

Building Blocks

voices of empowerment and
community development

A PUBLICATION OF RURAL OPPORTUNITIES, INC.



Advocating for Accessible Transportation

Submitted by Louise Parker, Resident Services Manager, ROI-Property Management & Deanna McManus, Resident, Red Maple Apartments



(Left to Right): Residents Deanna McManus & Nancy Pifer at the site where they hope to have an accessible bus stop provided.

Red Maple Apartments were specifically built for individuals with disabilities in the early 1990's. Since then, Rural Opportunities has tried, without success, to bring accessible transit services to the apartment complex that would allow residents to live more independent and efficient lives.

In December 2000, the residents decided that by joining ROI in its efforts, they could take more ownership over the

issue and provide a more focused approach. As a result, residents have become committed, result-driven advocates for obtaining a transit bus stop closer to their building.

As a first step, the residents requested that an advocate from the Regional Center for Independent Living provide them with training on how to become effective "self-advocates." To further define the issues, the Resident Services Manager developed a survey in January 2001. Two Red Maple residents, Deanna McManus and Nancy Pifer, were especially helpful in distributing, collecting and analyzing the survey. The results of the survey that was given to both residents and neighbors, provided overwhelming documentation of the need for enhanced transportation services at the apartment complex.

With this information, Deanna wrote a letter to Mr. Chuck Switzer from the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) describing the results of survey.

As a result of their efforts, on March 27, 2001 the RTA informed residents that they would investigate the possibility of providing bus services twice a day. If approved, this new service would run Monday through Friday. Residents were also informed of a new senior complex that has been scheduled for construction in close approximation to Red Maple Apartments. When this complex is completed, there is a strong possibility for increasing the frequency of the proposed transportation service.

When Deanna heard the good news, she commented, "This additional transportation service will help residents living at Red Maple now and those in the future. It is a giant step towards a positive solution to our lack of accessible transportation."

For more information on this effort, please contact Louise Parker, Resident Services Manager at (716) 272-9086. ■

Message from the President & CEO: Stuart J. Mitchell

Earlier this spring, one bolt of lightning, strategically placed, effectively shut down our Central Office's communication systems for several days. The lightning struck the phone lines going into our headquarters, located in the former Sibley family mansion in Rochester, NY, and "fried" everything in its path including the entire phone system, computer modems and numerous other relay devices. All of our surge protectors and backup systems were no match for this powerful act of Mother Nature.

While several consultants and ROI staff members worked feverishly to restore the systems, we were presented with a stark reality check. We could not communicate with our field office staff, partners, vendors and most importantly, with our participants, in the manner to which we had grown accustomed. It took us back to a time before e-mail, voice mail, teleconferencing, Internet access, instant network response and all the other conveniences that go with these marvelous advances. With the large geographic region that ROI serves, from New Jersey to Michigan to our office in Puerto Rico, we've come to depend on this technology that connects us through a network of flawless, instantaneous interactions.

Why then, some may ask, with all these modern conveniences do we still publish *Building Blocks*? Couldn't we harness the technology that is available to us and deliver ROI news with the push of a button? My answer is yes, we could, but *Building Blocks* represents more than just a reliable source of communication when all those technological advances break down. As I sat down to write this message, I was reminded of those ten days we were without phone lines and came to the conclusion that this newsletter mirrors an overall philosophy of ROI, one of diversity and inclusion.

The 5,500 people and organizations that receive *Building Blocks* are from a diverse range of social, economic and cultural backgrounds. In an age where we experience messaging overload, *Building Blocks* provides a tangible, unobtrusive means for us to tell our story. This 2-color newsletter, delivered by third class mail, will also reach those who have yet to bridge the digital divide and those people directly affected by our service delivery.

In this issue of *Building Blocks* you will read about our new web site that we are very proud to offer as an enhancement to our services. While this new offering ensures we remain active in the emerging high-tech world, *Building Blocks* will remain a fundamental tool in the way we communicate our stories. While the lightning strike slowed us down temporarily, it also served as an important reminder for simplicity. ■

Check It Out!

ROI Launches New Web Site: www.ruralinc.org

ROI is proud to announce that we have launched our new Web Site designed to bring visitors current, comprehensive ROI information as well as to create an open forum for communication. Partially funded through a grant from the NY State Department of Housing & Community Renewal, ROI contracted with dockside.net, a Rochester-based business, to undertake the development process.

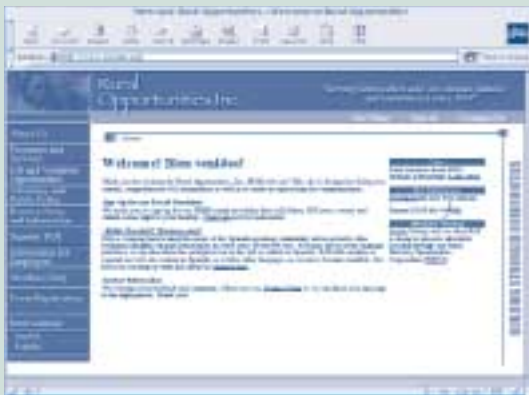
After an extensive planning process, ROI and dockside.net have produced a multi-phase development plan to ensure the new web site will accurately reflect and enhance our organizational business objectives.

