Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance

SINA reports

spring 2004

Resources arrive at the Learning Corridor, wearing *badges*.

"Did you ever use your gun?"
"What's this pepper-spray? What does it do?"
"Do you need extra college to be a police officer?"
Officer Ruth Ramos smiles at the children barraging her with questions. They point to her holster, her badge, her handcuffs; she patiently explains the equipment and her job. Nearby Officer Doug Lariviere distributes plastic police badges.

It's recess for Ms. Ali's 4th grade class. For Officer Ruth Ramos and Officer Doug Lariviere its an opportunity to provide education on safety issues and law enforcement, as well to help the children develop positive perceptions of police officers. As the Learning Corridor's first School Resource Officers, Ramos and Lariviere's duties combine law enforcement with teaching and counseling.

Five years ago, SINA submitted an application to the Justice Department requesting School Resource Officers for the Learning Corridor.

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A New Road Begins

Despite snow flurries and freezing temperatures on March 17th, more than 70 people gathered at the corner of Hudson and Park for the Park Street Streetscape groundbreaking ceremony. For Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance, the event celebrated the end of a long road, and the beginning of a brand new one. SINA, in partnership with SAMA and the City, spent the last six years working with local, state, and federal officials to find the funds for a complete restoration of Park Street.
Their perseverance paid off. On March 17th, they celebrated the success of securing 6.5 million dollars for a comprehensive streetscape renovation.

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Municipal and community representatives used golden shovels to symbolically commence the construction of the new Park Street.

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Executive Director's Message

The sum of a community is more than the sum of its parts. After 26 years of enhancing Hartford's Southside, SINA knows that community revitalization depends on much more than the checks and budgets behind endeavors. A neighborhood's quality of life is built and measured by its people, homes, safety, education, and commerce.

SINA has targeted its resources to important and realistic neighborhood improvement projects. During the last four years, we have operated with substantially increased resources in order to launch projects such as the Learning Corridor, Cityscape Homes, the various Streetscape projects, while simultaneously supporting our community partnerships and projects. With these projects well under way, SINA is scaling back to a more adequate level of operations. We enter 2004 by redirecting SINA's mission towards a more comprehensive community partnership approach.

This issue of SINA Reports represents the comprehensive progress that SINA is proud of. We begin the year with a new look to our newsletter. The articles in this edition demonstrate the breadth of SINA's work, coordinating efforts and directing resources to various aspects of community life. SINA continues to affect all areas, from education with our Scholar of the Month program, to leadership development, as we grant neighborhood service awards and empower community leaders. In the realm of housing, we have assisted seven more families to realize their homeownership dreams with the completion and sale of seven newly constructed houses on Allen Place, Zion and Madison Streets. Public safety has also been a highlight of the new year. On January 7th, the Learning Corridor's two School Resource Officers began their duties, combining law enforcement with teaching and counseling.

With the new year, SINA began implementation of its strategic plan, formulated at the end of 2003. Included in this plan are regular meetings with the Hartford Police Department, which we initiated in March with a successful security chiefs meeting. SINA also celebrated 2004 with location changes for our offices, as well as for the SINA Job Center. We anticipate, in the coming months, continued collaboration with Connecticut Puerto Rican Forum to rework the Job Center's First Source Hiring Agreement. This agreement will give qualified Job Center applicants priority for openings with SINA institutions.

Having closed the quarter million dollar funding gap for the Solomon Building renovations, SINA looks forward to celebrating its completion. In June, Mi Casa Family Service & Educational Center will open the doors of the Solomon Building where it will provide youth and families with a variety of cultural, leadership development, health and life skills, and educational programs.Overall, in the first quarter of 2004, SINA has established its direction for the coming year. With new offices, a new newsletter, and a new strategic plan, SINA continues its long-standing mission to affect comprehensive improvements in the neighborhoods we serve.

We remain honored to serve a community which continues to progress through its own efforts, desires, persistence, and care for neighbors. The successes in our community are worth trumpeting. Our accomplishments serve more than our neighborhoods. They serve as a model that others will emulate. May God continue to Bless us with success and the fortitude to make our communities thriving places to live and work.

A New Home for SINA's Offices

SINA staff members Special Assistant to the Director John Bailey, Fiscal Officer Keith Hedman, and Assistant Director Luz Conde help move the office to its new location.

In April, SINA moved its offices a few blocks down the road, from 400 Washington Street to 207 Washington Street. For the first time in 26 years, SINA offices are located in its own building. The two and a half story building (including a basement) provides ample space for SINA's operations and administrative work and numerous projects. The new location, no longer on a private campus, allows for more public access and provides SINA with a face in the community.

