make sure that we keep up with those changes, and that residents’ apartment sizes reflect their family’s true needs.

You may have heard about “right-sizing,” a key part of Plan NYCHA, our roadmap for the preservation of public housing. Right-sizing means that NYCHA is doing all it can to help residents living in under-occupied apartments – with more bedrooms than are needed by the families that live in them – move into appropriately-sized homes. This allows us to open up these larger units for families who need more space or are on the waiting list. Because almost half of these units are occupied by seniors, we also are helping many of our elders who may have difficulty taking care of a large apartment move into affordable senior housing with onsite support services. This will enable them to continue living independently in their own apartments.

More than 50,000 NYCHA apartments around the city are under-occupied. Half of them have two bedrooms occupied by one person. Many are headed by residents whose children have grown up and started their own households, or members of larger families who have inherited bigger apartments than they need.

DeReese Huff, the Resident Association president at Campos Plaza, was one of those residents. Her mother raised 10 children in the five-bedroom apartment she moved into in 1979. Eventually those kids moved on and the apartment was passed along to Ms. Huff and her own daughter. Recognizing that there were many others facing the situation that her mother once had and who needed the extra space, she requested a transfer to a smaller apartment and now shares a two-bedroom unit with her 13-year-old daughter. “NYCHA gave us a great place to live,” says Ms. Huff of the apartment she and her siblings grew up in, “and it’s only fair that we do the same for others.”

With more than 160,000 families on the public housing waiting list – that is almost one family waiting for every unit of NYCHA housing – and many more that have outgrown their current apartments and urgently need more space, there is a growing need to make things right. With your help, NYCHA is taking action.

If you are living in an apartment with more bedrooms than you need, you may have received a letter from NYCHA asking you to put your name on the transfer list as soon as possible. We will work with you to find an adequate apartment that works for you in a neighborhood of your choice, including your current development should an appropriate unit become available. We recognize that not all residents can be accommodated with their first choice. We also know some residents will consider a range of housing alternatives, from new senior housing to Section 8. NYCHA understands that a one-size-fits-all solution is not the answer and we are prepared to work with each family (including providing moving assistance) to ensure an appropriate outcome.

I am sure many of you have questions and concerns about right-sizing, and I encourage you to talk to your Property Manager for more information. Working together, we can maximize access to public housing and give more New York City families the opportunities so many families have enjoyed throughout NYCHA’s 78-year history.

John Klein

By Heidi Morales

This is the latest in a series of Journal profiles of NYCHA’s resident gardeners as part of the celebration of the 50th year of the Authority’s Garden and Greening Program.

Rosaura Milan, a 49-year resident of McKinley Houses in the Bronx, has fond memories of tending to a garden as a child. Her mother, she said, enjoyed gardening very much. “But that was many moons ago,” she said in between chuckles.

That was Mrs. Milan’s introduction to gardening, but it wasn’t until five years ago that she really dedicated her time and energy to nurturing a flower garden – and that’s when she fell in love. “I love to experiment with my flowers. I always get excited when I see them growing. I have about 200 to 250 tulips right here at the development,” she said proudly.

The grandmother of three boasts just as many wins in NYCHA’s annual Garden and Greening Competition; but winning is not the reason for her passion. “First and foremost, I think it’s a big help to beautify the community. I get such pleasure doing it,” Mrs. Milan said, whose happiness and playfulness in her voice and laugh are endearing and borderline contagious. “I feel such pleasure when I see the neighbors enjoy it – my garden has a lot of benches and tables. Gardening is my relaxing time.”

And she has high hopes for this year’s competition. “Even if I don’t win, I’m still going to enter,” she said. “I just love it.”

Mrs. Milan takes full advantage of the year-round technical assistance and gardening resources available to her through NYCHA’s Garden and Greening Program. “I like to go to the meetings; meet new people; and learn more about gardening,” she said. “Gardening has done wonders for me. I was in a bad accident and I feel the garden has helped me health-wise and mentally too. I feel peace when I’m there.”