"We were fortunate to have volunteers set up our original site more than 4 years ago," states Kate Hall, Web Site Committee Chairperson. "However, with the ongoing growth and diversification of ROI, regular updates became a real challenge. The new site not only addresses that issue, but it ensures that ROI remains relevant in today's ever-expanding technological world."

Some of the special features on the new site include:

- Quick & easy sign up for the ROI electronic newsletter, a free service that will deliver ROI news and events right to your desktop
- Bi-Lingual (English-Spanish) sections of the site
- Job & Volunteer Opportunities
- Advocacy & Public Policy Page

Brian Pitre, President of dockside.net, had previously utilized the services of the Rural Opportunities Enterprise Center and was well



positioned to take on this project. He comments, "At dockside.net we believe that the new ROI Web site will help better meet their business and organizational objectives. We believe this represents a solid first phase in a broader strategy utilizing Internet technologies to enhance the ROI organization. We are excited that dockside can apply its expertise to an organization that has also helped us expand our company in the past. We have found they are a great group of people to work with."

Take a few minutes to log on to the new site now and sign up for the electronic newsletter, or provide us with feedback by using the Contact Us form. ROI hopes this site ultimately enhances our service delivery. We welcome your comments! ■

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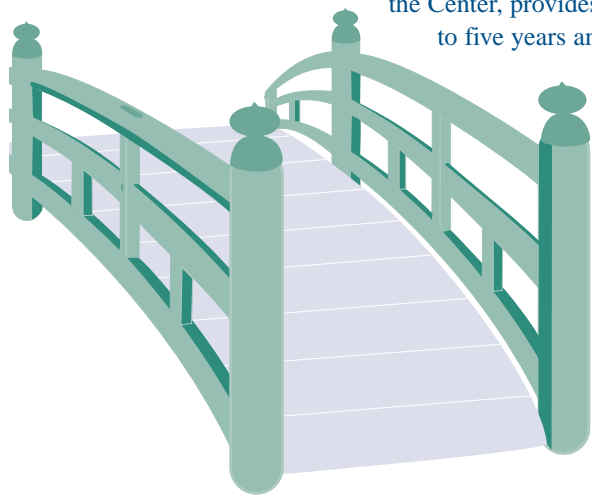
First Lady of Pennsylvania Opens “Bridges”

Submitted by Jennie Knox, Executive Grants & Projects Manager, ROI-Pennsylvania

Kay Laracuate-Washington, Executive Director of ROI-Pennsylvania, and her staff members, welcomed the First Lady of Pennsylvania, Michele Ridge, to the ROI Migrant Head Start facility this past spring. Mrs. Ridge, married to Gov. Tom Ridge, visited the Center in Chambersburg to help open “Bridges,” a new support group for parents. An affiliate of Parents Anonymous, Bridges is designed to prevent child abuse by providing an avenue for support and sharing of good parenting techniques.

Mrs. Ridge told attendees, comprised mostly of representatives from human service agencies, “Each one of you holds the power to protect children and heal and prevent tragedy.” Jane Nutter, Director of Child & Family Development Programs, provided Mrs. Ridge with a tour of the entire Joseph Allen Training & Education Center.

The Migrant Head Start Program, operating out of the Center, provides services to children age birth to five years and their families.



The Bridges Program is also offered in Franklin County at the ESCAPE Parent-Child Center. Thank you to the Franklin County Foundation for providing funding for this program.

For more information on the Child & Family Development Programs in Pennsylvania please contact Jane Nutter at (717) 234-6616. ■

ROI Homeownership Initiatives Receive National Recognition

The Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation (NRC) has highlighted three ROI Homeownership initiatives in their recent publication, “Winning Strategies: Best Practices in Homeownership Promotion.” The three initiatives receiving recognition are:

Comprando Casa, the Spanish-language Homebuyer Program developed by ROI in Indiana, was recognized for its impact on the Hispanic community. As stated in the publication, “Hispanic families are buying better homes and moving to newer, more diverse neighborhoods. Their children are performing better in school. Creating cross-cultural neighborhoods is helping Hispanic families feel more linked to a broader American culture.”

“ ROI is a chartered member of NRC and as part of the NRC Campaign for Homeownership, ROI is currently ranked the eighth largest producer of first-time homebuyers in the nation. ”

The Affordable Housing Lending Alliance is increasing homeownership opportunities among low and moderate-income rural residents, while also striving to make the home buying process less complex and costly. (See article on page 5.) This housing strategy, sponsored by Freddie Mac, HUD, USDA Rural Development and MGIC, brings together Alliance members including lenders, local non-profit organizations, state and local governments, local housing developers, home builders and real estate brokers in order to bring affordable housing opportunities to rural areas. The objectives are to provide financing solution to homebuyers and prepare families for homeownership. Alliance lenders include JP Morgan Chase, Citibank, FleetBoston, M & T and Ulster Savings Bank.

The Federal Home Loan Bank of New York’s First Home Club is an Individual Development Account (IDA) that matches \$3 for every \$1 that an eligible family deposits in a special account. The combined funds are then used towards down payment and closing costs, commonly the biggest barriers to homeownership. ROI’s participation in

this program has assisted hundreds of families in overcoming these barriers.

