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## INDIANA HOUSING PROGRAM BOOMING: New Office, New Grant, New Board Members

*Submitted by Annette Phillips, Housing Director, ROI-Indiana*

The Indiana office of ROI has been very busy over the last few months relocating their offices, writing grant proposals to expand services and securing new Board Members. After slightly over one year in an office in Hartford City, IN, a small rural town in Blackford County, ROI has moved on to bigger and brighter horizons. On October 2, staff moved to the new office at 2817 N. Oakwood in Muncie, IN. The Muncie office, which is centrally located in Delaware



*Left to right: Gilda Saathoff, ROI Program Coordinator, and Judy Presley, USDA Rural Development, at the Open House.*

County, was selected to better serve customers in the expanded service areas of Delaware and Madison Counties. ROI-Indiana will continue to serve the citizens of Blackford County.

ROI hosted an Open House on October 29th to celebrate their new office location. The event was a success with several housing professionals stopping by to welcome ROI and wish staff well. Guests included representatives from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Muncie's

Community Development Office, Rural Development, Transition Resources Corporation, Muncie lenders and others.

Soon after the move, staff members were notified that they had been awarded a grant for \$212,500 in HOME funds through the Indiana Housing Finance Authority (IHFA). The

award will be used to provide homeownership education and financial assistance to homebuyers in the new service area. ROI will help approximately 45 income-eligible families to purchase homes in Delaware, Madison and Blackford Counties.

ROI would also like to welcome two new Rural Opportunities Housing Corporation of Indiana (ROHCIN) Board Members. Sally McLaren and Robin Sutton joined the ROHCIN Board in November. Sally is the Branch Coordinator for Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Central Indiana. She also serves as the President of the Delaware County Human Service Coalition and is involved in several other community organizations. Robin is a Blackford County resident and a ROI homeownership program graduate.

So what is next in Indiana? ROI staff will keep busy continuing to build new partnerships in the expanded service area and doing outreach to residents in the new ROI service area. With the help of the IHFA grant and Neighborhood Reinvestment funds, ROI-Indiana plans to increase its current staff to three by adding a bilingual Housing Counselor. For further information about the ROI services offered in Indiana, please contact Annette Phillips at the new office number, (765) 286-2162. ■



*Charity Dunn, a recent graduate of the ROI-Indiana Homeownership Program, outside her new home.*

### Message from the President & CEO: Stuart J. Mitchell

Entering a new year often provokes us to evaluate the successes and challenges of the previous year. Our nation has been witness to unbelievable tragedy while at the same time, seen an outpouring of community spirit. Many ROI participants have been adversely affected by the uncertainties in the nation, especially vulnerable to the effects from the downturn in our economy. The September 11th tragedy has intensified the struggles many participants face as they attempt to support themselves and their families. As ROI works every day to position itself as a valuable resource and a beacon of hope, we continue to need the support of our community partners.

By now you should have received the ROI 2002 "Profiles of Success" Calendar that spotlights a variety of our participants and volunteers who have achieved remarkable success. This publication truly reflects the breadth of services we offer and allows us to tell our story through the accomplishments of those we are privileged to serve.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of JPMorgan Chase for underwriting this edition of Building Blocks. They continue to be a strong partner in ROI's work to build strong families and revitalize communities. On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff member of ROI, I wish you a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Entrando en un nuevo año a menudo nos provoca evaluar los éxitos y desafíos de años anteriores. Nuestra nación ha sido testigo de una increíble tragedia mientras al mismo tiempo, vista como una efusión de espíritu de la comunidad. Muchos participantes de ROI han sido adversamente afectados por las incertidumbres en la nación, especialmente vulnerable a los efectos de una baja en nuestra economía. La tragedia del 11 de septiembre ha intensificado los forcejeos que muchos participantes enfrentan cuando ellos intentan apoyarse ellos mismos y a sus familiares. El trabajo que ROI hace todos los días para ponerse en una posición como recurso valioso y guía de esperanza, nosotros continuamos necesitando la ayuda de nuestros compañeros de la comunidad.

Hasta esta fecha usted debe haber recibido el Calendario del ROI "Perfiles de Éxito" del 2002 que enfoca una variedad de nuestros participantes y voluntarios que han logrado el éxito notable. Esta publicación de verdad refleja la anchura de servicios que nosotros ofrecemos y nos permite contar nuestra historia a través de los logros de aquellos que nosotros hemos tenido el privilegio de servir.

Finalmente, me gustaría reconocer el apoyo de JPMorgan Chase por suscribir esta edición de Building Blocks. Ellos continúan siendo un compañero fuerte en el trabajo de ROI construyendo familias fuertes y revitalizando las comunidades. En nombre de la Junta de Directores y miembros del personal de ROI, yo les deseo un Nuevo Año saludable y próspero. ■

## ROI-Ohio Promotes Peace at Home

*Submitted by Manuela Peña Chalupa, ROI-Ohio*

On October 19th, the ROI Migrant Rest Center in Liberty Center, OH hosted various community members in an effort to create cultural sensitivity, raise awareness of violence prevention and promote peace.

