

Books to take Home!



Students at the Head Start center at Martin Luther King School enjoy a delivery of books that they will take home and enjoy with their families. Donated by First Book, they were among 500 donated to CRT's Head Start centers; most were distributed at smaller sites and will be taken home by students. Head Start provides a comprehensive program including health, nutrition, family support, and early literacy. For information, please call (860) 560-5565.

Hallmark Goods Available

Could your clients use an inspirational book to brighten their day? Could your program save money if you didn't have to purchase plates, cups, and other items?

CRT's Development Department can help. Hallmark Inc. regularly donates surplus goods to CRT, which are given to CRT programs and to other non-profits in the community.

With the help of CRT Alternative Incarceration Center participants and staff, Hallmark donations - sometimes consisting of thousands of items - are delivered at least once a month and stored in the Park Street warehouse.

"We've given posters to Head Start centers, picture frames and albums to lots of programs," said CRT's Director of Corporate and Community Relations, Nancy Shapiro. "There's really a lot here, and it changes all the time. Anyone is welcome to come and look at what we've got and take what they need."

For information, please call Shapiro at (860) 560-5471.

CRT's Income Tax Assistance:

Returning Money to the Community

More than \$500,000 is circulating in Connecticut's economy due to income tax returns prepared and filed so far for residents by the Community Renewal Team.

CRT has been providing free tax preparation services, encouraging people to take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit and other credits. Volunteers and CRT staff went through a brief Internal Revenue Service training to become certified Volunteer Income Tax Assistants; using software provided by the IRS, they have been preparing tax returns for hundreds of residents in Hartford and Middletown.

"This program has been a tremendous service to the community," said CRT President/CEO Paul C. Puzzo. "We're putting money back into people's pockets, and encouraging them to think about how to use it to build assets for their futures."

The tax preparation program, which began in February and will run through April 15, is offered at six sites in Hartford and Middletown.

"When someone comes to us for tax assistance, we tell them about other CRT programs, like energy assistance, or the Individual Development Accounts, or Head Start," said Lena Rodriguez, CRT's Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer. "There's a lot anyone can do to build assets, and we want to share that information."

Paid tax preparers, Rodriguez added, charge a fee for preparation and filing, and may charge interest on the refund amount if clients opt for an instant refund. "CRT charges nothing, and we will make sure people know about the EITC and other options."

CRT has worked closely with the IRS, the UConn Law Clinic, and other service providers to carry out the program.

"CRT has picked up the ball running," said Don Frank, a Senior Tax Specialist with the IRS, after visiting two CRT sites this March. "You've shown your commitment again and again, and I'm glad to be working with you."

For information on CRT's tax preparation program, call (860) 560-5611.

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by Justin Marshall, External Affairs Department Intern

Strengthening Communities, Building Assets

Are you, or someone you know interested in owning a home or improving the home that they currently own?

Well there will be programs available in April for people who own homes in Hartford, or want to buy a home in Hartford.

"Homeownership is a proven way to both help families and revitalize communities," said Paul C. Puzzo, CRT's President/CEO. "This is strengthening the city, building assets for individuals, and improving the quality of life for Hartford's citizens."

CRT's Homeownership Assistance Center, or HAC, will provide a one-stop service for people in Hartford, and especially in the Blue Hills Avenue neighborhood, who want to buy or renovate a home. A partnership between CRT, Fannie Mae, the Ford Foundation, Northeast Utilities and the Energy Programs Consortium, the program will be located at 1229 Albany Avenue (The Bennett Building) with CRT's Albany Ave. Neighborhood Services Center.

There are two major components of the program. The first is for those who do not currently own a home and want to take the correct steps in doing so. For those who need it, there will be financial fitness training on topics such as improving credit, or paying off current debts. People who possess good credit will not be recommended to attend financial fitness training, but will participate in home counseling, which informs perspective homeowners about different mortgage options. CRT will also set up participants with compatible mortgage companies, based on their needs and financial standing.



Lionel Rigler, Program Manager

The second element involves home improvements for current homeowners. This includes free home audits. Through this process the auditors find out what the owners want to do with their property, and assess what needs to be done also. Affordability is also factored, as CRT assists participants in finding a loan that is suitable for their needs and income qualifications.

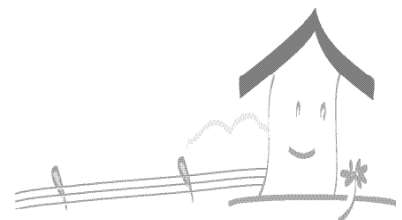
The program also serves as a medium between the homeowner, and contractors that have been screened by CRT and deemed to be qualified and skilled contractors.