ROI is a chartered member of NRC and as part of the NRC Campaign for Homeownership, ROI is currently ranked the eighth largest producer of first-time homebuyers in the nation. For additional information about these programs or to find out more about other Housing & Economic Development programs, please visit our web site, www.ruralinc.org, or call the ROI Central Administrative Offices at (716) 340-3300. ■

The Road to Success



(Left to Right): **Ramon Rojas** survived a long and bumpy road to complete his Occupational Skills Training and Work Experience at The Vine, a community church outreach center. While Ramon works towards obtaining his CDL (Commercial Drivers License), he will work as a Bus Aide for First Student Bus Service. **Gwendolyn Spellman** completed her Adult Basic Education and is now working toward obtaining her GED (General Equivalency Diploma). Gwendolyn’s well on her way to meeting another goal of becoming an assistant teacher as she takes on a Work Experience at the ROI Migrant Head Start Center in Hammonton, NJ. Congratulations to Ramon & Gwendolyn on all your hard work and future successes!



The “Five” Musketeers (L to R): **Rodolfo Ortiz, Francisco Ramos, Eleazar Martinez, Oscar Torres and Benjamin Sanchez** completed their On-the-Job Training and are working at Angerman Landscape. Their supervisor, **Michael Angerman**, says that the men are very dedicated and hard working individuals.

ROI-New Jersey Expands North

Earlier this year, ROI-New Jersey expanded its service area north to farmworkers in Burlington County. The new office, located on Eayrestown Road in the City of Mt. Holly, has already become active in the community by being a resource for farmworkers in need of emergency services and as an advocate for fair compensation.

Luis Walker, Training & Employment Coordinator for ROI-New Jersey, describes the process, “Although the Office has faced many challenges during this time of growth, we are confident that we will overcome them. The staff members are relatively new, including myself, to the organization and we have been busy acquainting ourselves with program policies and procedures, program goals, and most importantly, learning how to best serve our participants.”

To increase the availability to resources, Luis states, “It is our intention to increase enrollment through continued visits to the farms and speaking with farmworkers during their non-working hours. We remain optimistic and expect to be fully staffed and operational by the summer.” For further information about the services offered in New Jersey, please visit our website, www.ruralinc.org, or contact the NJ Administrative Offices at (856) 696-1000. ■

A Dream Come True



At 44-years of age, Carlos Serrano (pictured on the left) has realized a life long dream to drive a "big rig." After working on a farm, Carlos came to the ROI-New Jersey office in Vineland in December 2000 and was enrolled into a 9-week class to obtain his CDL (Commercial Drivers License). Carlos graduated from class with a certificate for perfect attendance. Congratulations Carlos!

Displaced Farmworkers Test Rapid Response Team

When Money's Mushroom, one of the largest mushroom production, packing and shipping enterprises in Berks County, Pennsylvania, was forced to reduce its workforce from 293 to 40 employees, hundreds of farmworkers were left without a job. Fortunately, the newly formed ROI Rapid Response Team was poised for action.

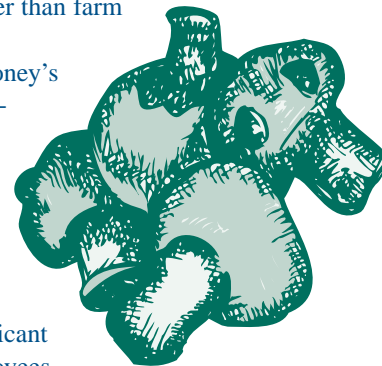
Operating out of the recently opened Berks Family Development Center in Reading, PA, ROI plays a key role in the Rapid Response Team's ability to provide support to displaced farmworkers. Team members include representatives from ROI, Berks County, the local Unemployment Office, farmworker union organizations and the Friends of Farmworkers.

Nita D'Agostino, Director of State Operations for ROI-Pennsylvania, describes the service, "Our Team provides a continuum of services and training programs for displaced farmworkers. Some of the farmworkers are multi-challenged, meaning they may have little training other than farm work and others may not read or speak English."

To support the displaced farmworkers from Money's Mushrooms, the Team held two informational sessions. The farmworkers were provided with information about what government and social services were available to them as well as opportunities to be trained for other jobs, including in-demand fields like commercial drivers and welders.

This workforce reduction was especially significant to the local economy because the displaced employees were seasonal farmworkers, not migrant workers. Whereas migrant workers would move to find more farm work, seasonal farmworkers typically are stable residents of their communities and work during the growing season. During the off-season they are then eligible for unemployment benefits.

For additional information about the Rapid Response Team, please contact Elvin Gonzalez, Regional Training & Program Manager at (610) 376-2850. ■



USDA Rural Housing Service Tours ROI-Puerto Rico



Tour participants meet with officials in San Sebastian.

municipalities and other organizations working in the area.