The all-day event, "Celebration of peace in the world and no violence/Celebracion de paz en el mundo y no violencia," brought together migrant and seasonal farmworkers, Latino community activists, agencies serving the Latino population, and students from Defiance and Bowling Green University. Activities included a candle light vigil and ceremony for victims and survivors of violence.

Speakers included attorney, Steve Callejas, who spoke about how the law is enforced with aggressors and victims. Sister Kersten, from the El Camino Notre Dame congregation, provided words of spiritual hope, forgiveness, peace,



and love to start the process of healing for victims and survivors of violence. Victims of violence gave testimonials and a counselor provided information and referrals if necessary.

ROI thanks all those who volunteered their time to organize the event and to the families and speakers who participated. GRACIAS! ■

★ **ROI is sponsoring a New Markets Tax Credit briefing on February 21, 2002 in Rochester, NY. For details, please log on to the ROI web site at [www.ruralinc.org](http://www.ruralinc.org) or call Laurie Hauer at (585) 340-3378.** ★

### Inside Building Blocks

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# Mercedes Elias: A Profile to Inspire

Before moving from Brooklyn to Sullivan County, NY, Mercedes Elias spent most of her life combating drug addiction and spent several years in and out of prison.

"I started smoking pot and drinking at the age of 13 and from there it escalated to abusing stronger drugs. I never worked a day in my life, I depended on Public Assistance and when they closed my case for missing my appointments, I turned to selling drugs, stealing and doing anything that I could to support my addiction. I was arrested for the last time in 1991 and sent to Riker's Island — it was here that I finally surrendered."

Her children were now in the custody of family members and Mercedes was facing 5-10 years in prison. Given the option, she entered into a mandated recovery program. It was here that Mercedes took her first HIV test. The results were positive. "I had no idea what an HIV test was, I just heard other

Courage is as often the outcome of despair as hope; in the one case we have nothing to lose, in the other, all to gain.

*Diane De Poiters*

inmates talking about it. When I first got my results I thought, this has to be a mistake. I took the test four more times and still did not accept the fact that I was HIV positive. It was not until I watched my husband die that I realized how serious this virus was."

Alone with a new baby, Mercedes moved to Sullivan County, NY and continued recovering from her addictions. She was first intro-

duced to ROI in 1998 as a participant in the ROI Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS Program (HOPWA).

As part of her recovery, she educated herself in every aspect of HIV and AIDS.

Mercedes conducted speaking engagements for adolescents in schools and youth groups. In 1999, she volunteered to be a Peer Educator for ROI's Health & Safety Program. Rena Meyer, Health & Safety Administrator, recognized that Mercedes would be an asset to ROI and subsequently hired her as an Outreach Worker.



Today, Mercedes is the Emergency Services Caseworker for ROI's Emergency Utility and Rental Assistance Program. This program provides one-time emergency rental

and/or utility assistance to individuals and families infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. In addition, Mercedes has moved off the HOPWA program, is now a participant in ROI's Family Self-Sufficiency Program and is no longer receiving Public Assistance.

"I feel so much gratitude and love towards Rena for standing by me; encouraging me to be the best that I can be and giving me the courage to apply for my first job. Furthermore, I am thankful to Rena and the Director of Health and Safety, Tammy Freeberg, for helping me realize my dream to work in the field of HIV/AIDS. The knowledge and skills that I have gained during my time with ROI has allowed me to do something that I enjoy very much, working with people living with HIV—just like me." ■



## Pennsylvania Training and Employment Program Expands

*Submitted by Nita D'Agostino, Director, State Operations, ROI-Pennsylvania*

Over the past several months, the ROI-Pennsylvania Training & Employment Programs have been successful in attaining funding for multiple new projects.

The **Community Connections Initiative Project**, funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, develops referral services and systems that ensure Welfare to Work recipients connect with the appropriate resources to ensure stable employment. This project is located in both Philadelphia and Lancaster Counties and is connected electronically to Pennsylvania's Department of Public Welfare Automated Information Management Systems.

The **Supported Work Program Expansion**, funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, now includes Carbon, Dauphin, Cumberland and Perry Counties. The Program is designed to assist adults with a ninth grade education or less, with dependent children, who are long-term public assistance recipients. Already in need of more support to find employment, more aggressive day-to-day follow through with these participants is the most intricate part of the project.

ROI's newest **multi-level Welfare to Work Project** in Chester County utilizes a multi-faceted case management approach that promotes a participant's successful transition into employment. It is expected that this project will allow participants to develop the motivation to learn new skills and become long-term valuable employees. This project is funded through the Chester County Office of Community Development.