The NYCHA Grows with its Gardeners conference was established in 2002 and is part of the Authority’s Garden and Greening Program, which began in 1962 and is the longest running program at the Housing Authority.
Notice of HUD Inspections

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will be conducting a physical inspection of NYCHA developments within the next few weeks. The system that HUD developed for these inspections is called the Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS). As part of this process, a certain number of residents’ apartments will be inspected.

Residents can assist by reviewing the following items:

**Electricity**
- Your circuit breaker or fuse panel should not have any missing breakers or fuses (you should not see any of the wiring or parts inside the breaker or fuse panel). Do not block access to the panel.
- All light switches and outlets should operate properly and have cover plates over them. Light fixtures should be functional.
- In apartments with Call for Aid units, switches and pull cords should operate properly with pull cord hanging down to the floor and no furniture blocking access to the cord.
- Ground Fault Interrupter (GFI) outlets should test properly when pushing the Test button.
- Leaks near electrical devices (e.g., light fixtures, fuse panels or breaker panels) should be reported.

**Smoke Detectors/Carbon Monoxide Detectors**
- Detectors should be installed and function properly.
- There should not be any empty brackets with missing detectors.

**Stove/Oven**
- Check each burner. Each burner should light individually by turning the knob.
- The oven should work and have no missing knobs.
- Range hoods should be clean and functional.

**Refrigerator**
- The refrigerator door should close all the way. Door gaskets should not be cracked or broken.
- Lights should work.

**Doors**
- Bathroom, bedroom and closet doors should close and latch properly.
- Apartment entrance and bedroom doors should not have a double-keyed cylinder or padlock.
- Door knobs and latches should be in good working order.
- Doors should be free of holes or damage.

**Windows**
- Windows should work properly, staying up when opened and latching when closed.
- Window glass should not be cracked or broken.

**Faucets**
- Faucets and their parts should not leak when either on or off.
- You should have rubber stoppers for the sinks and tub.

**Toilets**
- Toilets should function properly and have no apparent leaks.

**Mildew and Mold**
- Mildew and mold conditions in any area of an apartment should be reported.

**Exterminator**
- You should not have any type of infestation condition.

**Mailboxes**
- Mailbox doors must lock with a key.
- If any of the above items are not in good order, please contact the Customer Contact Center at (718) 707-7771 to schedule an appointment to have those items repaired. If you already have scheduled an appointment for these repairs, it is not necessary to call the Customer Contact Center again.

**Resident Owned Items:**
- Resident owned items also are approved during the physical inspection of the apartments and should be checked and corrected as necessary.

**Fire Extinguishers**
- Resident-owned extinguishers must have a valid annual inspection tag.

**Double-Keyed Cylinders**
- Resident-installed double-keyed cylinders and/or padlocks must be removed.

**Air Conditioners and Fans**
- Resident-owned air conditioners must be in working order.
- Fans must have protective covers.

**Mirrors**
- Broken mirrors should be removed and/or replaced.

NYCHA thanks you in advance for your continued cooperation.

NYCHA Chair Appears on Section 8 Panel

NYCHA Chairman John B. Rhea appeared on a panel at the New York University Furman Center’s Institute for Affordable Housing Policy Breakfast on March 5. The topic was “Fulfilling the Promise: Improving Housing Choice Voucher Holders’ Access to High Opportunity Neighborhoods.” Currently there are nearly 95,000 households receiving Housing Choice (Section 8) Voucher Program assistance from NYCHA, with more than 32,000 participating building owners.

Chairman Rhea discussed NYCHA’s mission to help connect families to opportunities and to ensure that voucher holders have the information they need to make housing decisions for their family. NYCHA provides voucher holders with a list of building owners who participate in the program, along with information on how the voucher may be used anywhere in the United States. Chairman Rhea also mentioned that NYCHA would like to do even more to assist families in their housing searches, but the Section 8 program continues to be hindered by steep declines in federal funding. “Since 2005 we have lost a total of $35 million in administrative fees for which we were eligible,” Chairman Rhea said. “This year we expect to receive less than 75 percent of what we need.”