Tour participants included:

Guests of ROI:

- Doris Greiner, Sr. Loan Specialist, Single Family Housing Division, RHS
- Crystal Ford, Executive Assistant to James Kearney, RHS Administrator
- Tubal Padilla, Management Consultant for Puerto Rico, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation
- Carmen Melero, Vice-President, Popular Mortgage, San Juan



Lee Beaulac (far right) discusses ROI's work in Puerto Rico with USDA representatives.

ROI Representatives:

- Myriam Gómez, Division Director, ROI-Puerto Rico
- Lee Beaulac, Senior Vice President, ROI-Housing & Economic Development (HED)
- Jean Lipani, Deputy for Counseling & Outreach, ROI-HED
- Keith Scholes, Deputy for Housing Assistance Programs, ROI-HED
- Miguel Velazquez, Housing Developer, ROI-Puerto Rico
- Edwin Hernandez, Housing Rehabilitation Specialist, ROI-Puerto Rico
- Diomedes Plaza, ROI Board Member
- Carmen Santiago Cuba, Puerto Rico Advisory Committee

The tour included a stop in San Sebastian for discussions with municipal officials concerning local homeownership needs as well as a visit with USDA Rural Development staff in Lares to discuss the ROI partnership with Rural Development and TSA program activities throughout the service area. After visiting the future new home of a farmworker who is a single parent, tour participants traveled to Adjuntas to visit a farmworker family whose house was undergoing rehabilitation financed with USDA Emergency Services funding. The final stop was a Homeownership Education Program graduation event in Adjuntas for eight families who recently completed all Homeownership Education courses.

For further information about ROI services in Puerto Rico, visit our web site, www.ruralinc.org, or contact the Puerto Rican Administrative Offices at (787) 829-6024. ■



ROI's Margarita Torres (left) congratulates her fellow ROI staff member, Diana Perez on completing homebuyer education courses.

Lenzeller Stovall Just Doesn't Quit...

Submitted by Ralph Sinistro, ROI-Ohio

The headlines on the front page of Ohio's *Alliance Review* of January 5th, 2001 read, "City woman's never-give-up attitude pays off; attains GED 37 years after dropping out of school."

This remarkable story was about Ms. Lenzeller Stovall. Len has been a member of the Alliance, OH Program Area Advisory Committee for 15 years. She has been a committed advocate for farmworkers all her life. She has also been a strong supporter of ROI since the Alliance field office opened in 1985.

In Len's own words, "I retired from farm work after 28 years. I babysat my grandchildren and I saw that I wanted more out of life than that. I volunteered for Head Start first, then I applied for a job there, but I was turned down because I hadn't graduated from high school."

When Len became pregnant at the age of 15, she was treated as an outcast. She was forced to drop out of school and give up her dreams. "You weren't allowed to go to school," she said, "and you weren't allowed to associate with anyone."

By age 21 she had four children. "We all grew up together," she said, "I had help, but it was difficult."

She and her husband were divorced when their eldest child was 12 and she credits her late father, Isaiah Mays, with helping her to raise her children. Len taught her children to learn from her lessons.

"I made it clear to my kids that they were going to graduate and were not going to be like their mommy," she said. "And they all graduated and were in their twenties before they started having children."

With all the challenges she faced, Len always found time to volunteer for the ROI Migrant Head Start program and work towards her goal of working with children. "I was determined to work for Head Start so I started going to classes at the library," she said, "I started to work on my GED in 1997. Being 49-years old I knew I was going to have a hard time. I had a terrible time. I found out that I often confused numbers. I got very upset because I have been going through life putting wrong numbers down. Now I was determined to

learn. I kept babysitting and I got legal guardianship of a 3-month-old baby girl. Sometimes I had to take her and my 6-year-old granddaughter to class with me and sometimes they interfered with my concentration. But that didn't stop me."

"I took the GED test 8 times, two of those times people collected money for me because I couldn't afford the test. That didn't stop me. My teachers kept encouraging me and telling me that I could do it."

"Now I tell young people to stay in school please, you never know what you miss until you want a job and can't get it because you don't



Photo by Kyle Lanzer, Alliance Review

have an education. You lose touch with life when you don't graduate or you get in a rut and you feel like you don't belong anywhere. With a diploma, you can get a job and know the real value of real things and life".

Now that she has her GED, Len started work at Head Start on January 15th as a teacher's assistant. "But I'll still come in and do some volunteering," she said.

Her next goal is to earn another degree so that she can be a preschool or Head Start teacher rather than an assistant. Eventually she wants to open her own preschool.

"It's important that everyone has a dream, she said, "and the more education you have the more expanded your possibilities can be." ■

...And Neither Does Her Daughter

Regina Stovall has seen her share of tough times as both a former farmworker and a single mom of two children. She shares some of her story, "The longest job I held was for 9 years at K.W. Zellers as a transplanter, grader and packer. I worked seasonally, nine months out of the year, three months of unemployment. It was not much, but it put food on the table."

After being laid off, Regina enrolled in the ROI Job Readiness Training Program and was introduced to Pearl



Lozoya, a Training & Employment Specialist for ROI. "Pearl was a great inspiration to me. She and the classes have taught me how to depend on myself, make decisions, build my resume, look for a job, and the most important thing, what was my goal in life."