Since youth between the ages of 14 and 21 who have been detained have a 78% recidivism rate, ROI is part of a new trend developed to reduce this rate. ROI will develop a Training and Employment Program for the youth's release and their home based probation plan. ROI will connect directly with internal detained youth center staff and while at the home base, connect with external detained youth staff, the court system and schools for one year following release. Further, ROI will develop part-time, after school employment opportunities as well as full-time employment for those not connected to a school system.

ROI-PA's Training and Employment staff members are excited about delving into new territory and will work to ensure the success of every participant it serves. For further information about any of these programs, please contact the ROI-PA Administrative Offices in Harrisburg at (717) 234-6616. ■

## A "Close-Up" Experience in the Nation's Capital

*Submitted by Tracey Gebhart, Deputy for Youth Program Administration, ROI-Planning & Research*

In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Labor Division of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers, the **Close-Up Foundation** in Washington, D.C. recently hosted a select group of Youth Program participants for a two week visit to the U.S. capital to learn about the government, the local community and to participate in an internship.

**Antonio Garcia, Natalie De La Cruz** and **Laura De La Cruz** were selected, among approximately fifty other students across the nation, based on their submission to an essay contest. The three youth participants from ROI's **Project YES** — Youth Experiencing Success (Farmworker Youth Workforce Investment Act Program), are all from Presque Isle, Maine and were accompanied by Tracey Gebhart, Deputy for Youth Program Administration in Rochester, NY.



*Pictured left to right: Natalie De La Cruz, Antonio Garcia and Laura De La Cruz outside the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C.*

During the first week, the youth were provided with various learning experiences geared toward learning more about government. Activities were packed into long days and included tours of Washington D.C. and Capitol Hill, as well as classroom lectures and social outings. In addition to visiting their local representatives, the students also toured the Supreme Court.

The second week, only the farmworker students remained and took part in job shadowing and internship opportunities. Placed in various government agencies, the students benefited by building leadership skills, participating in an actual work experience, exploring different careers and receiving training and mentoring.

In addition to ROI, nine other organizations were invited to send youth participants and staff members including, Motivation and Education Training Inc., La Coopertiva Campesina, Home Education Livelihood Program, Florida Department of Education, Telamon Corporation, Rocky Mountain SER, Jobs for Progress Inc., Arkansas Human Development, Maui Economic Opportunities, Inc., and Yakima Valley Opportunities Industrialization Center.

Thank you to the Department of Labor and the Close-Up Foundation for this valuable experience! For further information about the ROI Youth Program, please contact Tracey Gebhart (585) 340-3397. ■

# International Guests Visit Field of Dreams Center in Aspers, PA

Submitted by Jane Nutter, Director of Child & Family Development Programs, ROI-Pennsylvania

**R**OI-Pennsylvania staff members welcomed key educators from around the world to the Field of Dreams Migrant Head Start Center in Aspers. With a specific interest in educational activities for girls and women, the visitors included the Ministers of Education from El Salvador and Peru as well as teachers from Afghanistan.

The Field of Dreams Center was selected as a model for education curriculum and design. Guests were provided with information and tools about quality, child-centered and holistic education services to children and families to bring back to their countries. The group toured the Center and enriched their understanding of the ROI services provided in a streamlined, integrated approach.

Thank you to Lorie Brush, Project Director and Mona Habib, Education Specialist of the Center for

International Research American Institutes for Research based in Washington, D.C. who worked with ROI staff to bring the delegation to the Center.

The ROI Field of Dreams Center offers: Migrant Head Start/Child & Family Development Programs for children ages birth to five years; Training & Employment Programs for eligible farmworker adults and youth ages 14 to 21; an array of supportive services for migrant and seasonal farmworkers in need of emergency lodging, nutrition services, rental and utility assistance, referrals and translation; and family literacy programs. For more information on specific programs and services offered at the Center, please contact Mr. Jaime Juarez, Center Director at (717) 677-9181 or request information through the US mail at P.O. Box 66, Aspers, PA 17304. ■



Pictured above are members of the international delegation of Ministers of Education, Teachers, and Representatives of the Center for International Research in Washington, D.C. with Rural Opportunities, Inc. staff.

# ROI-New Jersey Receives Award at Puerto Rican Festival Parade

Submitted by Elba Iris Ojeda, Training & Employment Coordinator, ROI-New Jersey

**O**n July 29, 2001 ROI-New Jersey participants, Board and staff members participated in the Annual Puerto Rican Festival Parade. After much hard work, we are proud to report that our float was awarded 2nd prize and received an additional award for the most cultural float. A special thank you to John Ploch, a local farmer who lent us the flat bed and a tractor to pull the float. David Cuba, a ROI-New Jersey participant, also lent a hand to drive the tractor. Thank you to all who helped prepare for and participate in this spirited event! ■



# ROI-Puerto Rico Awarded \$1.2 Million HUD Grant

Submitted by Myriam Gómez-González, ROI-Puerto Rico

**I**n Fall 2001, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded ROI a \$1.2 million grant to develop a 14-unit rental housing project for elderly people in Lares, Puerto Rico. The project, "Parque Platino", consists of two efficiency and twelve one-bedroom apartments designed for independent living. Parque Platino will turn an abandoned lot into a beautiful building that will serve the needs of the local elderly population. Through the support of the Mayor of Lares, Luis Oliver, the municipal government donated part of the construction site.

