

Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción

Annual Meeting

June 7, 2000

RENEWED STRENGTH:

IBA AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW DECADE OF COMMUNITY CONTROL AND EMPOWERMENT

Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion is prepared to tackle future challenges to its mission and to the community we serve with renewed strength. This commitment is grounded in a glorious 32-year history characterized by community transformation, community control, self-empowerment, and the preservation of the rich Latino culture.

For over three decades, resident determination and unity have laid the foundation for the creation of a vibrant neighborhood in Boston's South End called Villa Victoria. The drive to create a livable and sustainable community has met with many successes and barriers. However, each step has strengthened the neighborhood's resolve to persevere in its mission to fully control their community and, influence the living conditions of future generations.

Our current environment holds many challenges, including unabated gentrification, technological inequalities and an uncertain financial future for many families we serve. With our renewed strength, the board and staff of Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion are prepared with the organizational structure, determination, and creativity to seek solutions to these daunting issues. As we start this century with a new board of directors, a new executive director, and a re-energized community, we are confident that the dreams and desires of the community's pioneers will live on for generations to come.

Turnaround: Ni un Paso Para Atras!

In June of 1998, the board hired a transitional manager to assist with the restructuring and stabilization of the agency. This step was taken after an almost two-year period of board and management instability. Throughout this process, the community participated actively in planning a new direction for the agency. However, a lack of an articulated management plan and without the proper organizational support, the agency did not progress.

Introduction

Since the annual meeting of 1998, Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion has been transformed from a dormant organization into a vibrant agency focused on preserving affordable housing in the South End and supporting residents in their movement toward self-empowerment. This dramatic change has been achieved under the leadership of a re-energized board of directors, the full participation of a motivated community, and the planning and implementation of goals by capable management. Fundamental aspects of this change have included:

Community Organizing

The IBA staff returned to its roots and organized the community around specific issues, concerns, and goals. This process led to a well-organized membership drive and a lively election for the new board of directors.

Expanded collaboration

The strength of IBA has always been rooted in the strong partnerships that have been created. During the transition period, we reached out to past supporters, new friends, and the corporate community.

Creativity

In the face of adversity, IBA's motivated staff became resourceful and creative. They sought out opportunities, leveraged services and improved the quality of programs. In short, barriers became opportunities for community improvement.

A unified board of directors and experienced transitional manager guided the transition period. With the support of the board, the transitional manager re-established the financial stability of the agency, expanded programs, and energized the community into action. As a result, IBA started the new year with a dramatically new organization to undertake the many issues that it will face.

During this process, grants were cancelled, contracts were terminated, and the agency suffered one of its worst crises in its thirty-two year history.

With the support of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay, the philanthropic community, and concerned members of the Latino community, the IBA Board of Directors contracted with the firm of CVR Associates, Inc. to lead the agency's transformation. David Cortiella, the former head of the Boston Housing Authority, provided the day-to-day management of the agency.

The transitional manager and the board developed an improvement plan that served as a guide for IBA's turnaround. The key turnaround goals achieved were:

Board Development: The residents of Villa Victoria elected a new Board in October 1998. The twelve elected resident representatives and the five non-resident resource members provided the leadership needed to stabilize the agency.

Agency Reorganization: IBA was organized into four functional departments permitting a more efficient delivery of services to the residents of Villa Victoria.

Fiscal Stability: Through increased fundraising and improved financial practices, IBA's financial foundation has been strengthened. Much work remains to be done to ensure the long-term stability of the agency's programs.

Improved Asset Management: IBA recently won the right to manage the properties that comprise Villa Victoria. Improving the capacity to manage and the appointment of a new development company board achieved this result.

Promote Latino Arts: By strengthening the performance of the Jorge Hernandez Cultural Center and reviving the Café Teatro series, IBA once again takes its place among the premiere agencies promoting and preserving Latino cultural and artistic expression.

Program Development: Through increased private partnerships, IBA has been able to launch new resident programs in technology, revive cultural programming, and expand its programs for youth, elderly, family support, and the daycare program.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Escuelita Boriken Daycare Program

A community's dream to build a state-of-the-art daycare program for its children has been realized. With the start of construction, a new center in the garden level of the Jorge Hernandez Cultural Center will permit the program to serve 80 pre-school children. The center will feature expanded classrooms, in-door and out-door play areas, a large kitchen facility, conference rooms, and specialized activity space for children, parents, and teachers.