As part of Plan NYCHA, the Authority will explore alternative funding options for the Section 8 program. Joining Chairman Rhea on the panel were Public Advocate Bill de Blasio, the Furman Center’s Director, Ingrid Gould Ellen, Jennifer Lee O’Neil of the Guadel Consulting Corporation and Sheldon Mann of Langsam Property Services.
Safety and Security Enhancements Create Employment Opportunities for NYCHA Residents

When an advertisement for Brooklyn Networks, a free six-week cable installation training program hosted by Brooklyn Workforce Innovations (BWI), arrived in the mailbox of Mr. Cifuentes, a resident of Woodside Houses in Queens, “but I knew that this training would be a great match for my interests and long-term career goals.”

This opportunity for Mr. Cifuentes is a result of NYCHA’s work, through the Office of Resident Economic Empowerment & Sustainability (REES), to leverage its resources, including its spending power, to create economic opportunities for residents.

Thanks to funding from the New York City Council and New York State Legislature, NYCHA is implementing safety enhancements to building entrances that will create employment opportunities for residents. These enhancements are an outgrowth of NYCHA’s Safety and Security Task Force, a collaborative effort among residents, the Authority and the NYPD to improve safety in NYCHA developments and the quality of life of residents.

In keeping with NYCHA’s commitment to extend economic opportunity to residents, NYCHA has required that the contractors hired to do this work employ qualified residents. Contractors are looking for workers with the following skills: cable pulling, pipe bending and basic electrical work.

BWI works closely with the NYCHA contractor, Security Management Systems, to customize their cable installation training program, Brooklyn Networks. “We are committed to hiring qualified NYCHA residents and ensuring that they have meaningful opportunities at our company,” says Craig Albrecht, Vice President at Security Management Systems. “The collaboration with BWI gives us the opportunity to hire workers that we know have been trained in the skills we need.”

“I’m very impressed with the quality of the program,” said Mr. Cifuentes. “The certifications we’re working toward will put me and my classmates a step ahead of the competition. The other training programs I’ve looked at at this level were way too expensive – I’m so grateful that NYCHA and BWI are offering this for free!”

REES led a citywide recruitment effort to fill the program, ensuring that interested residents would have an opportunity to participate. The classes will prepare many residents for opportunities with NYCHA contractors and other private sector partners over the next two years.

For information on more training opportunities with REES, call the REES Hotline at (718) 289-8100.

Eye on Housing Fraud

Through the quarterly feature “Eye on Housing Fraud,” the New York City Department of Investigation (DOI) provides names of residents, as listed below, who have been convicted and sentenced for defrauding NYCHA. In these cases, restitution is collected through a payment schedule until fully paid, including wage and asset garnishments, if necessary. Anyone with information regarding fraud or wrongdoing should call DOI’s NYCHA Inspector General Hotline at (212) 306-3356.

Ermelina Marinone – pleaded guilty to federal charges of Theft of Government Property and Making False Statements and sentenced to 18 months in federal prison following by three years of probation for defrauding the government of more than $85,000 by illegally obtaining dual subsidies from NYCHA and the City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, residing in a Section 8 apartment in Manhattan while allowing unauthorized individuals to reside in her NYCHA apartment in the Douglass Houses.

Migdalia Marrero – pleaded guilty to the federal charge of Making False Statements and was sentenced to two years of probation for failing to report her income and presence of her husband in her Section 8 subsidized apartment in the Bronx and defrauding NYCHA of $26,660, the same amount she was ordered to repay NYCHA as part of her sentence.