The project is designed to provide tenants with areas where they can gather, accommodating both small and large groups. It includes office space for counseling, health clinics and other individualized services, a multi-use community room and a top-floor terrace for recreation and planting.

Parque Platino is located in the center of the rural town of Lares, having access to medical facilities, churches, shopping and public services within a two-block radius. Supportive services include recreational activities, counseling and opportunities for economic and leadership development. The project serves an important community need for low-income housing for the elderly.

# Donativo de HUD por \$1.2 Millones a ROI -Puerto Rico

Por Myriam Gómez-González, ROI-Puerto Rico

**E**l pasado mes de Octubre el Departamento de la Vivienda Federal otorgó un donativo de \$1.2 millones para desarrollar un proyecto de 14 unidades de vivienda para envejecientes en Lares, Puerto Rico. El proyecto, "Parque Platino", consiste de dos apartamentos tipo estudio y doce apartamentos de una habitación diseñados para vida independiente. Parque Platino convertirá un solar baldío en un bello edificio que servirá las necesidades de las personas de mayor edad del área. El Alcalde de Lares, Honorable Luis Oliver apoyó el proyecto mediante la donación de una parte de los terrenos necesarios.

El diseño del proyecto provee areas donde los residentes puedan compartir en grupos grandes y reducidos. Incluye espacio de oficina para proveer servicios de consejería, clínicas de salud y otros servicios individuales, un centro comunitario de usos múltiples y una terraza en la planta alta para recreación y jardinería.

Parque Platino está localizado en el centro tradicional del pueblo montañoso de Lares, con acceso a servicios médicos, iglesias, tiendas y servicios públicos a dos bloques del lugar. Los servicios de apoyo incluyen actividades recreativas, consejería y oportunidades para desarrollo económico y de liderato. El proyecto sirve una necesidad importante de vivienda para envejecientes de ingresos bajos de la comunidad. ■

## We want to hear from you!

**R**ural Opportunities, Inc. is currently undergoing an intensive examination of our corporate identity. More specifically, we are evaluating internal and external perceptions of our name and mission statement as well as any possible consequences of both. Ultimately, the results of this process will be part of a recommendation to the ROI Board of Directors for any further action.

We need your help! As readers of *Building Blocks*, we are asking you to complete the survey below. An outside firm will conduct the survey collection process.

**Please submit your responses by January 23, 2002 via:**

**Phone:** (585) 218-4024 (between 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m EST)

**Mail:** Karen Barrow, Baybridge Consulting,  
One Colonial Village Rd., Rochester, NY 14625

**E-mail:** kbarrow1@rochester.rr.com

**Or take the survey online:** [www.ruralinc.org](http://www.ruralinc.org)

1. What are your perceptions of our name, **Rural Opportunities, Inc.?**
2. Does the name, **Rural Opportunities, Inc.**, reflect the services we offer? How so?
3. Does the name **Rural Opportunities, Inc.** present any difficulties or advantages?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We will keep you informed about our progress. ■

# Annual Conference 2001

## Farmworker Advocate Hall of Fame:



**L to R: Inductee, Lee Beaulac, Senior VP for Housing & Economic Development, ROI; Stuart J. Mitchell, President & CEO, ROI; Ignacio Jimenez, Chairman, Board of Directors, ROI; Inductee, Kay Washington, Executive Director, ROI-Pennsylvania; Inductee, Jim Schmidt, Executive Director, Farmworker Legal Services of New York**



**Ignacio Jimenez, Chairman of the Board of Directors, welcomes guests to the Community Luncheon.**



**On the left, Tom Quinn, President of Citibank (NY State), is shown appreciation by Stuart Mitchell, President & CEO of ROI, in recognition of Citibank's sponsorship of the Community Luncheon.**



**L to R: Board Members, Bill Kilgore, Ricardo Lucio, Jr. & Jill McGee gather for dinner before they begin the Board Meeting.**

**ROI would like to extend a special thank you to Citibank for sponsoring the Annual Conference's Community Luncheon and their continued support of our work.**



**William Johnson, Jr., Mayor of the City of Rochester, NY, lends his support for the work of ROI.**



# Filling a Need for Affordable Housing

In addition to developing affordable rental properties, ROI is responding to the need for "for-sale home" developments throughout many of our service areas. A special session on this topic, organized by Jay Golden and Karen Allison, ROI Housing & Economic Development staff members, was held during the ROI Annual Conference in Rochester, NY. "This is a relatively new activity for us. We want to examine our past experiences in this area and develop our own set of 'best practices' that can help chart the way for our future development efforts," stated Lee Beaulac, ROI's Senior Vice President of Housing & Economic Development.