The construction was made possible through a planning grant awarded to IBA in January 1999 by the Zero to Eight Coalition. The grant permitted the agency to undertake the necessary capacity building steps, obtain all necessary city permits and create an approvable design. Thereafter, with increased foundation support and a major grant from the Child Care Capital Investment Fund, the daycare started construction in May 2000.

Café Teatro Performance Series

For over a decade, Café Teatro provided the key component in Boston's cultural life featuring live Latino entertainment. Café Teatro was the site of many national and Boston premieres for performing artists. The philosophy of Café Teatro is to showcase the full range of Latino performances including dance, music, video, and other art forms. The revival of Café Teatro permits IBA to renew its contribution to Boston's cultural life by ensuring quality performances.

To re-establish Café Teatro, the IBA staff took a number of steps to ensure its stability and continued quality performances. IBA invested in audience development in order to renew our contacts with loyal followers, increased publicity through the use of electronic mail, and created strategic partnerships. This proved to be a winning strategy as audiences returned, local press acclaimed the performances, and those who participated enjoyed the wealth of arts displayed.

In large part, the success was due to our strategic partnership with the Boston Globe. By initiating a media partner during the turnaround, Café Teatro was promoted in the largest daily circulation newspaper in Boston.

Key milestones achieved during transition include:

- ★In partnership with Cisco Systems and City Year, IBA opened a public access technology center.

- ★In collaboration with the Boston Globe and with the support of many foundations, IBA revived the once prominent Café Teatro Latino performance series. Café Teatro, the only Latino performance series in New England, launched a successful fall and spring series featuring music from Puerto Rico and South America, as well as the fusion of Latino music with US rhythms.

- ★Established a Young Caciques Youth Leadership Development Summer Program. The Young Caciques program was a summer internship program aimed at developing teen and young adult leaders in Villa Victoria.

- ★Started construction of a new daycare facility. The construction of the daycare center in the garden level of the JHCC has been the community's dream since the late 1970's. With additional fundraising and a renewed organizational determination, the center will be open during the fall of 2000.

- ★Re-established the property management company. Although contracts were lost during organizational instability, ETC was established with a new determination to provide quality services to the residents through a renewed commitment by the board to exercise community governance.

The board of directors culminated this turnaround process with the appointment of a permanent executive director. After much consideration and deliberation, the board appointed David J. Cortiella to lead the agency into the twenty-first century. David Cortiella brings with him many years experience in shaping and re-directing agencies that, at some point in their history, had experienced organizational difficulties.

IBA's future stands on a firm foundation, with much more expected...

El Batey Technology Center

In partnership with Cisco Systems and City Year Boston, IBA began to address the issue of the division that exists between those who have access to and knowledge of new technologies and those who do not. In March 1999 El Batey Technology Center was established to assist the residents of both Villa Victoria and the city of Boston to access high speed computers, the Internet, and self-improvement classes.

The goal of El Batey is to become the catalyst for community development and growth in new technologies. IBA's goal is to demystify technology so that all residents can have access to the information and opportunities provided through the Internet. IBA has taken a major step toward fulfilling the goal of providing free high speed Internet access to all Villa Victoria residents with the donation of state-of-the-art equipment by Cisco Systems. This equipment has permitted us to network all our offices and to create safeguards for the future.

ETC Property Management

A key component in community governance in Villa Victoria has always been the ability of this agency to manage the properties. During this transitional period, the IBA board established a clear set of goals for the new property management company and transition away from the private management company previously overseeing the properties at the time.

Through a restructuring of responsibilities, establishment of measurable benchmarks, and of hiring key staff, the transition to ETC property management became a reality. To ensure the long-term stability of the company, the IBA board authorized the appointment of an ETC board of directors with resident participation. The role of the new ETC board is to manage and protect all IBA assets and to ensure their performance and viability.

Cacique Leadership Development

IBA rededicated itself to leadership development by creating a youth leadership council. Under the leadership of the resident services department, the Cacique program started as a summer internship program for 32 teens and young adults from Villa Victoria. This summer experience has permitted youth to play a leadership role in Villa Victoria and to serve as role models for the many young children in the community.

The year long youth programs have been expanded to include tutoring, technology training, leadership workshops, field trips, and other activities. The peer leadership program has been expanded to include more youth and to create a focused plan for youth training. The youth department also facilitated the creation of the first Girl Scouts troop in Villa Victoria and support for the South End Little League.