Since Regina was unable to find work at first, it was necessary for her to return to farm work. "I was so depressed and not happy with myself. Being a faithful worker though, I was there everyday. At the end of the season, I decided I had enough."

After completing the ROI Occupational Skills Training program studying Basic Computers, Pearl offered Regina the opportunity to become a VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) Volunteer through AmeriCorps. She describes her decision, "I had made the next step in my life. Pearl had offered me a chance to make a change in my life. Holding on to faith, I decided to give it a chance and signed up for one year of service."

Regina's confidence and skill levels have dramatically increased since she became a VISTA Volunteer at the ROI office in Alliance, Ohio. "I have learned so much here at Rural Opportunities. I have been involved in the community, social agencies, and I know a little of how the system works. My computer skills have improved. I have also put together tenant meetings, newsletters and given tours."

With the Education Award through the AmeriCorps Program, Regina has gone on to attend ETI Technical College as a Computerized Accounting major. Regina sums up her experiences, "My life is not complete and I still have obstacles to overcome but I thank God thus far."

ROI congratulates Regina and Len on all their accomplishments and wishes them future success! ■

Fleet Supports Homeownership Alliance Expansion

Fleet has provided funding that will allow ROI's Homeownership Program to expand its Affordable Lending Alliance Program. Through the Alliance Program, ROI originates and processes mortgage loans on behalf of lender partners. In exchange for providing these services, ROI receives a transaction fee, paid by the lender, for the services it provides to facilitate the mortgage application process. As a result, these fees provide self-sustained cost recovery for the ROI Homeownership Program on an ongoing basis. This arrangement not only satisfies our partner's desire to fund production-based programs, it provides a more seamless process for borrowers.

The support from Fleet will be used to provide technical assistance and support services to a network of cooperating rural housing organizations across New York State. This will allow ROI to reach rural markets that we currently do not serve and provide the same self-sustaining cost recovery to these groups. The new Alliance partners will be selected and integrated into the program by mid-summer. This grant from Fleet complements and enhances the support that ROI has received through HUD's Economic Development Initiative.

Though Fleet recently announced the sale of Fleet Mortgage to Washington Mutual, Fleet officials were quick to assure us that the bank would continue to make the affordable lending products available. For more information about the Homeownership Alliance or other Housing-related services, please visit our website, www.ruralinc.org, or contact the ROI Central Administrative Offices at (716) 340-3300. ■

Pennsylvania Programs Celebrate Achievements

Submitted by Evelyn Sanchez, Regional Training & Program Manager, ROI-Pennsylvania

On Thursday, March 22, 2001, the ROI Chester County Embreeville Migrant Head Start Center and Adult Training & Employment Offices of Chester & Philadelphia Counties, PA celebrated the Second Annual Milestones Graduation. The event took place in Kennett Square at Taqueria Moroleon. Program graduates and their families enjoyed receiving their ROI Milestone Certificates of Achievement in recognition of their accomplishments.

Congratulations to the following graduates:

Migrant Head Start (Chester County)

- Norberto Colin Flores
- Nancy Araceli Esparza
- German Flores Ortiz
- Edie Hernandez Renteria
- Nancy Lopez Vega
- Yoban Romero Gasca
- Luis Mario Villagomez Baeza

Adult Training & Employment

(Philadelphia Office)

- Sokhan Mom
- Sophannara Meas
- Lim Leng
- Ken Duch
- Savann Boeun
- Vanna Him

(Chester County Office)

- Pacual Leguisamo
- Cerafin Cipriano
- Raul Rivas
- Miguel Zavala
- Nelson Ferrer
- Vicente Montes

Other honorees acknowledged during the ceremony include:

The Migrant Head Start Parent Center Committee Officers, Olivia Camacho (President); Hilda Esparza (Vice President); Maritza Serrano (Secretary); and Estela Nunez (Treasurer). The Adult Training & Employment Program recognized Program Area Advisory Committee Board Members, Mom Heng (Philadelphia County) and Roberto Ayllon (Chester County).

The evening was a great success! Graduates, their families, board and staff members especially enjoyed the Mexican Cuisine and the Spanish, Khmer and English translations during the ceremony. Congratulations to all of our honorees for all their achievements! ■

Students Shocked and Challenged by Spring Break Experience

Submitted by Sarah Stafford, Training & Employment Caseworker, Youth Program, ROI-Ohio

While many college students spent their Spring Break working on their tan, a select group of Bowling Green State University (BGSU) students spent five days working and learning at the Migrant Rest Center in Liberty Center, Ohio. Preparing the facility for farmworker families, the sixteen students came together for the first of a two-part program of the Migrant Youth Project. The program, a collaboration between the ROI Youth Program and the Chapman Learning Community of BGSU, is designed so youth can learn about the lives of farmworkers and efforts to address their needs in Northwest Ohio.

Students spent each morning listening to speakers from agencies serving farmworkers such as the Ohio Migrant Education Center, Community Health Services and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee as well as ROI staff members. Afternoons were reserved for service projects to rehabili-

from the Chapman Learning Community, was pleased with the student response. "This kind of experience is important academically. It helps bring real-life situations to subjects such as Sociology and furthers Chapman's goals of student involvement and active learning."