The session focused on a current project to develop 18 homes that will be for sale to low and moderate-income buyers in Orleans County, NY. Homes that are marketed to first-time homebuyers require that both Real Estate Development and Home Ownership staff work together to ensure the best product and the lowest cost.

In addition, the group discussed past efforts in other regions of ROI's service area including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio and Puerto Rico. Recommendations by the group will be incorporated into future ROI projects and will be reflected in the ROI Real Estate and Home Ownership Policies and Procedures. ■

# Rental Assistance Program Graduates Families into Home Ownership

Submitted by Genesee County Section 8 Homeownership Staff Members, ROI-Housing & Economic Development

Have you ever dreamed about owning your own home but thought that credit or income issues would prohibit it? ROI may be able to put you on the road to realize your dreams with the **First Time Home Buyer Program (FTHB)**. The FTHB Program offers help to those who want to purchase their first home but need assistance in doing so. Laura McDermott is one of the many ROI success stories.

Laura first found out about the **First Time Home Buyer Program** from a friend.

Although she had excellent credit and employment, she wasn't sure she wanted to jump right into home ownership. Working with Sue Boss, ROI Homeownership Program Administrator, and Jason Elmore, Program Manager, Laura decided to enroll in the FTHB Program in January 2000. This program has taught Laura and hundreds of others how to make their dream of home ownership come true. More specifically in Laura's case, staff taught her how to pay off her debts and save money toward the purchase of her home.



Laura, surrounded by her daughters and family pet, are proud of their new home.

After completing the classes, Laura was ready to start looking for a home and was eligible for financial assistance. ROI assisted Laura by securing a grant from the Department of Housing & Urban Development HOME Program and a 1% mortgage loan through USDA Rural Development. Laura graduated from the ROI Homeownership Program in October 2001 by purchasing her first home. She and her two daughters, Jenn and Kerri, are all enjoying the New Year in their new home.

The FTHB Program based in Batavia, NY is conveniently located next door to the ROI Section 8 Rental Assistance Program. This arrangement boosts the success of the FTHB Program by providing a pool of potential participants who are working to become more self-sufficient. There are approximately 5 graduates of the Section 8 Program every year who later enroll in the FTHB Program. Eligible participants are provided with access to affordable mortgages and financial assistance for home ownership.

Through the Section 8 Program, ROI serves 3,600 families across the five NY State Counties of Orange, Dutchess, Sullivan, Yates and Genesee. ROI is also launching a new program, the **Section 8 Home Ownership Program**, which allows families to continue to receive subsidy payments toward a mortgage for up to fifteen years.

For further information about these or other ROI programs, please visit our web site at [www.ruralinc.org](http://www.ruralinc.org) or call ROI's Central Administrative Offices at (585) 340-3300. ■

## A Big Thanks...

ROI would like to thank the following corporations for their support of our work through the 2001 Annual Campaign.

- Action For A Better Community, Inc.
- Allfirst Bank
- Arkansas Human Development Corp.
- Azteca Travel
- The Bank of Castile
- BOCES Genesee Migrant Center
- Canandaigua National Bank & Trust
- Chicanos Por La Causa, Inc.
- Citibank (NY State)
- Conifer Realty, LLC
- Cornell Migrant Program
- Cunningham & Chericoff, P.C.
- Davidson, Fink, Cook, Kelly & Galbraith, LLP
- DGA Builders, Inc.
- DiMarco Constructors
- Federal Home Loan Bank Of New York Fleet
- Fred Beans Ford of West Chester
- Freddie Mac
- Genesee Management, Inc.
- Gibson & Associates, LLC
- The Health Association
- HR Benefit Advisors, Ltd.
- Interior Moving Services, Inc.
- Kaolin Mushroom Farms, Inc.
- KB Graphics, Inc.
- Kentucky Farmworker Programs, Inc.
- Key Bank
- Law Office Of Mary Ann E. Wiater
- Longaker, Rimkus & Associates, Inc.
- MA Services/Pullano & Company
- MMI Technologies, Inc.
- Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Corporation (MGIC)
- Moss, McGee, Bradley & Foley
- Muhlenberg/Greene Architects, Ltd.
- National Equity Fund, Inc.
- New Jersey Rural Housing Action Corp.
- New York State Electric & Gas
- New York State United Teachers
- Paris Kirwan Associates, Inc.
- Passero Associates, P.C.
- Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency
- Rick Metz, Developer L.L.C.
- Roberts Travel Service, Inc.
- Rochester Gas & Electric Corporation
- Rural Housing Action Corporation
- Rural Opportunities Enterprise Center, Inc.
- Salomon Smith Barney
- State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA)
- Strathallan Hotel
- Telamon Corporation
- Testa Builders, Inc.
- The Summit Federal Credit Union
- Thomas E. McAllister
- Tri-County Community Action Agency Headstart

