



The CAPsule

Greater Bergen Community Action, Inc. Spring 2015, Vol. 1, Issue 2

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1st Annual Lois A. Braithwaite Community Advocacy Awards

Greater Bergen Community Action celebrated the life of Lois A. Braithwaite on March 27th with the presentation of the 1st Annual Lois A. Braithwaite Community Advocacy Awards to U.S. Senators Bob Menendez and Cory Booker.

The award is named in honor of Mrs. Braithwaite, who served as Board Chair of GBCA for 23 years until her passing in January. She was an advocate for the disadvantaged and deeply committed to improving the lives of people in need. She was a teacher, volunteer, founder of the James Street Block Associa-



Left to right, Lois Braithwaite's nephew Tom Reynolds, U.S. Senator Bob Menendez, Lois Braithwaite's niece Jill Johnson, and Don Conway, GBCA Board Chair.



U.S. Senator Cory Booker

tion, and a community activist since the 1960s, with a reputation that grew as the years went by.

For their dedication to the people of New Jersey and commitment to the ideals that Mrs. Braithwaite lived, GBCA was proud to honor Senator Bob Menendez and Senator Cory Booker with the first Lois A. Braithwaite Community Advocacy Award.

Senator Menendez is a tireless advocate for the most vulnerable in our society. The child of Cuban immigrants, he grew up knowing what it was like to struggle. A leader from the time of his first elected office at age 20, Senator Menendez has spent the ensuing years fighting for the opportunity for everyone in America to have the same chance to succeed.

Senator Cory Booker has never taken his achievements for granted. With every step of his journey, he has reached back to pull others forward. Senator Booker understands the challenges of the community GBCA serves and is a champion for the programs that help those with less achieve a brighter future.

From the Executive Director's Desk...



It has been a momentous year at GBCA. We have had moments of hope and expectation. Also, moments full of challenge and achievement. And all of this, along with moments of deep, deep, sadness. Certainly, no event had more profound significance than the sudden passing of our beloved leader and Board Chair, Lois A. Braithwaite. She was a force of nature and a force for good. Lois was beloved, and she is terribly missed by many who basked in her glow – who were made better because she took the time to care about and love us.

No one more embodied what the ideals of Community Action than did Lois. The legacy of achievement she left is remarkable. When she joined the Board, GBCA was deploying just around \$2 million into the community, through the work of less than 100 staff. At the time of her passing, GBCA will deploy approximately \$40 million, through the talent and hard work of almost 700 people, serving roughly 60,000 people. We are all part of her family and we will forever be inspired by her.

One member of that family, Jeanette Taville, has worked for GBCA for 23 years. She wrote a beautiful remembrance of Lois called “The Godmother of Greater Bergen,” in which she said...

“A somber veil has fallen over Moore Street. The silence was deafening and blank stares could not comprehend. The middle chair at the helm of the board room table was strangely unsettling. As we move forward with plans for the future, the absence of her participation and contributions is already apparent. The Godmother has left the building.

However, I am honored to have known the lady who occupied that middle chair for over two decades. I am proud of what she stood for. I am humbled by the sacrifices she made for others. I will always respect her commitment to achieving parity and her willingness to fight for it. I miss her dearly and will keep her memory close as we continue to pursue our Mission. Another legacy is born. Ms. Lois A. Braithwaite, a fire that will never be extinguished.”

It is fortuitous that this fire will live on through a lifelong friend whom she recruited to the Board a few years ago, Don Conway, our new GBCA Chairman. They attended Holy Trinity School together, and while they pursued different life paths, (Lois a teacher in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and Don, a successful businessman), they forever share a commitment to making our community a better place for everyone. Lois knew we would need Don’s talents and experience, and as she always had, she has one last time provided us with what we need when we need it most.

We miss you Lois, so very much. And while it is often said that the passing of time will ease that pain, we at GBCA have a hard time believing that such a day will ever come. Actually we’re not so sure we want it to.

Robert F. Halsch, Jr.

Community Advocacy Award Attendees



From left to right: Tom Padilla, former Freeholder and GBCA board member; Don Conway, GBCA Board Chair; Kaitlyn Conway; Bob Halsch, GBCA Executive Director; Julie O'Brien, Gala Committee Co-Chair.