Although most migrant farmworkers had not yet arrived in Ohio, students were able to speak with a group of seasonal farmworkers and many former farmworkers. One such speaker was Alvina Costilla, one of the founding members of the Migrant Rest Center over 30 years ago. Her testimony brought to life the need for Centers such as the ROI facility. As she recounted her childhood steps migrating to Ohio and the challenges of opening the facility, she referred to the Migrant Rest Center as "a blessed place."

Tracy Rodriguez-Michaelis, ROI Director of Special Programs, challenged each student to share their experience with more people. Amy wanted

“Farmworkers are everywhere and contribute greatly to our lifestyle. I hope people recognize where their food comes from.”

tate the Migrant Rest Center. A special highlight for many students was an afternoon trip to visit nearby migrant camps. BGSU student Erin Ellifritz noted, "It was shocking to imagine children in those houses." Freshman Amy Gresham stated, "Seeing how people really lived was very eye-opening."

For many students, this was their first chance to experience the culture and lifestyle of migrant farmworkers. Senior Mark Allen was shocked about the living and working conditions. He said, "I had read about the situation but there is no real substitute for seeing it with your own eyes. The issues are very real and are happening right here in our local community." Project coordinator Margaret Weinberger, an instructor

her friends to know that "migrant farmworkers exist in Ohio and they have a culture that is vibrant and strong." Erin agreed, "Farmworkers are everywhere and contribute greatly to our lifestyle. I hope people recognize where their food comes from."

Each student has committed to participate in the second part of the Migrant Youth Project, a day camp for farmworker youth that will take place on the BGSU campus in mid-June. This Spring Break experience provided them with an introduction to farmworker issues to better prepare them to mentor the youth. Thank you to the BGSU Partnerships for Community Action for funding this project, and congratulations to all the students who took part in this program. ■

Dollars at Work

The Emergency Loan Grant Committee that oversees ROI's employee-supported Employee Loan Fund is proud to announce that since June 2000, \$14,822 has been approved in loans and \$5,200 in grants. It takes as little as \$1 per pay period to contribute to the fund with a maximum contribution of \$5. Grants are only available to contributing members and are dependent on the availability of funds in the account. Start your contributions today! For more information, contact Juan Canto, Deputy for Human Resources, at (716) 340-3355.

Focus On Farmworker Housing

Submitted by John Wiltse, Director of Operations, ROI-Housing & Economic Development

ROI Releases New York Farmworker Housing Study

Rural Opportunities, Inc. has released a study entitled "Farmworker Housing in New York State: Analysis and Recommendations." The study, partly funded by a grant from Citigroup, provides a broad overview of the major challenges facing farmworkers, non-profit organizations, units of government and growers as they seek to provide decent, safe and sanitary housing for an estimated 60,000 migrant and seasonal farmworkers in New York State.

The study provides county-by-county data on farmworker populations, licensed labor camp capacities and other available farmworker housing. There is also a detailed analysis of state and federal funding sources that can be accessed to develop and improve farmworker housing.

The introduction to the study states: "Public money is needed to promote and develop off-farm housing, which is where most of New York State's farm labor lives. In New York, some public money is being spent for on-farm, privately owned housing, but even the level of spending for on-farm housing is inadequate compared to worker needs. The housing available to farmworkers is often atrocious. It is sometimes not inspected, and only the most egregious violations of labor housing standards sometimes lead to investigations. Workers crowd together where they can find rentals in old houses or motels, as many as eight to a room."

The farmworker housing study was researched and written by ROI intern Sue Bucholtz, a third year law student at the University of Buffalo Law School. Sue previously spent seven years coordinating educational programs for farmworkers in Western New York.

For a copy of the study, contact John Wiltse at (716) 340-3346 or jwiltse@ruralinc.org.

Farmworker Housing Symposium Planned

As a follow-up to the New York farmworker housing study, a one-day farmworker housing symposium is being planned for October 1, 2001, in Corning, NY. The symposium, to be held in conjunction with the New York State Rural Housing Conference, will bring together farmworkers, agricultural organizations, growers, farmworker advocates, elected officials, state and federal agency representatives and others to discuss farmworker housing issues. Workshops will provide an overview of state and federal resources for constructing and improving farm labor housing. Roundtable discussions will enable participants to explore ways that all stakeholders can collaborate to address the critical housing needs of farmworkers and their families.

The symposium is being coordinated by a steering committee and ROI is one of many organizations involved in planning this event. For more information, to be placed on the mailing list for symposium registration materials, or to provide input in the planning of the symposium, please contact John Wiltse at (716) 340-3346 or jwiltse@ruralinc.org.

“Public money is needed to promote and develop off-farm housing, which is where most of New York State's farm labor lives.”

New Jersey Youth Program Recognizes "Program Stars"

Submitted by Carmen Denise Vargas, Youth Services Coordinator, ROI-New Jersey



Picture/from left to right, Mr. Gonzalez, Isaias and Elin

Earlier this year, ROI-New Jersey recognized Isaias Ibarra and Elin Roman, both children of farmworkers, as the Youth Program Stars for their outstanding achievements.