Enercida Garcia and Victor Garcia – each pleaded guilty to the federal charge of Conspiracy to Commit Theft of Government Property and Theft of Government Property for illegally obtaining Section 8 benefits by concealing their ownership at different times of a Section 8-subsidized property and their familial relationship in which Victor was the landlord and Enercida was a tenant. Enercida was sentenced to six months of supervised release and Victor to one year of probation. Together they were ordered to repay NYCHA a total of $43,416.

Keisha Rease – pleaded guilty to the federal charge of Theft of Public Money for failing to report her City employment, most recently with the Department of Juvenile Justice, and defrauding NYCHA’s Section 8 program of $27,650. Rease was sentenced to three years of probation and ordered to repay NYCHA $27,650.

Fake Parking Permit Ring Busted

DOI recently announced the results of its proactive investigation into the use of fraudulent NYCHA employee parking permits that investigators found displayed on vehicles in outdoor parking lots in NYCHA developments. After DOI investigators found an initial fake parking permit in 2011, it expanded its investigation searching for possible similar abuses at other NYCHA developments. DOI found fraudulent parking permits displayed in vehicles parked in J.P. Mitchel Houses in the Bronx and the James Weldon Johnson Houses, Frederick Douglass Houses, Martin Luther King, Jr. Towers, and Alfred E. Smith Houses in Manhattan.

Since December 2011, DOI has arrested 14 people, including six NYCHA residents who also face administrative action by the Authority. The investigation found that the fraudulent permits were likely computer-generated facsimiles. They were spotted because of differences from genuine permits, including a different-colored background and invalid permit numbers. DOI continues its investigation and is working with NYCHA to strengthen oversight procedures.

A limited number of parking permits, for a fee, are available for NYCHA residents who apply through their management office. Anyone with information about fraudulent parking permits should contact DOI’s NYCHA Inspector General hotline at (212) 306-3356.

Comments? Questions? E-mail Journal@nycha.nyc.gov.
Women’s History Month: Staten Island RA Presidents Honored

S everal Resident Association Presidents were honored for their volunteer service to their communities and to Staten Island as a whole on March 10. The second annual Women's History Month Celebration was sponsored by State Senator Diane Savino, State Assembly Member Nicole Malliotakis and City Council Member Debi Rose. Shown are, seated from left to right, Geraldine Parker, Stapleton Houses RA President and Citywide Council Member Debi Rose; and Beatrice Everett, West Brighton Houses RA President; and Brenda (Kiko) Charles, Mariner’s Harbor Houses RA President; Senator Diane J. Savino; Assembly Member Nicole Malliotakis; City Council Member Debi Rose; Scherise Lewis, RA President; Mary Shalo; Florence Grossmann, New Lane Shores RA President; Sylvia Cunningham, Todt Hill Houses RA President. Standing, from left to right, are Victoria Cinglano-Doria, Berry Houses RA President; Senator Diane J. Savino; Assembly Member Nicole Malliotakis; City Council Member Debi Rose; Scherise Lewis, South Beach Houses RA President; Eunice Love, Richmond Terrace Houses RA President; and Beatrice Everett, West Brighton Houses RA President.

NYCHA Chairman John B. Rhea speaks at a Mayoral news conference on February 28, 2012, to announce City summer job fairs for Coney Island-area residents.

The Force Is in His Hands

M aurice Davis, 21, a resident of Rutgers Houses (Manhattan) and a member of the Green City Force – a service corps that prepares young people for sustainable careers – recently was named 2012 Corps Member of the Year. The Corps Network, which represents 33,000 Corps Members across the country, selected Maurice as one of six national corps members who, through their accomplishments and personal stories, exemplify the organization’s ideals. Mr. Davis and his fellow award recipients were honored recently at The Corps Network National Conference in Washington, D.C.

“Four days at the conference, I talked to many different people who represent The Corps Network all across the United States,” Mr. Davis said. “I spoke in front of many people about my background and how much these past eight months meant to me. I learned so much from the experience.”