Despite the effort and ordinary inconveniences of any move, SINA sees the change as completely positive. "The move helped some of us with a little spring cleaning," Assistant Director Luz Conde explained. "We're all excited about our new offices."

On The Move

With the new year came new locations for the SINA Job Center.

The Hartford Construction Jobs Initiative moved to the Connecticut Puerto Rican Forum located at 95 Park Street. The Open Doors Grant program moved to the Aetna Center for Families in the Learning Corridor.

"It's nice to be in proximity to other services that compliment the assistance we offer," Open Doors Grant Case Manager Aimee Maron described. "It's easier to collaborate."

Hartford Construction Jobs Initiative
c/o Connecticut Puerto Rican Forum
95 Park Street
Hartford, CT 06106
Tel: (860) 247-3227

Open Doors Grant c/o
Aetna Center for Families
385 Washington Street
Hartford, CT 06106
Tel: (860) 947-0760

SINA's mission is to work cooperatively with the community to develop leadership and improve the economic, physical and social characteristics of Hartford's Frog Hollow, Barry Square and South Green Neighborhoods.

staff

LUIS C. CABAN - *Executive Director* • JOHN M. BAILEY - *Special Assistant To The Executive Director*
IVETTE QUIROS - *Administrative Assistant* • LUZ CONDE - *Assistant Director* • KEITH HEDMAN - *Fiscal Officer*

All photography by Ian Christmann except where noted.

Resources arrive at the Learning Corridor, wearing badges

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Two years later the national program accepted Learning Corridor's application, but the implementation of the officers was delayed due to staff shortages in the Hartford Police Department. Finally, on January 7, 2004, the long awaited School Resource Officers arrived at the Learning Corridor for their new duties.

The officer's presence caused an initial shock. Some faculty, staff, and parents questioned why the Learning Corridor needed police officers.

"School Resource Officers are not just for schools with high crime," Learning Corridor's Director of Community/Public Relations and Events Aura Alvarado-Strudwick explains. "Having the officers here is proactive. It's for prevention and building relationships." The Learning Corridor's new officers have already established patrols beyond the campus, cracking down on issues in the surrounding community including speeding and parking violations, as well as serving as a liaison with the police department on possible drug and prostitution threats.

Officer Doug Lariviere gives a plastic police badge to Kelly Edwards

In addition to law enforcement, School Resource Officers bring an educational component to campuses, integrating police-related lessons with the curriculum of the school. By leading assemblies and teaching in classrooms, the officers will teach on subjects such as the role of a police officer, the science of a radar gun, the physical fitness requirements of a police academy, and the importance of law enforcement in the students' lives.

Officers Lariviere and Ramos see every interaction with the children as an opportunity to educate. Their presence gives students unprecedented access to a realistic picture of the law enforcement system. The officers answer endless questions and focus on being approachable so youth will see police officers as allies, not enemies. "We make it a point to learn their names, to shake their hands, and to be friendly so they are not afraid to come up to us," Officer Lariviere describes. For both officers being approachable means constant conversations and being available for the students before class, on the playground, and in the cafeteria.

"I want the kids to remember me as someone who did something good," Officer Lariviere makes an impact by participating with the student's activities - shooting hoops, tossing footballs, or organizing a spontaneous pull-up competition.

"I smile a lot," Officer Ramos describes her technique to being approachable. "Sometimes a smile is the only way to draw people and break down barriers, and it works." Indeed, the officers' presence doesn't just draw the students, faculty and staff have responded by seeking out the SRO's for advice, assistance, and conversations on a myriad of public safety and policing issues.

After only three months, Officers Ramos and Lariviere have already demonstrated that a School Resource Officer is just that - a resource to the entire Learning Corridor community, and most importantly, to the students themselves.

Recess is over and Ms. Ali's class begins to head inside. Nine-year old Madison lingers for a moment, still looking up at Officer Ramos. "I want to be a cop when I get older," Madison states with an emphatic grin. Officer Ramos smiles back.

A New Road Begins

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If Park Street represents the heart of Hartford's Latino community; then the Spanish American Merchants Association is the pulse. SINA takes pride in its history of partnering with SAMA. "We've been doing a lot of work on Park Street, like working with the merchants to organize the first special services districts," SINA's Executive Director Luis Caban explained. The Park Street Special Services District will help maintain the Streetscape improvements.

For SINA, Streetscape was an ambitious project but its impending outcomes for the merchants and the community made it worth all the effort. "When we put our foot down, with our determined partners, we get things done," Caban declared.