A tenth grade student, Isaias was selected Student of the Month at Delsea Regional High School in Franklinville, New Jersey. While working hard to learn English from his tutor, Olga Baylina, Isaias was also hired at The Vine, a non-profit, multi-purpose retail outlet. He continues to do well in school and plans to continue exploring career opportunities through ROI's Youth Programs.

Elin, a ninth grade student at Vineland High School, also successfully

completed his Work Experience at The Vine. Supervised by Edgar R. Gonzalez, Elin was hired as a stock clerk that involved learning many new responsibilities. Through the program, Elin was successful in acquiring new job skills and has demonstrated his ability to be a hard worker. With the guidance from Mr. Gonzalez, Elin has also developed many positive work habits, creating marketable skills for the future.

ROI congratulates Isaias and Elin on their achievements and thanks the employees at The Vine and ESL tutor, Olga Baylina, for their cooperation and participation with the ROI Youth Program. ■

A PROPERTY IN PROGRESS

Heritage Meadows

Submitted by Bob Beck, Resident Services and Pat Nurreddin, Property Management

Heritage Meadows Apartments, located in rural Kent, NY, is a 23-unit property owned by ROI that provides affordable housing for farmworkers and low-income individuals and families. Acquired by ROI in 1998, Heritage Meadows, formerly known as Carlton Manor, was known for its history of drug and criminal activity and was in need of major repairs and rehabilitation. Under the direction of ROI, extensive renovation and major improvements have been made with support from a coalition of private, county, state, and federal agencies, as well as local financial institutions. Rental assistance provided by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development ensures that the units will be affordable to low-income and fixed-income individuals and families.

The rehabilitated apartments feature all new appliances, on-site laundry facilities, off-street parking, playground areas and a community meeting room. Through a concerted effort by both residents and ROI management staff, criminal activity has been eliminated, resulting in a safe and peaceful living environment.

Today, Heritage Meadows is a well-integrated, diverse community. Young and old, English and non-English speaking people, individuals with disabilities, multiracial and multi-cultural, individuals and families all live in harmony.

According to Edith J., a long-time resident, "Since Rural Opportunities Inc. took over the property, my rent is affordable...repairs are made quickly...people get along with each other...and I can enjoy sitting and watching the children play in the playground."

For further information about affordable housing, check out the new ROI web site at www.ruralinc.org. ■



Awards & Honors

Kevin Kennedy, Genesee County (NY) Section 8 Administrator, has been named to the New York State Governor's Developmental Disabilities Planning Council. The Council, in partnership with individuals with developmental disabilities, their families and communities, provides leadership by promoting public policies, plans, and practices that:



- Affirm dignity, value and worth;
- Support full participation in society;
- Uphold equality and self-determination; and
- Promote access to research and information needed for informed decision making for all individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

Please contact Kevin at (716) 343-3861 for more information.

John Wiltse, Director of Operations, Housing & Economic Development, was recently elected President of the National Farmworker Housing Project Directors Association at the annual meeting held in San Diego, CA.

The primary purpose of the Association is to work with the National Rural Housing Coalition to increase farmworker housing funding and coordinate the activities of the groups who are working to address farmworker housing needs. The Association includes representatives from thirty organizations, including ROI, from around the U.S. that all receive funding from the U.S. Department of Labor, Farmworker Housing Assistance Program.



Members of the Association carry out a wide range of farmworker housing activities including single and multi-family housing construction, on-farm and off-farm farmworker housing rehabilitation, home-ownership assistance programs and technical assistance efforts geared to increase the capacity of other organizations to address critical farmworker housing needs.

John has been an active member of the Association for ten years and has served as its Secretary since 1995.

Under the direction of **Kate Hall**, Deputy for Corporate Development, ROI was awarded First Prize in the national contest, "Telling Your Story: An Award for Excellence in Communications." The honor, given by Rural LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corp.), was awarded to ROI for producing outstanding publications during 2000 including the "Profiles of Success" Calendar, the quarterly newsletter, *Building Blocks*, and the Annual Report. ■

Real Estate Development Manual

ROI recently published a Real Estate Development Manual to provide both new and experienced housing developers with an in-depth description of the entire housing development process from project conceptualization to leasing to on-going compliance monitoring.

Written by ROI Real Estate Development staff and edited by Jack Jensen, Management Consultant with Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, the Manual includes sample job descriptions, contracts, market studies, pro formas and other common development documents. ROI Director

of Real Estate Development, Jay Golden, who wrote sections of the Manual, also coordinated the work of the ROI team who produced the remaining material.

The new ROI web site (see article on Page 1) will have an online version of the Manual. Be sure to check out the link to Jack Jensen's "Quick and Dirty Housing Feasibility Analyzer," which provides an integrated tool for analyzing project development costs, sources and uses of funds, affordability, a 30-year pro forma, construction cost estimates and other tools. ■

President & CEO
Stuart J. Mitchell

Chairperson, Board of Directors
Ignacio Jimenez

Editor
Kate Hall

Layout/Design
direct design

Building Blocks is a quarterly publication of Rural Opportunities, Inc.

Building Blocks Committee:
Fran Spadafora Manzella, Stuart Mitchell, Lee Beaulac, John Wiltse, Jennie Knox, Michel Attia, Dave Hearn, Pete Martine, John Schmidt, Mary Hanson, Myriam Gomez-Gonzalez.