Senator Booker and News Anchor / Producer Giovanna Drpic



David Ganz, GBCA Board Member & Bergen County Freeholder



Dr. Allan DeGiulio, GBCA Deputy Executive Director, and Gala Committee member Jill Ippolito



U.S. Senators Cory Booker and Bob Menendez

Oakwood Apartments Affordable Housing Lottery Opening

Greater Bergen Community Action (GBCA) is now accepting preliminary applications from eligible residents who wish to enter a lottery to purchase an affordable housing unit at the Oakwood Apartments located at 148 Oakwood Avenue in Cliffside Park. These new apartments have 2 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms with 1,000 square feet. Other amenities include on-site parking, a washer/dryer hook-up, a master bedroom with a walk-in closet, and master bedroom and living room balconies. The appliances will be Energy Star compliant.

This is a great opportunity for low- to moderate-income households that earn at or below 80% of the Area Median Income in Bergen County:

Persons in Family	Maximum Income
1	\$46,100
2	\$52,650
3	\$59,250
4	\$65,800
5	\$71,100
6	\$76,350

To enter the lottery, a preliminary application must be submitted. During the first three months of availability, priority will be given to qualified residents who were impacted by Hurricane Sandy. *(This Sandy priority will not exempt residents from any other*

selection criteria in place.)

Application forms are available on the GBCA website at www.greaterbergen.org/services/housing, and at the GBCA Administrative Office at 241 Moore St., Hackensack, NJ 07601.

Preliminary applications must be received by GBCA or postmarked on or before **May 30th, 2015**. Please submit only one application per household.

For more information, please contact GBCA at 201-968-0200 extension 7056.



This is an **Equal Housing Opportunity**. Units are available to all persons regardless of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status or national origin.

Our mission is to reduce poverty in communities served by GBCA by addressing the causes and conditions of persistent economic insecurity.

Greater Bergen Community Action Partnership, Inc. (GBCA) is a 501(C)(3), not-for-profit Community Action Agency. Established in 1967, GBCA is Bergen County's designated anti-poverty agency.

The CAPsule is the Newsletter of Greater Bergen Community Action Partnership, Inc., Hackensack, NJ.

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Architect's rendering of Oakwood Apartments

City of Garfield's First Ward Rehabilitation Update

March 11, 2015 marked one year since the City of Garfield's Mayor and Municipal Council designated **Greater Bergen Community Action, Inc.** (GBCA) and **DMR Construction Management, Inc.** (DMR), co-master developers of the 19-block area in the City's First Ward, previously designated as "in need of rehabilitation."

Over the course of the year, much progress has been made in analyzing properties within the designated area and assembling parcels for prospective development. The owners of each of these properties were contacted about the acquisition of their properties, and formal letters of intent to purchase were disseminated.

On March 2, 2015, the City of Garfield Redevelopment Agency invited GBCA and DMR to update the commissioners, the Mayor, and members of the Municipal Council on the progress made on the rehabilitation project since designation. Following a presentation detailing the activities undertaken over the year, members of the respective bodies expressed their pleasure with the progress made and were looking forward to what lay ahead. The co-developers committed to returning to the Agency within six-months to present proposed development partner(s) and to begin the next phase of the process where development activity would commence in earnest.

In the 30 to 45 days since the presentation to the Redevelopment Agency, meetings have taken place with several notable developers, introducing them to the rehabilitation area and soliciting their interest in



Train Trestle over Passaic Street in Garfield

becoming involved. The goal is to select the developer(s) who shares our overall vision and strategy for the development of the area.

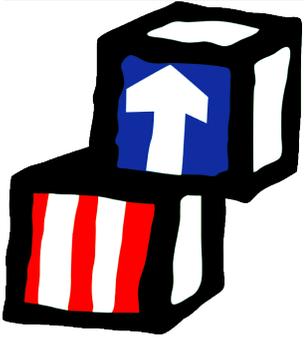
Within the past months, the GBCA development team met with NJ Transit to discuss the Garfield train stop, which is located within the rehabilitation area, and around which much of the development will take place. We were advised that NJ Transit, as a result of the City's request, has put the refurbishing and repainting of the train trestle into their 2016 budget with work to be completed by the end of 2016. This is a major accomplishment as the trestle is at the heart of the Passaic Street commercial corridor and its current dilapidated condition significantly visually detracts from the area. We have been assured that even though it is visually unappealing, the trestle is structurally sound.

We also learned that ridership at the Garfield train stop has increased in the past several months.

Simultaneously, we have firmed up pending agreements with two property owners for the leasing of their lots for much needed parking in the area. Parking remains a significant issue and will play a role in the location and density of any development that is done here. Plans by the City of Garfield to develop a Municipal Parking Authority are moving ahead. This will allow for a citywide approach to dealing with the issue.