Reflecting the consistent growth of programs, ROI purchased an additional administrative office building in Rochester, NY during Fall 2001. The house once belonged to the Sibley Family, the same family who built the mansion that holds the ROI main offices at 400 East Avenue. Adjacent to the lot where the Central Administrative Offices are located, the additional office space at 7 Prince Street will accommodate the Housing Division staff. The move is expected to be complete by the end of January 2002. ■



Front entrance to 7 Prince Street.

Side view of ROI's newest administrative building.



# New Jersey Youth Attend Symposium in Atlanta, Georgia

In August 2001, New Jersey farmworker youth Annette Roman, Pedro Sanchez and Juan Vazquez were chosen to attend the Second Annual Youth/Staff Symposium held in Atlanta, GA. Accompanied by ROI staff members, Carmen D. Vargas, Youth Services Coordinator and Alberto Jimenez, Youth Program Caseworker, the three ROI Youth Program participants were chosen for their enthusiasm and dedication to program activities.

As part of the Symposium, the youth participated in the "Farmworker Youth Congress" and attended workshops, met participants from other states and programs, and participated in a Scavenger Hunt — they even won first place! A highlight for Annette was seeing her favorite baseball team, the Atlanta Braves, play and win.

All three participants are taking steps toward a bright future by setting goals and working hard to achieve success. Annette and Pedro have been enrolled in the ROI Youth Experiencing Success Program since 2000 and have completed work experience, tutoring and mentoring activities. Annette will graduate from high school in June 2002 and plans to attend college to pursue a degree in Social Work. Pedro entered high school in 2001 and continues to work hard in his English-as-a-Second language classes. Juan completed a work experience during the spring of 2001. He works part-time as a Dietary Aide and is working on obtaining his GED. Subsequently, he plans to attend college.

Congratulations to the three participants on all your hard work! ■



Top: Pedro Sanchez and Juan Vazquez. Bottom: Alberto Jimenez, Annette Roman and Carmen D. Vargas.

# ROI Honors New Jersey Graduates

Submitted by Elba Iris Ojeda, Training & Employment Coordinator, ROI-New Jersey

ROI-New Jersey celebrated the achievements of program graduates at its Annual Graduation Dinner in October 2001 in Vineland. The event honors the success of its graduates from the ROI Employment & Training and First Time Home Buyers Programs. Over one hundred guests attended the graduation including family members, the Mayor of Vineland, ROI Board and staff members, local employers, the media, Vineland City Councilmen and social service providers.

Congratulations to all of our participants! You've certainly earned your achievements! Felicidades at todos nuestros participantes! Nos sentimos muy orgulloso haber trabajado con ustedes! ■



Luis Dario Arias, Lautaro Pascual, Nilda Diaz and Luis Santiago.



Norma Febus realized a dream by becoming a certified Home Health Aide.



Alvin Cuba, Goya truck driver, with Elba I. Ojeda, T&EC, Vineland, NJ.



Kevin Ripoll, Showboat Banquet Server.



Juam Roman, Lilliston Ford Van Driver.



A Group of Graduates from New Jersey.



Julia Leon, Fairfield Medical Van Driver.

# Awards & Honors



Ken Siegel, ROI Prison Programs Administrator, has been selected to participate in the Institute for HIV Prevention Leadership conducted by the Center for Disease Control and the Association of Schools of Public Health. The program, a year long, intensive learning experience, is designed to increase the capacity of program managers to design, plan, implement and evaluate effective HIV prevention interventions. During the year, Ken will interact with a new network of HIV prevention colleagues, participate in four,

one-week sessions of classroom instruction and complete integrative learning assignments. This experience will ultimately strengthen the capacity of both Ken and the entire Health & Safety Program in delivering more effective HIV Prevention Programs.

ROI was recently presented with Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation's "2001 Excellence in Lending Award." The award, given during the NRC's Excellence in Lending Workshop in October, was in recognition of ROI "having achieved high quality Full Cycle Lending process and systems resulting in consistently low delinquencies."

ROI would like to recognize the following staff members from Pennsylvania for attaining their Certification as Family Development Specialists. The certification, based on two, seven-day periods of extensive classroom sessions, is designed so that staff members will draw upon a participant's resources, strengths and ability to solve problems.