Family Support

For over fifteen years, the family support program has been providing a culturally sensitive support group for families suffering the effects of mental illness in their immediate household. As the only program serving Latino families in the state, Juntos Luchamos has permitted families to address life crises and resolve issues confronted in their daily lives. Given the success of the program, the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health has signed a five-year contract for the program.

Elders Support Program

The elders support program has been providing services at our on-site senior housing complex in Villa Victoria. The program's goal is to support independent living by providing advocacy, supportive services and other self-empowerment activities. IBA recently commenced a community assessment of over 100 seniors living in Villa Victoria to expand its services to the elder residents of this community in a language and culturally appropriate manner.

Community Celebrations

An integral component of IBA's community development has been the incorporation of cultural celebrations into all programming. This is most evident in the numerous community celebrations held in Villa Victoria throughout the year. Festival Betances, a celebration honoring a Puerto Rican patriot, has been held in July for 27 consecutive years and annually highlights the rich cultural and artistic expression of both Puerto Rico and South America. The celebration of the Three Kings in January is a traditional celebration for the youth of our community where over 600 gifts are given away annually. In addition, IBA has incorporated the arts into all its activities.

Audited Financial Statements
For the Fiscal Years ending June 1998 and 1999

REVENUES	1999	1998
United Way	393,925	303,882
Contributions	27,315	105,500
State and local	316,247	61,134
Federal	206,303	33,409
Gov. Service fees	168,046	459,026
Program fees	124,897	72,954
Investment return	5,070	2,528
Rental income	271,982	256,643
Management fee	180,275	0
Other income	15,460	13,685
Total Revenues	1,709,520	1,308,761
PROGRAM EXPENSES		
Arte y Cultura	96,012	80,999
JHCC	158,701	159,066
Development	200,025	224,788
Outreach	0	1,722
Elderly	43,997	79,262
Mental Health	148,806	135,513
Youth	55,876	68,685
DMR	0	46,832
Escuelita Boriken	378,814	322,158
Fundraising	45,377	19,969
Administrative	526,563	299,986
Total Expenses	1,654,171	1,438,980
Changes in assets before forgiveness	55,349	(130,219)
Forgiveness of debt	166,000	163,896
Changes in net assets	221,349	33,677
Balance at beginning of year	813,282	779,605
Balance at year end	1,034,631	813,282

2000 Board of Directors

Zulma Arroyo
Blanca Cardona
Aida Cepeda
Carmen Cotto
Eduvina Figueroa
Annette Griffin
Paulina Jimenez
Eric Liriano



Maria Pena
Juan Rosa Quintana
Reinalda Rivera
William Rodriquez
Charlene Senters Domenech
Dana Smith
Elisa Soltren
Anjela Tejada



David Cortiella has a two-year contract as executive director of Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion, the agency that administers the Villa Victoria housing development. The IBA last week regained man-

agement of Villa Victoria after two years during which Peabody Properties was contracted by HUD to manage the 884-unit development.

Former BHA head steers Villa out of tough times

Yawu Miller

David Cortiella had just taken over as transitional manager at Villa Victoria housing development in 1998 when he met resident Jenny Gray.

Cortiella was looking to build support for the Board of Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion, the agency

which runs the Villa, and was anxious to talk to anyone and everyone in the South End public housing development.

Gray initially brushed Cortiella off, but eventually he was able to bend her ear.

"She asked, 'what are you going to do?'" Cortiella recalls.

"I said, 'I don't have the answers.

What do you think we should do? The problem with our agency, why we got into trouble, is because we were always telling you what to do instead of hearing what you need.'"

A veteran community organizer, Cortiella polled Gray and scores of other tenants to get the pulse of the residents of the 884 housing units in the development. Resident support was key at Villa Victoria, where months earlier former state Rep. Nelson Merced had been ousted from Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion by the resident board. Board members and residents had complained that Merced was out of touch with the needs of the residents.

By all accounts Villa Victoria was in the midst of a free fall. The IBA was losing funding, staff members and most of its board. South End developers were eyeing the prime land while the Villa residents were bracing themselves for disaster.

At the heart of the problem, Cor-
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• Villa

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tiella says, was the IBA's lack of communication with the residents.

"The IBA could have been in Hartford Connecticut for all they cared," Cortiella said. "For the community it was very important for them to have input."

