



CHRISTIAN
ACTIVITIES
COUNCIL

Breaking Barriers
Building Communities

Bridges

NEWS FROM THE CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES COUNCIL • 36 UCC CHURCHES IN MISSION TO GREATER HARTFORD

Charting the Future: How Can the CAC Best Meet the Needs of the People?

Every five years or so, the CAC renews its strategic plan for the future. That time is upon us once again.

Under the leadership of independent consultant Linda Campanella and with funding from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, we are currently engaged in an intensive process of re-visioning the CAC's future.

Evaluating Where We Are

The strategic plan will be about six months in the making and rooted in a 360-degree examination of the Council and its environs today. Our goal is a strategy that identifies realistic objectives, achievable strategies and the resources required to implement the Council's vision.

"It should be more than a document," Linda said. "It should be a living, breathing plan that gets dirty because they refer to it so often."

Significant groundwork for the plan has already been laid. Earlier this fall, Linda met with the CAC's key stakeholders and constituents—staff, board, partnering and funding organizations, supporting churches and the community—to gather their perspectives on the organization and its work. We also identified organizations with programs

similar to ours and new needs within the community we could potentially serve.

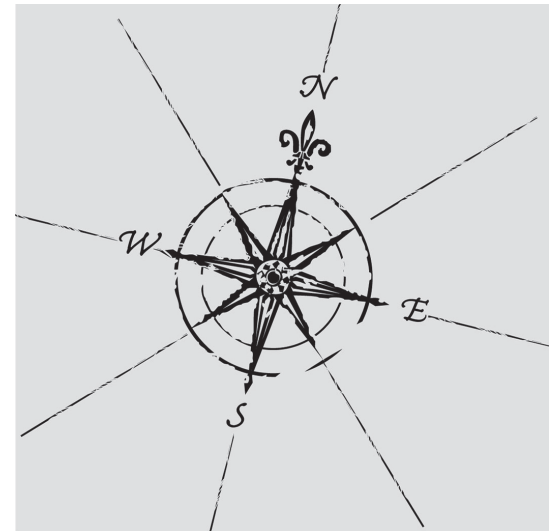
Setting the Future Course

It was all grist for a planning retreat that was held on November 15 at The Lyceum Center in Hartford. About 30 staff, board and council members engaged in a day-long process of envisioning the CAC's future.

"Things are going very well," Linda said. "The board and staff are engaged. We had a productive discussion."

Key topics of the day included:

- The CAC's mission. All agreed that the council is serving a higher purpose, but how might it be done differently? How might the organization be stronger or different five years from now?
- Biggest challenge: In today's economic climate, we are challenged financially. To obtain necessary funding, the CAC needs to make a compelling case for what it does and why it matters so much.
- Greatest possibility: We're challenged to bring faith-based and other organizations together, and to focus less on geography and more on where the need is. How can the council engage strategic allies and build coalitions so as to accomplish more than it can do alone?



Defining How We'll Get There

Next steps will be to refine and finalize the five-year vision and reach agreement on the overarching goals that support it. Finally, an action plan with specific initiatives will be developed, which we're targeting for March 2009.

Linda, who is also a UCC member and the moderator at Asylum Hill Congregational Church, says she welcomes the opportunity to work with the CAC.

"I'm excited to be doing this work for the CAC, both professionally and personally," she said. "This is an organization that is making a profound difference in the community, and they have a story that needs to be told."

New and Expanded Services to be Offered

Our nation's financial crisis is making the CAC's Housing Counseling Program increasingly important at the local Hartford level, according to CAC Executive Director Don Steinle.

In order to respond to the community's growing need for financial guidance, the Housing Counseling Program is being expanded to include mortgage delinquency and foreclosure services.

Damaris Whittaker, a former assistant to Associate Director Rev. Edwin Ayala, will be returning to the CAC to assume the full-time position as of the first of the year. She is a certified paralegal most recently employed by Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc., working largely with families on housing issues—skills and experiences she will bring to her work with the CAC. She also has a master's degree in nonprofit management and philanthropy along with Spanish language capability.

In addition, Damaris will assist in administering the Urban Suburban Affordables (USA) housing program.

The housing counseling program has recently received a national HUD grant (one of only four in the state) and a long-term contract with the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CFHA) which will help support these expanded services.

Resident Organization

A new CAC service for Upper Albany neighborhoods

Shawn Holloway joined the CAC staff in September, assuming the new position of resident organizer. Shawn's charge is to join residents in Hartford's Upper Albany area together in sustainable, collective efforts that can make their neighborhoods safer, cleaner, better places to live.

"Shawn is a major addition to our capacity to reach out to people in the neighborhood," said CAC Executive Director Don Steinle.

The position is funded by Upper Albany Weed and Seed, the Local Initiatives Support Organization (LISC) and the City of Hartford.

A former neighborhood coordinator for the City of Hartford, Shawn already has many of the connections within the city and Upper Albany that will be critical to accomplishing his goals. He also knows many of the residents, and is meeting regularly with those who previously have been active in the CAC's earlier neighborhood initiatives.

Shawn's approach is collaborative. He meets with a residential group on the third Thursday of every month at the Upper Albany Library branch. He's also forming a youth forum to address youth violence in the city.

"I work with everyone in the neighborhood," Shawn said. "I assist, coordinate, get the right people in the room. I have ideas on what needs to be done. The residents have their own ideas. My goal is collective discussion. It's better for the projects to come from the people who live in the community."