- Rita Alicea, Training & Employment Specialist, Erie
- Susan Bognoski, Home Ownership Counselor, Chambersburg
- Pat Diehl, Migrant Head Start Teacher, Aspers
- Jennie Knox, Executive Grants & Projects Manager, Harrisburg
- Juan Martinez, Youth Training & Employment Specialist, Kennett Square
- Lorena Martinez, Training & Employment Coordinator, Aspers
- Lourdes Martinez, Training & Employment Coordinator, Lancaster
- Maria Martinez, Training & Employment Coordinator, Reading
- Luayda Ortiz, Training & Employment Specialist, Kennett Square
- Mary Sibbach, Regional Training & Program Manager, Jim Thorpe
- Linda Simon, Family Services Manager, Chambersburg

Family Development Specialist Certification is based on the Family Strengths Model of service delivery as developed by the University of Iowa National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice. Congratulations on your achievements! ■



Mireya Ramos and her children Lizbeth, Juan and Alejandro receive a food basket from ROI as part of a holiday tradition assisting families in need in Atlantic and Gloucester Counties, New Jersey.

# Home Ownership Brunch Generates New Participants

Submitted by Amy Torres, ROI-Housing & Economic Development

The ROI-Pennsylvania Home Ownership staff held their Annual Real Estate Sales Brunch in Adams and Franklin Counties during November 2001. In addition to real estate agents, ROI-PA invited settlement agents, who assist migrant families to establish permanent roots in a community, as well as lenders to "Come and Get to Know Us."

Mike Johnson, Deputy for Home Ownership Programs, prepared a PowerPoint presentation describing the Home Buyer Education Workshops, the Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) assistance and displayed more than 50 homes of participants who graduated from the ROI programs. Though some of the guests had been local real estate agents for years, they had not known or had forgotten the RLF assistance was available.

ROI staff members fielded questions from guests about programs and the availability of Home Buyer Education workshops. The event was a successful outreach effort resulting in requests for more information and referrals to increase participation in ROI workshops and classes. For more information about the Home Ownership Program in Pennsylvania, please call the PA Administrative Office at (717) 234-6616. ■

## PLEASE NOTE: New Area Code of (585) for Greater Rochester!

On November 15, 2001 the Rochester, NY area was assigned a new area code. The new area code of (585) replaces the former (716) area code that is now solely designated to the Buffalo area. Counties affected by the change include: Orleans, Genesee, Wyoming, Allegany, Monroe, Livingston, Ontario, Yates and Steuben.

In order to make the transition, there will be a grace period until August 17, 2002 where both area codes will work. Please adjust your telephone lists, fax machines, speed dial phones, or any other equipment that may be affected. Please inform your staff of these changes as well. ■

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For more information, please call (585) 340-3300 or log on to the ROI Web Site at [www.ruralinc.org](http://www.ruralinc.org).

# Congratulations, Volunteers!

## Awards Dinner at Annual Conference Honors Volunteer Contributions

A lot of important work at ROI is done through the commitment and initiative of our hard-working volunteers. The following volunteers were acknowledged at an awards dinner during the Rural Opportunities Annual Conference in October.

### Board and PAAC (Program Area Advisory Committee) Awards

#### The Board of Directors Joe Allen Service Award

##### ■ *Sheila Banks, Rural Opportunities Housing Corporation of Pennsylvania*

Sheila carries out her commitment to the cause of providing for the housing needs of migrant and seasonal farmworkers in many ways including her outstanding work as the Secretary of ROI Board of Directors and with her commitment as a member of Rural Opportunities Housing Corporation of Pennsylvania and Farmworkers Housing Corporation of Pennsylvania.

#### Affiliate Award

##### ■ *Mark St. John, Rural Housing Corporation of Indiana*

Mark, a founding member of ROI's Indiana Housing Affiliate Corporation, has been instrumental in the expansion of the Indiana program for years. His efforts led to increased funding, more visibility, and clearer focus in Indiana.

#### Outstanding PAAC Member

■ *Isaac Randall, Albion, New York:* Isaac has attended every PAAC meeting and is always willing to participate in all advocacy activities. His participation and commitment to ROI encourages others to participate and he serves as an example.

■ *Diómedes Plaza Plaza, Adjuntas, Puerto Rico:* Diómedes has perfect attendance in all PRAC, ROI Board and Executive Committee meetings. Diómedes provides outreach to area farmworkers and motivates others to increase their participation.

■ *Gary Conrad and Ann Conrad, Alliance, Ohio:* Ann and Gary have planned, organized and worked diligently to make the Ohio Farmworker Recognition Day successful for many years.

#### PAAC (Program Area Advisory Committee) Improvement

■ *Ignacio Jimenez, Cumberland County, New Jersey:* Ignacio, a volunteer for nine years and current Chairman of the ROI Board of Directors, serves on the East Coast Parent Center Committee, Parent Policy Committee and Cumberland County PAAC. He is a strong advocate for his fellow farmworkers, knowing firsthand their challenges and experiences.