A former Boston Housing Authority administrator under the administration of then-Mayor Raymond Flynn, Cortiella now heads CVR consulting, a firm that helps housing developments with organizational development and management. Cortiella, former BHA counselor Frandique Rocha and Ana Vargas, former head of the Denver Housing Authority, are partners in the firm, which has contracts with HUD and housing authorities throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

During nearly two years of transitional management at IBA, Cortiella is credited with helping to repair the agency's fractured board, helping restore its fiscal health and reorganizing its management structure. Cortiella has been given a two-year contract with IBA to serve as its executive director.

"He's brought the IBA out of a tough situation," said resident board member Elisa Sotren, a budget assistant at Northeastern University's

Center for the Study of Sport and Society. "We've become a better board because we've had such a great manager."

Last Wednesday, Villa residents and supporters turned out at the Jorge Hernández Cultural Center to celebrate the IBA's regaining management of the Villa. Peabody Properties was retained by HUD to manage the development in 1997.

"The problem with our agency, why we got into trouble, is because we were always telling you what to do instead of hearing what you need."

— David Cortiella

At the celebration, South Enders praised Cortiella's work.

"David has done an extraordinary job," said South End Neighborhood Action Program Executive Director Pat Cusick. "His retention as CEO

bodes extremely well, not only for the IBA, but for the entire South End."

Cortiella will be the agency's sixth executive director.

Villa Victoria residents trace the housing development's roots back to the 1960s, when the South End served as the heart of Boston's

Puerto Rican community.

At that time, the Boston Redevelopment Authority was eyeing the prime land occupied by Puerto Rican tenants as ripe for its urban renewal programs. As the BRA began tearing down housing, including the New York Streets area now occupied by the Boston Herald office, the Puerto Rican tenants began

waging a campaign for community control.

Most of the Villa Victoria development is built on what was referred to as BRA Parcel 19 in the early '70s. After a noisy campaign for community control, the Emergency Tenants' Council, formed by the Puerto Rican community in 1968, was given official designation to develop housing on the parcel and on the surrounding streets.



Frank Gustie (r), a Red Cross Instructor presents Lavern Rose, first aid coordinator at the New Covenant Christian Center, with a defibrillator, which is used to revive victims of cardiac arrest. The

American Red Cross donated the device to the church and provided training. More than 50 percent of 911 emergencies occur in Boston's poorest neighborhoods.

South End News

Giving Head Start kids a Jumpstart

BY SUSAN LOCKERY
CORRESPONDENT

A jubilant 6-year-old at the Escuelita Bonken Daycare Center, jumps up and down repeating in an over-excited pitch:

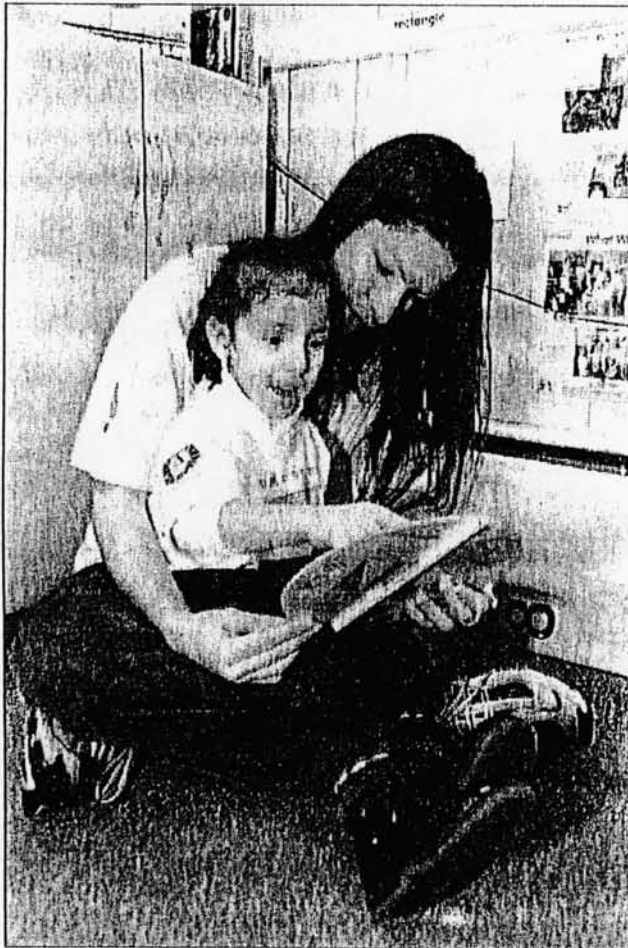
"Today's Jumpstart! Where's my Jumpstart teacher?"