As part of NYCHA’s Green Agenda, the Authority has been working with the non-profit Green City Force (GCF) for the past two years to connect residents between the ages of 18-24 with training and job opportunities in the emerging green economy. In addition, members receive training in job readiness, eco-literacy, outreach and energy efficiency auditing for homes and small businesses. Last year 23 NYCHA residents graduated from the GCF training, including Mr. Davis. He, along with other Corps members, have participated in the NYC Cool Roofs campaign and built an urban green space at Lillian Wald Houses in partnership with Planters and The Corps Network.
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IT Programs a New Career Path for Residents

By Howard Silver

Cheers rang out for some young residents at a recent NYCHA Board meeting, as an initiative was approved that made their employment at NYCHA and training at Columbia University possible. The residents are among 23 young people now working part-time as consultants with major employers while attending a specialized training course that will lead to a certificate in computer technology support, underwritten by Columbia University. The training at Columbia consists of helpdesk support, for Siebel and Maximo, two computer programs used by NYCHA; and mentoring and business writing courses.

“The program not only allows us to know about the Information Technology (IT) field but also about ourselves,” said 23-year-old Victoria Vasquez, a resident of Vladeck Houses in Manhattan.

“Throughout the training we are receiving, we are being groomed into becoming an asset for any company. I am so grateful.”

The pioneering program was developed by NYCHA’s Department of Information Technology under the direction of Acting General Manager Atefeh Riazi, in conjunction with Resident Economic Empowerment & Sustainability (REES) and the Office of Public and Private Partnerships, in response to a challenge from the NYCHA Board to increase the number and quality of resident job opportunities.

“This program is the culmination of the Board’s commitment to creating employment development opportunities for residents,” Chairman John B. Rhea said. “This is an incredible program that leverages the dollars that we put out to make sure they have a broader impact.”

David Price, 24, of Jackie Robinson Houses in Manhattan remarked, “Throughout the last six months, I have had the opportunity to develop a variety of IT skills. But I believe the most important skill is handling the unique responsibility that comes with being a student in this program.”

Development of the employment program tailored to the unique demands and rewards of the technology industry was challenging, and had been tried before. “Residents often don’t have the skills needed by IT vendors to be hired for Section 3 jobs,” IT Project Manager Diane Chehab said. “Acting GM Riazi insisted that we find a way to prepare residents for IT employment opportunities, so we had to try something new. The skills they will have are in demand not just at NYCHA but everywhere.”

Some of the residents being trained to be Information Technology professionals stand with NYCHA Chairman John B. Rhea (center) and Acting General Manager Atefeh Riazi (third from left). From left to right, Sandy Liao, Chelsea Houses; Jessica Candara, Morris Houses; Ian Holly, Polo Grounds Towers; Victoria Vasquez, Vladeck Houses; Yokasta Vargas, Somatovayr Houses; David Price, Robinson Houses; Jason Giraldo, Douglas Houses; and Franklin Arce, Williams Houses.

RA Presidents Honored for Black History Month

Ann Cotton-Morris, the Citywide Council of Presidents Queens District representative and Woodside Houses Resident Association (RA) President, and Carol Wilkins, Ravenswood Houses RA President, were honored for their commitment to tenants’ rights at New York City Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer’s annual Black History Month Celebration and Awards Night. Ms. Cotton-Morris (below) and Ms. Wilkins (right) received framed City Council proclamations from Council Members Van Bramer and Letitia James at the event on February 28 in the Jacob Riis Settlement House in Queensbridge Houses. Pamela Thrower, the RA President of Queensbridge Houses, also spoke during the ceremony.

“I find it to be a special privilege and honor to receive an award for serving the many residents in my community,” said Ms. Cotton-Morris. “It is inspiring to know the service I render is recognized and appreciated by the many caring residents, NYCHA and the surrounding community.”
Lights, Camera...Read!