The Honorable Mayor Eddie Perez addresses the crowd at the Park Street Streetscape groundbreaking ceremony.

"We are here today because of a lot of hard work," State Senator John Fonafara acknowledged the team efforts that pushed the project along. "This is a great day for Hartford."

The ceremony concluded as a dozen city and state officials, as well as representatives from the participating organizations, lifted dirt with golden shovels, symbolically breaking ground for the new sidewalks, streets, light fixtures, and parking, all parts of the planned enhancements to Park Street's business environment.

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Nonprofit Organization
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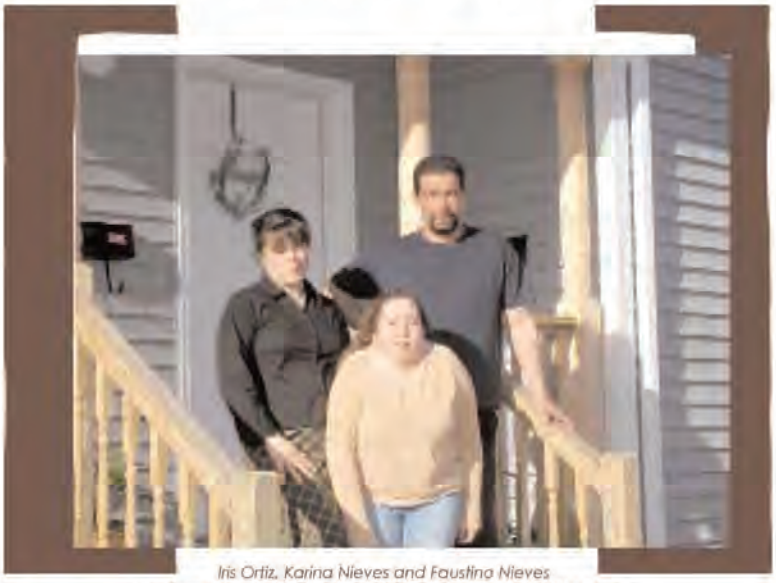
Making Dreams Come True



Iris Ortiz, Karina Nieves and Faustino Nieves stand on the porch of their new Cityscape home on Allen Place. (photo by J. Sanchez)

On Friday, March 5th, Iris Ortiz stepped into a dream. On that morning, Iris and her family moved into their new Cityscape house. After a lifetime of renting apartments, Iris crossed the threshold at 30 Allen Place, entering her own home for the first time.

"This is a dream come true," Iris exclaimed. Iris's Allen Place house is part of the Cityscape Homes project, a collaborative effort between SINA and Broad-Park Development Corporation. This partnership, called Pope Park Zion, is revitalizing blocks throughout the Frog Hollow neighborhood and providing homeownership opportunities for community residents.

For the last 14 years, Iris has been a tenant with Broad-Park Development Corporation. "It's natural for families to grow and move into homeownership," Broad-Park's Director of Real Estate Development David Mesite explains. "We are pleased that Iris has moved on to become a homeowner in a property that we are developing."

"I couldn't believe it," Iris stated upon first entering her new place. "This is so nice. Having a house is the best thing that I did." Iris's husband and daughters share her enthusiasm. "We have a beautiful yard," Iris effused. "That's the thing my husband loves the most."

Iris's home is the 18th of 51 properties that are being constructed or completely renovated in the Cityscapes Homes project. Seven more houses are currently under construction, and the remaining properties (in the School and Colonial Street area) are in the planning stage.

SINA launches Quarterly Security Chief Meetings

On Wednesday, March 10, SINA took the first step in its strategic plan to institute quarterly security chief meetings. In their initial meeting, security representatives from SINA's member organizations, including CT Children's Medical Center, Hartford Hospital, Trinity College, met with SINA and Acting Chief of the Hartford Police Department Mark Pawlina to begin a dialogue about mutual concerns and solutions.

Chief Pawlina outlined some of the initiatives he has launched in hopes of enhancing the Police Department's capabilities. He explained the Department's recent focus on maintaining a high level of visibility in areas deemed as "Hot Spots." Emphasizing "Hot Spots" has helped minimize criminal activity in those areas.

The Chief acknowledged the importance of resident and merchant participation in helping identify "Hot Spots," and announced that the department will continue to seek this information by having area Community Service Officers attend community meetings. The Member Organizations' representatives responded by describing "Hot Spots" they have identified. The Chief noted these areas and offered updates and possible solutions, including camera surveillance.

To maintain consistent communication, the security chiefs will meet with South Hartford's South District Commander Lieutenant Achilles Rethis on a quarterly schedule.