Adults and preschoolers alike, have much enthusiasm for this innovative program which teaches young children early communication skills, literacy and social skills all designed to increase the likelihood of their thriving in an academic setting.

The idea behind Jumpstart grew out of the experiences that two Yale University students — Aaron Lieberman and Rebecca Weintraub — had while working at a summer camp for young children. Inspired by their summer experience, they founded Jumpstart in 1993.

The mission of Jumpstart is to encourage young people to work toward the day when every child in America enters school prepared to succeed. Since then, Jumpstart has become a flourishing non-profit, and is a member of the AmeriCorps national service network. Jumpstart pairs college students with preschool-aged children. All Corps members serve a 20-month term which includes two Jumpstart School Years and a Jumpstart Summer.

During the school year, college students serve as part-time corps members and work one-on-one with a young child on a weekly basis. In the Jumpstart Summer, corps members serve as full-time teachers and



ONE-ON-ONE: Jumpstart team leader Mary Montavon from Harvard University reads to Leah Suarez at the day care center at Escuelita Boriken on Tremont Street. Montavon will spend more than 900 hours working with youngsters on learning to read and prepare every child, but especially those coming from disadvantaged communities, to succeed when they begin school. (Linda Haas photo)

they run a regular preschool classroom.

Upon completion of 900 hours of service, corps members receive a \$2,400 educational award.

"Our college students are a committed group. For many of the students participating in Jumpstart, this is only one of a few jobs they assume in helping pay for their college educations," said Scott Knox, deputy director of Jumpstart Boston.

The Boston program includes 130 college students, enrolled at 16 colleges. Among those participating, are students from Tufts, UMass-Boston, Emerson, Suffolk, Boston University and Boston College. They work at program sites in the South End, which was the original site in Boston, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Cambridge or Chinatown. The diversity of the Jumpstart sites gives the college students the opportunity to immerse themselves in different communities.

Escuelita Bonken, a multicultural daycare center based in the South End for the past quarter century is experiencing a lot of success with its Jumpstart program.

The college students come on Tuesdays and Fridays from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. During that time, they work one-on-one with the children developing skills for reading awareness.

"The main goal of this partnership is literacy," said Yvette Rodriguez, day care director at Escuelita Bonken.

"The more the children are exposed to books, the better skills they will continue to develop," said

Rodriguez.

Rodriguez adds that the partnership seems to work well, because many of children see the college students as brothers or sisters, rather than teachers.

"Kids make their feelings well known," says Rodriguez. "They are honest in expressing their affection for both the program, and the college students who are involved with it."

Students who complete the Jumpstart program will become certified to be preschool teachers. A bachelor's degree combined with

"Today's
Jumpstart! Where's
my Jumpstart
teacher?"

a certificate of completing Jumpstart makes them eligible for preschool teacher certification.

"Jumpstart is always looking for new students who are interested in the program to apply," said Bob Giannino, executive director of Jumpstart Boston. "We are looking to increase the number of male students to participate in the program."

Giannino says, only 50 percent of the college students who participate in Jumpstart are education majors, so there is no specific major required.

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Jumpstart

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Many students who participate in Jumpstart, are not solely interested in pursuing a career in education.

Twenty-year-old Jacqu

Coglia, from Boston University, hopes one day to work as a pediatrician.

"Jumpstart has been a great experience. It has changed me a lot, and working with the children has given me another focus besides my school work," said Coglia.

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th End *News*



Leaders in the making

For 22 young adults, the summer meant performing an internship in the "New Cacique Leadership" program, to develop the leadership ability in teens in Villa Victoria. Participants in the IBA program are, front row (from left) Damon Lewis, Crystal Chevere, Marilyn Mercado, (second row) Hector Ostolaza, Francisco Palmaria, IBA Youth Coordinator, third row Orlando Rivera and Ivelisse Saavedra. (Franklin B. Tucker photo)

Youth workers bring together kids

Connecting South End, Lower Roxbury teens to prevent violence

BY JAMIE BEARSE
STAFF WRITER

It's tough to call the place where you live a neighborhood when you don't know who's living next door.