For more information call 716-340-3300 or visit ROI on the web at: www.ruralinc.org.

Save These Dates!

Second Annual Youth Symposium

August 20-23, 2001

Atlanta, Georgia

For further information, contact **Tracey Gebhart**, (716) 340-3397 or e-mail Tracey at tgebhart@ruralinc.org

2001 National Farmworker Partnership Conference

Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs, 30th Anniversary Training and Policy Conference:

Collaborating to Educate Service Providers and Policy Makers

September 24-27, 2001

Washington, DC Metro Area

For more information, please contact **Kelly Wochinske**, (703) 528-4141 ext. 102 or e-mail Kelly at wochinske@afop.org.

ROI Annual Conference

October 22 through October 24, 2001

Attention ROI Staff & Board Members and Community Partners! This year's conference theme will focus on Diversity. Featured events include a Luncheon (sponsored by Citigroup) and Gala Reception on Tuesday, October 23rd. Details and online registration will be available on the ROI website, www.ruralinc.org, as the event draws closer.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Run River Enterprises

Submitted by Al Hartsig, Senior Business Development Officer, ROI-Housing & Economic Development

Working capital. It could be money to attend a conference or it could be money for employees' salaries during the start-up phase of a business. Whatever the context, you can't see it, you can't touch it and to a lending institution, you can't put a lien on it. Without any collateral, there's usually little hope for a loan from the banking industry. This scenario is all too common to entrepreneurs, especially those in service industries. Run River Enterprises faced this problem in January of 2000.

Pam Leardear, an ordained United Methodist minister, with a Doctor of Ministry in Liturgics, spent the eighties and nineties as a minister and as a director of church conference centers within the United Methodist Church. In late 1998, Pam started Run River Enterprises, a spiritually based consulting business to assist churches, church camps, and not-for-profit conference centers with their master plans, capital funding campaigns, organizational development, and spiritual discernment.

Armed with little more than a laptop computer, assistance from Garrie Stevens, a spiritual consultant assistant, and Katie, her faithful golden retriever, Pam survived her first fifteen months in business. However, she was taxing the limits of her equipment. She needed help financing her equipment needs and working capital to grow her business. Her equipment needs were modest, but critical — upgrading her computer equipment, a copier/fax machine, and a laminating machine for presentations.

The biggest need would also prove to be her biggest nemesis — working capital. The old adage, "no collateral, no loan" reared its ugly head again. After several banks declined her application, Pam was referred to Rural Opportunities Enterprise Center, Inc. (ROECI) through the Small Business Administration's website in January 2000. Pam was a perfect example of the type of loan request from an emerging business that ROECI Deputy Director, John Bell, calls "good people with good ideas." ROECI was able to approve Pam's



Pam Leardear

“ A small consulting business has grown because ROECI believes ‘good people with good ideas’ makes good lending sense. ”

request and her loan was closed by March.

What has a working capital loan done for Run River Enterprises? By having funds to attend regional and national conferences and placing ads in regional and national trade publications, Run River Enterprises has been able to expand its customer base from the northeast United States to Oregon, California, and Florida. As Run River Enterprises' customer base grows, so does its reputation and financial security.

From the hills of New York's Onondaga County, south to Florida and west to California and Oregon, a small consulting business has grown because ROECI believes "good people with good ideas" makes good lending sense. For further information about ROECI, please contact us at (716) 340-3300. ■

ROECI Enters Central New York Markets

Submitted by Al Hartsig, Senior Business Development Officer, ROI-Housing & Economic Development

The spring and summer of 2000 saw ROECI (Rural Opportunities Enterprise Center, Inc.), a ROI Affiliate Corporation, expand its geographic markets to the east of the Central Office located in Rochester, NY. By adding Onondaga, Cayuga, and Madison Counties to the established eighteen-county micro-loan service areas in Western NY, the Mid-Hudson NY region and Stark County, Ohio, ROECI expands its services to reach the greater Syracuse area.

In addition to assisting Run River Enterprises (see article at left), ROECI closed two other loans in Onondaga County, for a total investment of \$52,500 by the end of 2000.

ROECI's efforts have forged strong relationships with the City of Syracuse, Greater Syracuse Business Development Corporation, Appleseed Trust, and the Small Business Development Center, located on the campus of Onondaga Community College. The Small Business Administration (SBA) District Office in Syracuse has also been very helpful to ROECI. The SBA office, under the leadership of Bernard J. (BJ) Paprocki and with assistance from Joanne Melodayo, sponsored an outreach event in October 2000 at which ROECI presented the Micro-loan Program to the Syracuse banking community.

ROECI is also bringing the banks of the Syracuse area into its referral network of business lending and technical assistance. ROECI has high aspirations for the Central New York area. For more information about ROECI, please visit our website, www.ruralinc.org, or contact our Central Administrative Offices at (716) 340-3300. ■

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Please contact the Editor, Kate Hall, directly.

She can be reached by Phone: (716) 340-3334, Fax: (716) 340-3335 or E-mail: khall@ruralinc.org

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