Fifteen young booklovers from the Rutgers Community Center recently toured the WABC-TV (Channel 7) studios, their reward for their dedication to the printed page. The NYCHA youth took part in a reading challenge to see which community center in Manhattan could read the most books during last summer. A total of 70 youth at Rutgers read more than 1,300 books, averaging more than 19 books per child.

The contest was part of the NYC Literacy Enterprise/NYCHA Reads program, an effort to engage children in activities that foster reading during the summer and throughout the year. Children from 14 community centers participated. On average citywide, each child read more than seven books.

Part of the studio tour on March 1 included watching a live broadcast of a WABC news program. WABC/Disney Inc. donated 10,000 books last summer to NYCHA-run and sponsored community centers.

Polo Grounds Community Center Opens its Doors to Harlem

After more than a decade of waiting, the Polo Grounds Community Center finally opened its doors. Cheerful children, seniors, teenagers, community members, NYCHA staff and elected officials clapped, stomped, sang and danced as they celebrated the grand opening on March 2.

Ruth Smith, the former Resident Association President at Polo Grounds and originator of the idea of building a community center at the site, was present to see her vision become a reality. “I could cry because this was in 1980 and look at it now. It took all that time, but we got it, we got it,” she said.

The Community Center includes a gym, multipurpose room, performance stage, locker rooms, game room, video room with a sound booth, arts and crafts room with a kiln and a commercial kitchen.

“The center is going to expand kids’ horizons,” said NYCHA Chairman John B. Rhea. “It’s an opportunity for them to build friendships, a place where we’re going to nurture our future leaders, and most importantly a place where we’re going to provide vital support for families.”

The charitable organization Children’s Village is providing programs and activities at the center, including afterschool homework help, sports and recreation, dance, arts and crafts and a summer camp.

Children’s Village also provides snacks and meals daily to all participating children.

Yadira Cruz plans to bring her eight and 14 year-old children to the new center. “I’m so happy, this building is beautiful. Now there are more opportunities for the kids, they help them out a lot. There are more distractions so the kids are involved in positive things not thinking about drugs and bad things,” Ms. Cruz said.

“I think the center is going to give the kids an opportunity to do things they never thought that they could do,” said Tonya McGhee, Assistant Vice President at the Children’s Village. “It’s going to give them a safe place. It allows them to open their minds, give them new experiences and hopefully save their lives.”

Joining Chairman Rhea, Ms. Smith and Ms. McGhee in delivering remarks at the grand opening were NYCHA President for Community Operations, Deidra Gilliard, Department of Youth and Community Development Commissioner, Jeanne B. Mulligrav, State Assemblyman Herman D. Farrell, Jr., and Niykee Stuart, Assistant Director for Children’s Village.

NYCHA Youth Takes Prize in Statewide Competition

As reported on in the March issue of the Journal, Sadia Nusrat, who lives in Gowanus Houses in Brooklyn, was nominated by NYCHA for a college scholarship given by the Public Housing Authorities Directors Association (PHADA) and the New York State chapter of the organization (NYSPHA-DA). Ms. Nusrat, a senior at Midwood High School in Brooklyn, won second place in the NYSPHA competition, for which she will receive a new laptop computer.

“Wow! That made my day,” Ms. Nusrat said. “When I told my mom that I got nominated for the scholarship she gave me a big hug and said ‘I have a feeling that you will win.’”