That's what youth workers from across the South End and Lower Roxbury were saying they want to change as they prepare to set up a new \$45,000 budget to promote peace among the area's youths and bring the two neighborhoods together.

"Some kids won't cross the street to go to a youth center because they're afraid of it being in someone else's turf," Holly Lockwood, program director of the South End/Lower Roxbury Youth Workers Alliance (YWA), said. "It's so bad that you don't even know who your neighbor is."

But with the help of grants from local agencies such as the Boston Foundation, Haynes Foundation and the Clipper Foundation, the YWA will no longer have to scrape by in its fight to bring the kids of Lower Roxbury and South End together to fight violence.

Ironically, the announcement of the grants comes just days after an alleged member of the L.A.-based Bloods street gang allegedly slashed another teen's face with a broken beer bottle during a confrontation in Roxbury. The incident left the 18-year-old victim blind.

"This isn't in reaction to that incident," Jorge Palmarin, a YWA member from Tent City Corp., said. "I think that the organization of

teen groups and advocacy programs makes it difficult and will continue to make it difficult for the Bloods and the Crips to [recruit in the area]."

The YWA, first created in September of 1996, was funded for two years by federal grants. But since the start of fiscal year 1998, the group has been maintained by donations and the YWA's workers' undying devotion to making the neighborhoods a better place live.

"We're not going to let Congress tell us we couldn't have this program," said Lockwood. "We held it together and now it's getting better."

The YWA held it together so well,

youth workers in South Boston sought the advice of youth advocates in Roxbury and the South End on how to set up a central group.

A few months later, South Boston Youth Workers United was up and running. And, every so often, representatives of the YWA meet to discuss strategies and programs.

"They learned how to become more organized from us," said Palmarin. "And we learned some advocacy techniques from South Boston. We drew from each other's strengths."

The new budget will be used to build a bridge between housing developments in the South End

and Lower Roxbury. Shirronda Almeida, a YWA representative from Teen Empowerment of Boston, said kids from different developments that do not have youth programs will no longer be at a disadvantage.

"Kids in places such as Madison Park or Lenox Street that don't have a lot of youth programs will be part of programs at other facilities like at Villa Victoria," said Almeida. "Kids are really going to get a chance to get to know each other."

Members of the alliance hope the youths of the area will take the lead in networking and getting to know each other. YWA is made up of 32 members who meet once per month representing 29 different agencies across the neighborhoods including Greater Options for Adolescent Lives, Blackstone Community Center, MYTOWN and Showdown Youth Program — just to name a few.

"We have gotten to know each other and who is best for the job if a certain situation arises," D'Mon Bills, YWA representative from United South End Settlements, said. "We've gotten to know each other through trips and get-togethers and I think the kids will too."

The YWA plans on using \$5,000 of the budget to make sure the kids will have plenty of chances to interact and make friends. The money will go towards funding between four and eight programs that promise to involve youths at more than one housing development.

"It could be something anywhere from karate classes to tutor programs to field trips," Lockwood said. "It all depends on what programs affect the most people positively."

Lockwood added the special attention would be given to youth programs in Lower Roxbury because the developments in that area are disadvantaged when it comes to programs.

"We want to reach out to everybody especially the kids in Lower Roxbury," said YWA member Jenny Gray of IBA at Villa Victoria. "Some of the field trips we do with these kids may be outward bound-type programs — that can really build some camaraderie between people."

Palmarin insists that youths at the different developments will have to decide among themselves what types of programs they would like to see the money go towards.

"[The kids] will have to come up to us and say what they want to do and how they think it will bring the community together while breaking down barriers," said Palmarin.

The first set of awards for programs will be given out on Oct. 18 and the second half of the awards will be distributed in mid-January.

"Some kids already have a strong sense of pride and community about where they live," said Gray.

"And through these programs, kids will be able to learn positive values from each other and together we can build a stronger neighborhood."



WORKING TOGETHER: Members of the South End Youth Workers Alliance stand at Massachusetts Avenue, the crossroads of the two neighborhoods they are seeking to bridge. From left, Jorge Palmarin, Shirronda Almeida, Holly Lockwood, Jenny Gray, and D'Mon Bills. (Jamie Bearse photo)

South End *News*

ETC in charge at Villa ... again

Director eyes renovations for the neighborhood

BY JAMIE BEARSE
STAFF WRITER

The Emergency Tenants Council, a South End non-profit that has championed affordable housing for more than four decades, has been given the green light by federal officials to once again resume control of the Villa Victoria housing development on Feb. 29.