Garfield's First Ward Rehabilitation Area



Head Start Scrapbook



Head Start students discuss latest project.



Mary Knych from *Young Audiences* presenting storytelling through music and movement with children.



Garden Day at Head Start



Young Audiences provided professional development to the classroom teachers and assistants.



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Bergen County Freeholder and GBCA Board Member Tracy Zur, right with Head Start Class on Read America Day



Freeholder Tom Sullivan



Senator Sandra Cunningham



Senator Bob Gordon



Assemblyman and GBCA Board Member Benjie Wimberly

GBCA Establishes the Lois A. Braithwaite Scholarship Fund



In addition to the Braithwaite Community Advocacy Awards and in tribute to the legacy of our late Board Chairwoman, GBCA has chosen to establish a scholarship fund. A committee comprised of board members and GBCA staff is in the process of setting guidelines for awarding the scholarships.



Jersey City Housing Authority & Pennrose Properties Development To Incorporate GBCA-Run Early Childhood Education Center

Jersey City Housing Authority (JCHA) and Pennrose Properties, LLC recently held a groundbreaking ceremony for the fourth and final phase of the Gloria Robinson Court Homes, a mixed-income apartment community in Jersey City. In addition to 70 apartments, this final phase of the development will include a 10-classroom Head Start early childhood education center, which will be administered by GBCA.

This final phase of the development will complete the full build-out of the community, which encompasses 274 units of workforce housing on the 7.6-acre site.

“Projects like Gloria Robinson are an example of how we can transform public housing sites into desirable mixed-income communities that provide access to housing and quality education in one place,” said Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop. “Our vision is for more new development – both affordable and market rate – to incorporate this model of providing much-needed Pre-K space for our growing student population.”

“The JCHA-Pennrose project represents not only another example of a successful public-private partnership, but also a new model for affordable housing development, which provides access to quality com-



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prehensive early childhood education,” said GBCA Executive Director Robert Halsch, Jr. The new center being developed here will create much needed Early Head Start classrooms for infants from birth through three years old and will be an integral component of GBCA’s birth-to-five-year-old Pilot Program, one of only five such programs funded nationally by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

The projects and Head Start classrooms are expected to be completed by the Spring of 2016.

New Literacy Program Funded by TD Charitable Foundation

GBCA received a \$10,000 grant from the TD Charitable Foundation to fund a financial literacy program in Garfield through its sponsored credit union, 1st Bergen Federal Credit Union. The program will provide information on basic saving, borrowing and establishing or repairing credit to unbanked and underbanked individuals. For further information on



1st Bergen's financial literacy program, please contact Debbie Nicholson at 201-968-0200, ext. 7401.

Administrative Professionals' Day



GBCA's Administrative Professionals: Bergen County staff (top) and Head Start Staff (bottom).

Please visit our website at
greaterbergen.org



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facebook.com/greaterbergen



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twitter.com/greaterbergen

Greater Bergen Community Action honored its Administrative Professional staff at two luncheons recently: one held at Morton's The Steakhouse in Hackensack for Bergen County staff, and one for Head Start staff at Oceanos Restaurant in Fair Lawn. The hard-working staff were given certificates of appreciation and were recognized for their outstanding contributions to the agency.

Greater Bergen Community Action To Receive \$750,000 Microsoft Software Grant



Greater Bergen Community Action, Inc. (GBCA) is being awarded a \$750,000 software grant from Microsoft. The award will be presented on June 13th at the grand-opening of the Microsoft store at the Willowbrook Mall in Wayne.

“We are grateful for this wonderful act of generosity on the part of Microsoft. This donation will go a long way in helping to insure that the children and families we serve can benefit from the most up-to-date technology which, in today’s information-based society, is crucial. I commend Microsoft for being a good corporate citizen and welcome them as a community partner,” said Robert Halsch, Jr., Executive Director of GBCA.

The June 13th store opening marks Microsoft’s fifth store in New Jersey and 112th across the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. Microsoft continues to expand its existing retail footprint in the United States to deliver a premium retail experience that is entertaining and educational and gives customers choice, value, and service with their technology purchases.

Individuals are invited to join GBCA at the grand opening. Attendees should arrive at 9:00 am to the grand opening ceremonies on Saturday, June 13th for a chance to win giveaways and receive a special product offer. GBCA’s award will be presented around 10:30 am.