■ *Orleans/Genesee/Niagara Counties, NY, PAAC:* For the past two years, this PAAC had struggled to pull together. They made a variety of improvements including holding monthly meetings at a variety of locations with agendas of interest. Their efforts resulted in the election of a representative to the ROI Board of Directors.

### Program or Administrative Volunteers:

■ *Carolyn Scott, Derline Cummigham, James Sullivan and Laura Smith (Housing & Economic Development) Rochester, New York:* For the past two years the above individuals have given their time to help educate first time home buyers in banking, insurance and real estate. The skills and expertise shared by the volunteers resulted in informed and knowledgeable homebuyers.

■ *Nancy Colvin (Training & Employment) Alton, New York:* The staff in the ROI office in Alton, NY would agree they would be lost without their office aide. Nancy is an inspiration and valuable asset as demonstrated by spending 20+ hours a week doing fundraising, assisting with client services, as well as keeping things running smoothly.

■ *Linda Krupa and Sue Bubner (Health and Safety) Rochester, New York:* Due to their efforts, a mutually beneficial relationship was formed that resulted in more exposure and strengthened community contacts for Rural Opportunities, Inc. Linda and Sue oversaw the development of children's artwork for a coloring book about safety and assisted in workshops serving over 750 children.

■ *David Wagner (Administrative) Rochester, New York:* Though David's tenure with us has been short, the impact he has made since has been great. He has taken the idea of a technical assistance newsletter for staff members who work with volunteers from a concept to a reality with limited guidance.

## CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS AND THANK YOU!!

# Bella Design

Many entrepreneurs face an important decision when contemplating the question, when do I make the switch from a part-time venture to full-time self-employment? For Lou Castartelli, that switch came in 1999. After working 14 years for Wendell Castle, a nationally renowned wood sculptor and one of upstate New York's finest wood artisans, Lou began his own business, Bella Design.

Getting off to a good start as he sought financing, Lou began working with his local Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to develop his business plan. However, Lou could not obtain financing from his local bank. They advised him that his start-up business did not meet their guidelines for conventional financing. He was then referred to the Rural Opportunities Enterprise Center, an affiliate of ROI.

The Enterprise Center staff were able to look beyond the traditional bank measures and take into account Lou's extensive experience, excellent credit history, current customers and projected customers. The Enterprise Center approved a \$16,000 loan for equipment and working capital, allowing Lou to take on additional work and expand his products. During 2000, a second loan for \$5,000 was approved, allowing him to purchase additional equipment.

Bella Design creates production artwork and custom furniture, including finely crafted tables, chairs and media centers. Through a relationship with Brazilian artist Romero Britto, and Nan Miller Gallery in Rochester, NY, Lou has been commissioned to create production artwork of Romero's original art. Bella Design has produced the limited edition sculptures for the past two and a half years. Most recently, Lou created a 10-foot high outdoor sculpture placed in Miami, Florida.

Lou now has his own 2,500 square foot shop, a growing reputation and a valuable asset, his own business. "The Rural Opportunities Enterprise Center helped me expand and has been my partner as my business has grown," says Lou. "Without the loans, support and assistance from the Enterprise Center, I would not have been able to accomplish what I have."

ROI congratulates Lou on his accomplishments and wishes him continued success. For further information about the Enterprise Center, please call (585) 340-3387 or visit the web site at [www.ruralinc.org/programs/eco\\_dev.asp](http://www.ruralinc.org/programs/eco_dev.asp).



Lou Castartelli, owner of Bella Design, proudly exhibits a piece of his custom-designed furniture.

“Without the loans, support and assistance from the Enterprise Center, I would not have been able to accomplish what I have.”

# Make Your Taxes Less Taxing!

Rural Opportunities, Inc. is gearing up again to provide FREE tax counseling assistance to low-income, elderly, disabled and Spanish-speaking residents in the NY Counties of Monroe, Orleans, Wayne, Ontario, and Genesee. Additionally, this year's program will expand to provide services to select regions of NY State including the Mid-Hudson Valley and Long Island. To enhance this program, ROI has been authorized as a VITA Site (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) allowing us to serve more people in need of assistance.

Volunteers are trained and certified through the Internal Revenue Service. The program will run between February 1 and April 15, 2002. For an updated list of tax counseling sites or for further information, please contact Valerie McAllister by calling (585) 340-3707 or by e-mail at [vmcallister@ruralinc.org](mailto:vmcallister@ruralinc.org).

## Thank You

On behalf of the Board, staff and volunteers, ROI-Pennsylvania would like to thank the following sponsors of the special event at the Berks Family Development Center held in June 2001.

- Allfirst Bank
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- Tyson Foods

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Please contact Kate Hall by

Phone: (585) 340-3334, Fax: (585) 340-3335 or e-mail: [khall@ruralinc.org](mailto:khall@ruralinc.org)

CLIP AND MAIL

## ROI Needs Your Support!

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