$1,000 Scholarships for NYCHA Residents

To support the educational pursuits of residents, NYCHA offers two types of scholarships: the NYCHA-CUNY Resident Scholarship awards NYCHA residents who are full-time undergraduates at a City University of New York (CUNY) college, and the Regina A. Figueroa Memorial Scholarship awards NYCHA residents with disabilities who are enrolled in a CUNY undergraduate program. Scholarships are worth at least $1,000. To qualify you must:

• Be an authorized NYCHA resident
• Be a full-time sophomore, junior or senior student enrolled in a CUNY Associate or Baccalaureate degree program
• Have a minimum 3.0 GPA
• Demonstrate financial need
• Submit a 500 word autobiographical essay
• For the scholarship for students with disabilities, have a documented disability

The application period is open from April 30–June 15, 2012. For more information and an application, go to www.nyc.gov/nychacunyscholarship or call (212) 306-3322.
**MILESTONE ANNIVERSARIES**

**Mill Brook Houses Celebrates 50th Anniversary**

Mill Brook Houses Extension in the Bronx recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Commemorating the occasion were, from left to right, Thomas Johnston, Borough Administrator; Samantha Campbell, Secretary; Gwendolyn Junious, Assistant Property Maintenance Supervisor; Donald Patterson, Property Maintenance Supervisor; Victor A. Gonzalez, NYCHA Board Member, John Johnson, Citywide Council of Presidents Bronx South District Chair; Princella Jamerson, Resident Association President; Melania Allen, Borough Director; Allison Williams, Property Manager; Carl Walton III, Boro Administrator; and Frank Potulin, Maintenance Worker.

**Manhattanville Houses Celebrates 50th Anniversary**

Manhattanville Houses in Manhattan turned 50 recently. On hand to celebrate the moment were, from left to right, Carol Williams, Resident Association (RA) Treasurer; Jean Gray, RA Sergeant-At-Arms; Emma Baricelli, RA Vice President; Deborah Candrevas, RA Recording Secretary; Ann Morris, RA President; Michael Rosen, Senior Deputy Director of Mixed Finance; George Crawford, Assistant Property Maintenance Supervisor; Camilla Kmiec, Property Manager; Paul Crews, Property Maintenance Supervisor; Alverista Hall, Mixed Finance Administrator; and Caroline Torres Soriano, Supervisor of Caretakers.

**Marble Hill Houses Celebrates 60th Anniversary**

Marble Hill Houses in the Bronx now is 60 years old. Joining together to mark the occasion were, in the front from left to right, Teresa Williams, Property Maintenance Supervisor; Victor A. Gonzalez, NYCHA Board Member; Paulette Shomo, Resident Association President; Simon Mukkatt, Property Manager; and Wendy Anderson, Assistant Property Manager. In the back, left to right, were Miguel Molina, Borough Administrator; Garth Small, Assistant Property Maintenance Supervisor; Andy Maldonado, Supervisor of Grounds; and Kevin Briggs, Supervisor of Caretakers.

**Smith Houses Gets Shiny**

Some residents at Smith Houses in Manhattan found a way to meet their community service requirement while making their homes more beautiful. They are gathering with NYCHA staff to clean the walls and staircases in one building in the development once a month, and they plan to get to every building. The residents break into teams and work floor-by-floor.

Federal law requires all public housing residents who are not exempt to perform community service or economic self-sufficiency activities for eight hours every month. Starting this year as part of residents' annual review process, NYCHA is providing resources to support compliance with the federal Community Service law. NYCHA will be expanding its efforts to ensure that everyone complies with the law and meets the Community Service requirement.

Many residents earn hours by joining Resident Watch or assisting at government or community organizations like church or faith-based run programs, schools, libraries, non-profit organizations, hospitals and nursing homes. Residents can check the following websites for opportunities in their neighborhoods:

- www.volunteermatch.org
- www.NYCServe.org
- call 311 and ask for volunteer opportunities.

NYCHA's borough Family Services offices also offer assistance:

- Bronx 718-409-8699
- Brooklyn 718-498-3243
- Manhattan 212-334-2506
- Queens 718-206-3286
- Staten Island 718-816-1521

**FREE 15-week job training program for homeless & low-income women**

**First Step Program**

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- Internet Research • Resume Writing • Interviewing Skills
- Job Placement Assistance • Self-Esteem Building
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Comments? Questions? E-mail Journal@nychc.nyc.gov.