The only eligibility requirements for this program are that you own, or plan to buy a home in Hartford. This program is mainly focused on the Blue Hills neighborhood, but CRT will work with anyone in the city. The whole program is free, and you don't have to have lower income to participate, but those who are of lower income, this program has a lot more to offer to you.

All components of the program are currently free, but there may soon start to be a small fee for those who are considered qualified to afford it. The advantages of joining this program well outweigh the small fee, which may be enacted for some of the more well off participants. This is a positive program that everyone who participates will benefit from, don't miss out! Any questions please contact Lionel Rigler, Program Manager at (860) 560-HOME (4663).



Steven Gosselin, Homeownership Counselor



CRT Celebrates 40 Years:

Share Your Memories!

Believe it or not, CRT is getting ready to celebrate its 40th birthday.

A year of celebratory events will begin in November 2003 to celebrate CRT's incorporation in October of 1963.

In preparation for the birthday, CRT is working on collecting history and memories of past events and successes.

Please share your memories - snapshots, old newsletters and clipping, and stories of CRT's past. We are especially interested in stories of client successes - people who used CRT's programs years ago and have gone on to success in their chosen fields.

You may even see your story or snapshot highlighted in this newsletter.

Send information to Liz Dupont-Diehl at lizd@crtct.org, or call (860) 560-5689.



Sharing Food & Cultures



The staff at the Locust Street Early Care and Education Center enjoyed a "Unity Day" pot luck lunch in March. Staff brought in food from many cultures, including Peru, Puerto Rico, and many others.

CRT's Second Make It Bloom Challenge



Chris McCluskey at the Bristol AIC with last year's winning entry

Do you know your marigolds from your roses? Can you tell your annuals from your perennials?

If so - or, if you'd like to learn - take part in CRT's second Make It Bloom contest.

Each CRT site is eligible to participate. You'll be given a budget of up to \$25 to make your program location beautiful with flowers, plantings, or other landscaping improvements.

The winning site will receive a pizza party for all involved, as well as recognition in InFocus.

"The goal is to use the talent and creativity of some of our program staff to make their workplaces more appealing," said Facilities Director Brenda Ransom. "Lots of time, people have the interest or the talent, and wish they could make some changes or improvements to their workplace. Well, here is their chance!"

All participants will be judged in August. The winner will be chosen based on creativity of landscape design, use of available space, ease of maintenance, involvement of clients or participants, and overall appeal.

Anyone interested in participating should contact Ransom at (860) 560-5670 by April 20. If enough sites are interested, bulk rates on plants may be available.

A Job Well Done



Receiving a certificate of thanks for helping hang artwork for the 2003 National Arts Program are, from left, Chris Lucisano, Greg Donnelly, and Mark Pallatino of the Bristol AIC, Joe Young of the National Arts Program, and Greg Taylor of the Enfield AIC. AIC staff and clients installed approximately 700 pieces at Capital Community College for the National Arts Program exhibition. Amateur and professional artists aged 6 and older compete for cash prizes, and all entrants have their work publicly displayed.

New Mileage Rate

Due to a change in federal guidelines, CRT's reimbursement rate for employee mileage has dropped to 36 cents per mile from its previous rate of 36.5 cents per mile. Forms are available from the Finance Department at 555 Windsor St. in Hartford, or at CRT's intranet, at <http://intranet.crtct.org/>. Go to Departments, then Finance, then forms. Reimbursement requests for a month's travel should be made by the 15th of the following month. Contact Ed Begley at (860) 560-5649 with any questions



Employee

of The Month



Daniel "Jeff" Johnson

Improving customer service. Offering others assistance, always with a smile. Volunteering for challenging assignments.

These are just some of the qualities that won Daniel "Jeff" Johnson of the Nutrition Department March's Employee of the Month Award.

Working at CRT's Hartford kitchen, Johnson helps prepare nearly 5,000 meals daily, for homebound seniors receiving Meals on Wheels, Senior Community Cafés, and Head Start students.

In addition to exceptional work on a daily basis, Johnson looks for challenges and rises to them. For instance, when the July 4 holiday required preparation of an additional 2,500 meals for the four-day weekend, Johnson stayed to make sure clients were fed.

Without his help, the newly formed Food Connection, which provides groceries and food stamps to area seniors, wouldn't be so successful, according to his supervisor, Susan Svoboda.

Thanks to his dedication and help, efficiency, accuracy, and customer service have all improved. He is consistently seeking to learn new things and improve the services CRT provides.

Congratulations!

Beat the desk jockey blues!

Stretching Can Promote Relaxation and Flexibility

If you're sitting at your desk most of the day, you may experience cramped, tired, and stiff muscles by mid-afternoon, and they may feel even worse by the time you get home. Simple stretching exercises,

which can be done at the office, can help increase flexibility, improve posture, and soothe those aching muscles. Our exercise routine includes stretches to help you unwind from "head to toe."