May is Community Action Month!

Throughout the country, Community Action agencies are helping people and changing lives. GBCA is proud to be one of the biggest agencies in helping people and making a difference! For more information on Community Action Month, please contact Jessica Massler at 201-968-0200 ext. 7199 or jessica.massler@greaterbergen.org, or visit the Community Action Partnership’s national website at <http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/index.php>.



1st Bergen Federal Credit Union & CHIP Boards Welcome New Member Joseph Rutch

The Boards of Trustees of the Greater Bergen Community Action (GBCA)-sponsored 1st Bergen Federal Credit Union and GBCA’s real estate development affiliate, Community Housing in Partnership (CHIP), are pleased to announce the addition of Joseph Rutch to their boards.

Mr. Rutch has spent his career in public service at both the Municipal and County levels. He has served as the Borough Administrator in Bogota and currently in Cliffside Park and as Finance Officer for both Bogota and Fairview. He has also been the Director of the Division on Aging and Director of Community Development for the County of Bergen. Mr. Rutch has been an Adjunct Professor at Fairleigh Dickenson University since 1995.

His long and distinguished career in public service coupled with his wide-ranging volunteer executive board experience makes Joe an outstanding addition to both boards.



New Americans Program: 40 Years of Successes

Greater Bergen Community Action's New Americans Program provides immigration and naturalization assistance, translation and interpretation services, advocacy, information and referral, and citizenship classes for individuals and families. The program is observing 40 years of service in 2015. An example of what the program can mean to families that enroll involves a family of four. One mother and father who came to the New Americans programs for assistance with their naturalization application were very depressed because their eldest son had passed way. They decided to attend the ESL program offered by GBCA's Education and Training Division. Although they could not attend the citizenship classes offered by the program, the New Americans' Case Manager performed mock interviews with them to prepare for the citizenship exam. They took their *United States Citizenship and Immigration Services* (USCIS) exam, and they both passed. Their two minor children obtained citizenship through the parents. All received their U.S. passports. As a result, the mother obtained a better job at a Day Care Center, and their quality of life improved as the father became eligible for Medicaid.



Lilliam Cartagena, GBCA Case Manager

GBCA On The Move

Greater Bergen Community Action (GBCA) has been designated as Co-Master Developer of a 19-block area of the City of Garfield's First Ward. This area, which was previously found to be "an area in need of rehabilitation," encompasses the Passaic Street commercial corridor and properties on the blocks immediately adjacent. As plans are developed for the revitalization of this area, GBCA is backing its efforts by planting its flag in the district. The agency is in the process of purchasing a major property in the heart of the rehabilitation area.

The building, located at 99 Passaic Street at the intersection of Midland and Passaic Street, is directly across the street from the Garfield train stop. GBCA will relocate its Corporate Headquarters from Hackensack to this location. The Randazzo Building, as it is more commonly known, is a three-story structure of approximately 21,000 square feet. It was originally home to First National Bank, after which it was converted to mixed-use with offices on the ground floor and residential units on the upper levels. GBCA plans to convert and occupy all three floors.

This is a key property in the rehabilitation area as



it anchors the eastern end of the Passaic Street corridor and will bring much needed vitality to this end of the district. It is anticipated that up to 30 employees will be located at this site to provide administrative support to the entire agency and its operations, which are now spread out across three counties.

1st Bergen Federal Credit Union Names New CEO



Leo O'Donnell has taken over the reins as the new CEO of 1st Bergen Federal Credit Union. He plans to develop and market new products to increase membership, while creating streamlined on-line loan applications as his first project. "Our planning will always have the benefit of our members in the fore-front," he said at the

Credit Union's annual meeting on April 28th, where he was introduced to the members. Dr. Allan DeGiulio, the Credit Union Board Chairman, said, "We are fortunate to have Leo join us as CEO. He is a pleasure to work with, and we believe he can bring real growth and stability to our credit union."

Mr. O'Donnell was the Vice President of Lending at the First Atlantic Federal Credit Union in Eatontown, NJ, before accepting the position at 1st Bergen, and was the Vice President of Real Estate Services at Symbionce Financial Solutions in East Hanover, NJ, prior to that.

Alison DuBois, Julie O'Brien, Rev. Greg Jackson and Soraya Gonzalez were re-elected to the Board of Directors at the annual meeting.



Greater Bergen Community Action, Inc.

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Contributions to support any of GBCA's programs may be sent to the above address.