Numerous federal housing violations stemming from a faltering board of directors and a revolving door in the front office lead to a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's take over of the 424-unit complex in 1997.

But an overhaul of ETC staff members, a revamp of tenant programs and new leadership has convinced HUD to hand the reins back

over to the longtime housing management agency.

"The decision by HUD speaks volumes for what the board has been able to do," David Cortiella, executive director at Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion which works in conjunction with the ETC management, said. "Things are turning around and the financial picture is showing some growth."

Soon after ETC takes over management from Peabody Properties, Inc., who was given administrative control by HUD two and a half years ago, Cortiella plans to meet with tenants and architects to begin working on plans to renovate all of the units.

Although he won't have a dollar figure for the project until at least this summer, Cortiella said that work done on units would range anywhere from modernizing kitchens and bathrooms to replacing roofs.

"We're going to take a phase approach to this," Cortiella, who has

just signed a long-term contract to head IBA this week, said. "We would start some work by the end of the year and if everything goes well, we could wrap everything up by the end of next year."

ETC also plans to add more space for neighborhood children to play as well as revamp the existing playground.

"It's a commitment to improve living conditions on the site," said Cortiella. "The improvements will also be a major shot in the arm for long term viability at the Villa."

Cortiella added that he hopes to refinance the property and seek assistance from the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency to help pay for the renovations.

ETC's return to property management ends the darkest period in the history of the 32-year-old organization. IBA/ETC took root in the mid-1960s when a group of South End residents decided to fight dis-

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IBA chips in to boost Hub's salsa scene



LATIN LEADERS: Manguito will provide music for dancing at Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion's final 'El Bembe' of the year on Dec. 17.

Salsa and merengue lovers have a new spot in town to keep themselves warm this winter.

While you won't hear Ricky Martin's brand of pop salsa at the Jorge Hernandez Cultural Center's "El Bembe", the growing crowds at the weekly Friday night event aren't being drawn to the South End venue by what's

Jazz/World

BOB YOUNG

commercially cool these days.

Old school salsa and merengue, courtesy of the house band Manguito, have been doing the trick just fine for more than two months.

Still, you won't find the center's performing arts director, Alex Alvear, complaining about Ricky Martin or today's broader interest in Latin music. They've

helped fuel the success of "El Bembe."

"Several years ago many people didn't even know what salsa was except that they ate it with chips," Alvear said.

"Now everybody wants to dance to it. We saw a window of opportunity with all the big hype."

"El Bembe" — the party, jam or gathering — was started to complement and build interest in the center's other programs, such as the Cafe Teatro series, presented by Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion, which means Puerto Rican Tenants in Action.

IBA still is looking for corporate sponsorship for the event. But it's now drawing more than 250 fans of the Cuban *son*, *guarachas* and '70s and '80s Fania All-Stars-type Latin jazz and salsa, which is building a solid au-

dience base for the center's cultural programs.

"The money doesn't go into a club owner's pocket," said Alvear, adding that the proceeds are reinvested in IBA's arts programs.

"It's going for a very good cause, supporting the cultural life of Boston. That's sort of our subliminal message and people are starting to get it."

Even if they're not especially interested in where their \$10 admission goes, "El Bembe" audiences now have a midsized Latin music alternative to large rooms such as Wonderland and the Roxy and smaller venues such as Ryles.

Alvear also stresses that, as with many of the programs held at the center, "El Bembe" is all-inclusive.

"We don't want to ghetto-ize ourselves with programming so that only Latinos will come," he said. "We want to make the center a Latino headquarters that's home for everybody."

"Our audiences are always a very nice mix of people, agewise, genderwise, everything. That's one of our biggest assets."

Anyone who has ever taken in a show at the converted church knows that multiculturalism is alive and well there. Performances ranging from Cuban bass star Cachao to an avant-garde Chilean troupe interpreting "Pinocchio" have attracted comfortable mixes from all cultures and races.

"We're still celebrating Latino arts and culture," said Alvear, "but we're also creating a cultural experience. We find richness in diversity."

The year's last "El Bembe" takes place on Dec. 17. The series resumes in February. Christina Pujol-Jensen and Seemore Johnson offer salsa and merengue dance instruction from 9 to 10 p.m., with Manguito and a DJ taking over from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. Call (617) 927-1707.

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