Neck Muscle Stretch

(works neck muscles)

Sitting in a chair, look straight ahead.

Move your head forward slowly, tucking your chin to chest. Go back to starting position.

At starting position, slowly tilt your head backward, as if looking up at the sky. Go back to starting position.

At starting position, slowly bend your neck sideways, bringing your ear to your right shoulder. Repeat with opposite shoulder. Go back to starting position.

At starting position, turn your head to the left and then to the right. Go back to starting position. You should feel your neck muscles loosen.

Repeat all exercises 3-5 times.

Shoulder/Back/Spine Stretch

(works shoulders, upper and lower back muscles, and spine)

Stand facing the wall, more than an arm's length away.

Slowly bend forward at the waist, placing your palms against the wall as you lower your chest and shoulders toward the floor. You should feel the stretch in your shoulders, your upper and lower back, and your spine.

Hold for a count of five. Repeat 3-5 times.

Arm Stretch

(works chest, shoulder, and arm muscles)

Sit up tall on the edge of a chair.

Slowly leaning forward, clasp your hands together behind your back at hip level.

Drop your shoulders downward as you pull your arms out behind you. You should feel the stretch along the top of your chest, in your shoulders, and along your arms.

If clasping your hands together is too difficult, try holding the end of a towel in each hand.

Hold for a count of five. Repeat 3-5 times.

Leg Stretch

(works calves and lower back muscles)

Stand facing the wall, about an arm's length away.

Place your palms against the wall at shoulder height.

Keeping your feet flat on the floor, slowly bend your elbows, moving your face toward the wall.

You should feel the stretch in your calves and lower back.

Hold for a count of five. Repeat 3-5 times.

*Excerpted from Oxford Healthy Mind Healthy Body Magazine
JSA Communications
Marty Jeffcock, Editor*



Educating the Public

Participating in last month's Juvenile Justice Day at the state Capitol are, from left, CRT's Assistant Director of Criminal Justice Christopher McClusky; Miriam Darveau, a Case Manager at the Bristol Juvenile Justice Center; and Project Coordinator Patty Ucello, of the East Hartford Juvenile Justice Center. Each year CRT Criminal Justice staff participate in the event, which educates the public about work done by CJ programs around the state.



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April Birthdays

Aiken, Elaine	15	Perez, Maribel	02
Alamo, Rocio	28	Ransom, Brenda	13
Caine, Doris T	20	Reyes, Joset	23
Castro II, Lester James	07	Richards, Leona	20
Cawley, Deborah	05	Rigler, Lionel S	13
Curry, Paula	26	Rivera, Hipolita	10
Curry, Yvonne	06	Rosado, Olga L.	09
Davis, Nicole A.	23	Saez, Luis	04
Deberry, Carlise	01	Sternal, Lorraine	10
Dempsey, Peggy	24	Suchor, Courtney	07
Fernandez, Alma	18	Svoboda, Susan	07
Figuroa, Zuleyda	03	Torres, Miriam E	17
Fountain, Stephanie M.	23	Underwood, Barbara	28
Garcia, Pamela J.	12	Vazquez, Irma R	15
Gunderman, Kyle	10	Velasco, Rosa	11
Hardin, Keisha	05	Woods, Patricia A	26
Heredia, Teresa	18	Young Jr, Leroy	13
Holmes, Rochelle	04		
Johnson, Renee T.	12		
King, Ronald	18		
Laney, Leslie	21		
Leatherwood, Lessie	26		
Lee, Donald W.	03		
Lovallo, Daniel J	30		
Lyons, Susan	16		
Mars, Julian	20		
Martinez, Gloria	09		
Martinez, Marcos	16		
Murphy, Todd	26		
Norton, Brian	22		
O'Donnell, Jill	21		
Oliver, Kristy D	17		
Perez, Adiola	21		

The Community Renewal Team, Inc.

provides a range of anti-poverty programs that help people and families become self-sufficient and to ensure their basic human needs are met. Programs include Head Start and Early Care and Education; Meals on Wheels and meals at senior centers; criminal justice programs; neighborhood-based outreach; positive youth development; energy and weatherization assistance; employment and training; and emergency shelter and supportive housing. CRT was formed in 1963 and is now Connecticut's largest Community Action Agency.

InFocus is the monthly newsletter for CRT employees, trustees, and volunteers.

Please submit information or story ideas to InFocus at 555 Windsor St., Hartford, CT, 06120-2418, or to **Liz Dupont-Diehl** at e-mail lizd, phone (860) 560-5689.

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