Some of Shawn's current initia-



Resident Organizer Shawn Holloway

tives include clean streets, which he's accomplishing with residents and with Hartford's police and the Department of Public Works, future landscaping for neighborhood homes through plant sharing, and other beautification projects. He's consulting with sister programs in the Southend and Blue Hills areas for ideas and approaches he can bring to Upper Albany.

"We're trying to change the thought processes of people in the community—that it's worthwhile to invest in your neighborhood and community," Shawn said.

Looking ahead, Shawn aims to get more people involved, and that will require persistence. It could take six months to a year, he said, to cultivate the relationships required to build the momentum that can mark the beginning of change.

"I'm excited. In some ways, it's like coming home for me," Shawn said. "We can get back some of what we had, in terms of feeling like a neighborhood and a community. We can make huge steps toward that."

Adventures in the City

An Outstanding Year in 2008

Adventures in the City was more successful than ever this summer. With funding that totaled \$106,883, we served close to 1,000 children in the Hartford area:

- 386 children attended the day-long academic program, with results indicating an average increase of one year in reading and seven months in math.
- 295 children attended special programs throughout the area.
- 250 youth (middle and high school) also participated.

A number of youth counselors also supported the program, and middle school youth from the combined Woodstock UCC Churches "Compassion Camp" (First Congregational Church, Woodstock and East Woodstock Congregational Church) donated books and read to the children at our Grace Lutheran Church and North United Methodist locations.

Clark Elementary School is a new location for the program—in addition to the Sand and Milner elementary schools where we've held Adventures in the City for many years. This new site comes as a result of our relationship with The Village Family Resource Center for families and children at Sand.

To round out the AIC's academic programs, children went on field trips to Bushnell Park, Elizabeth Park, the Artist's Collec-



tive, Albany Avenue Branch Library, Keney Park, State Capitol, T-Bowl and Quassy Amusement Park.

Housing Initiatives

Two-family homes complete

An open house was held on November 22 to celebrate the completed renovation of the historic property at 19 and 29 Edgewood. What was once one "perfect six" apartment building has been converted into two new side-by-side, two-family homes. Both homes are now up for sale.

New condominiums planned

Our next initiative is the rehabilitation of a neighboring property on 54 Edgewood. This perfect six building will be converted to six affordably-priced two-bedroom condominium units with funding through the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA), Northeast Utilities and other subsidy sources, including the City of Hartford. The cost of renovation will be approximately \$1 million. The condo units will sell for \$75,000-125,000.

And on home turf...

The Mack Center, the CAC's home office, is getting some needed attention, thanks to a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Improvements include a new, more energy-efficient heating and cooling system, insulation throughout the building, exterior painting and repairs, and other upgrades for safety and the historic preservation of the building.

Staff comings and goings

Departures

Candy Bordonaro, our long-time office manager, recently moved to Maine where she's owned a second home for several years. The office just isn't the same without Candy! We wish her all the best in her new life.

Yvonne Chandler (formerly Price), director of housing ventures, is leaving the CAC to serve as full-time executive director of Better Quality Management, the agency that manages Horace Bushnell Congregate Homes, Zezzo House, and other CAC-sponsored properties. Yvonne has served the CAC's housing

A Christmas Open House

Please Join Us!

Where: CAC Mack Center
47 Vine Street, Hartford

When: December 15, 2008
4-6 p.m.



ventures faithfully for many years. We'll miss her, but she won't be far away.

Arrivals

Michelle Roberts is our new office manager. Michelle's is a familiar face around the CAC. She has been with us for years, managing CAC Financial Services and assisting Yvonne Chandler with housing ventures.

Ralph Knighton will be coming on board on a part-time basis to serve as housing development director. Ralph has been a consultant to the CAC since May 2007.

Damaris Whittaker will be joining us as of the first of the year to serve as housing counseling associate and to support the USA program. You can read more about Damaris on page 2.

Bridges

Christian Activities Council, Congregational
47 Vine Street
Hartford, CT 06112
Phone 860-527-9860
Fax 860-727-9558
www.christianactivities.org

Staff

The Rev. Donald R. Steinle
Executive Director CAC

The Rev. Edwin Ayala
Associate Director CAC
Director, Metropolitan Training Advancement Institute

Michelle Roberts
Office Manager

The Rev. Nancy Allen
Assistant Director,
Metropolitan Training Advancement Institute

Ken Esposito
Congregational Organizer,
Universal Health Care Initiative

Flora Foster
Office Assistant

Sandra Foster
Resident Service Coordinator,
Zezzo House

Tori Hamilton
Housing Counseling Specialist

Ralph Knighton
Housing Development Director

The Rev. John Selders
Program Coordinator,
Zezzo House

Kathy Simpson
Newsletter Designer/Editor

Planned Giving: Leaving a Legacy

If you believe in the CAC's social justice ministry and want to ensure that its inner city mission is sustained for years to come, we invite you to consider making a planned gift to the CAC in your will or through your estate planning. Your gift will benefit the poor and their quality of life. All donations, large and small, are welcome.

Planned gifts require legal and professional assistance. For more information, call Rev. Edwin Ayala at the CAC office (860-527-9860).

**Christian Activities Council,**
Congregational
47 Vine Street
Hartford, CT 06112

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