

Spring 2006

MI CASA en su Nueva Casa MI CASA in its new home

In the revitalization story of Hartford's Park Street, January 19, 2006 will be a date to remember. On this day, the historic Solomon Building at 590 Park Street reopened its doors to the community. Decades ago the building invited families to shop at its Woolworths, or spend an afternoon bowling in the alleys above the store. Today, as home for the MI CASA Family Services and Education Center, the former department store welcomes neighbors with a new mission: to enhance the quality of life for underserved youth and families through positive development programs, prevention, recreation, support, and cultural services.

Donated to MI CASA by SINA, the new facility will make dreams come true for many youth living in Frog Hollow and surrounding neighborhoods. The three-story center includes classrooms, computer labs, art rooms, program space, and a performance stage. A gymnasium and sauna will soon be added.

MI CASA began its life in 1992 as a neighborhood-based program charged with providing intervention services for youth at risk. In 1999, the program evolved into a formal not-for-profit focused on keeping neighborhood youth productively occupied and out of trouble.

SINA's real estate donation, estimated at \$250,000, enabled MI CASA to move from its tiny "storefront" location on Oak Street to the ample 24,000 square foot facility on Park Street. The new location will greatly enhance MI CASA's goal to reduce gang participation, violence, and other harmful activities among youth ages 10 to 17 and their families.

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"The city of Hartford has been diversifying with many different cultures for many years. The Frog Hollow / South End neighborhood is a good example of such changes. MI CASA is an agency that has been serving these communities, specifically Latino / Puerto Rican children and families for the last 14 years. I am proud to have the opportunity to provide support to this agency ever since it's founder, Mr. Jorge Rivera, created the principles and ideals that form MI CASA's mission. The long term vision and goals of Mr. Rivera will be better served with the new state of the art facility gratefully donated by one of the most valuable institutions working in the South End of Hartford, the Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance, better known as SINA." Francis Dávila, Board President, MI CASA Family and Educational Services, Inc.



Francis Dávila, Board President, MI CASA Family and Educational Services, Inc., welcomes guests to the grand opening of MI CASA's new home in the Solomon Building.

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- New Education, Community and Volunteer Committee members

With SINA's 30th anniversary approaching, we have begun to take a retrospective look at our recent and historical work in the Southside of Hartford. Throughout 2005, and now continuing into 2006, the last year of our current strategic plan, we reflect on our accomplishments and aims. We examine ways to protect the significant strides we have made in neighborhood development; we consider how new partnerships could help us accomplish and complete our revitalization efforts; we study our target neighborhoods to identify the sectors where SINA might initiate or expand involvement.

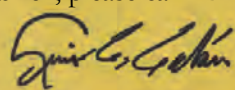
As we reflect, we also move forward. The new year has brought new faces to SINA's committees. To the Executive Committee, SINA welcomes Early Reese, Trinity College's new chief financial officer and treasurer. To our Education, Community, and Volunteer (ECV) Committee, we welcome Carlos González, Horticulture Supervisor, Hartford Hospital Department of Rehabilitation Services, and Anne Lundberg, Director of Internship Programs, Trinity College. Recently the ECV Committee embarked on a strategic planning process aimed at fine-tuning its programs and ensuring that all of its work aligns with SINA's mission.

Throughout 2006, SINA plans to continue the legislative involvement that, in 2005, demonstrated significant successes and benefits. SINA's advocacy efforts helped influence policy and increase affordable housing opportunities. As well, SINA's involvement in the Affordable Housing Steering Committee provided opportunities to interact and collaborate with an array of individuals and groups involved in community development, including many housing and real estate professionals.

Being involved in this network, I have been encouraged by the spirit of cooperation and cohesiveness of the group. I have also been encouraged by the feedback I am receiving from other coalition members, comments that reveal a broad statewide knowledge of SINA's model and accomplishments. The committee's continued growth and activity will further expand and recognize SINA's contributions.

From the start, 2006 has sparked a spirit of celebration. In January alone, Park Street had multiple reasons to party. On January 6, the Three Kings Day Parade celebrated El Día de Los Reyes (the Feast of the Magi) with a camel parade and treats for the children. Two weeks later, youth and families in Hartford's Southside had another reason to celebrate. On January 19th, the historic Solomon Building opened its doors as the MI CASA Family Services and Education Center. The conveniently located 24,000 square foot facility is a much-needed resource for youth in our community. For SINA, the donation of this building to MI CASA is one of our many responses to the lack of recreational facilities that we noted back in 1996. Since then, SINA and its member institutions helped establish the Trinity Boys and Girls Club, CT Valley Girl Scout Council, Aetna Center for Families, Trinfo Cafe, MI CASA's expansion into the Solomon building, and the Community Sports Complex, currently under construction.

I would like to personally encourage our newsletter readers to participate in building the future of our youth by supporting MI CASA's programs and services. MI CASA invites donors to become a part of its history by buying a brick for a special commemorative wall. Bricks are available in three sizes, and will be inscribed with the donor's personal name or message. To buy a brick, please call MI CASA at (860) 522-5222.




Congratulations to SINA's Executive Director Luis Cabán for receiving a 2005 Man of Excellence Award from Men of Thunder Coalition, a coalition of religious leaders in the Greater Hartford area.

Introducing Our New Education, Community and Volunteer Committee Members

SINA introduces Carlos González and Anne Lundberg as the newest members of the Education, Community, and Volunteer Committee. "Carlos and Anne have achieved outstanding results in their respective careers, and I am delighted that they are now bringing their immense expertise to the SINA Education Committee.

I'm looking forward to working with them to fulfill SINA's commitment to education, community service and leadership in South Hartford," said Debra Borrero, Chairperson, Education, Community, and Volunteer Committee

"Our society today is experiencing major shifts and changes to the cultural conditions that were once predictable. These changes have created a set of challenges for families of all types and sizes; and it makes the work of those who strengthen and nurture families much more difficult.

We at the Department of Children and Families (DCF) appreciate our communities' partners such as SINA who make our work much easier.

We would like to express our appreciation to the SINA organization for your commitment and compassion to serving families and children in the greater Hartford community and for promoting the notion of a beloved community that we all strive to create."

Michael C. Williams, Area Director, Hartford DCF Office

MI CASA en su Nueva Casa

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Originally built in 1929, the Solomon Building housed shops and vendors for many years. By the mid 1990s its doors had closed. SINA, already an active player in Park Street's revitalization, recognized the property's potential to meet a need in the community.

SINA purchased the building and, in June 2003, gifted the property to MI CASA for use as its new headquarters. The \$3 million renovation that followed stayed true to the building's Art Deco-style, including preservation of the tin ceiling and antique light fixtures, as well as a replica of the original storefront. Beautifully restored, the building complements the impressive streetscape improvements taking place on one of Hartford's most celebrated commercial/retail corridors.

"We need things for the children to do," a Park Street neighbor lamented. "If they don't have healthy activities, they turn to destructive things." Community surveys consistently reinforced the need for youth recreational services and facilities.



MI CASA youth demonstrated the Puerto Rican dance Plena during the ribbon-cutting celebration for MI CASA's new headquarters.

MI CASA needs your support to complete its new community center. By purchasing a brick, you will be contributing to the development of our community, and leaving a legacy of your support on our "commemorative wall" prominently displayed inside the building. Join the growing circle of supporters who have helped MI CASA make the new community center a reality. Place your order for a commemorative brick today! In addition to providing a safe and supportive environment for all our youth, the MI CASA Community Center will also have a positive economic impact that benefits the neighborhood.

If you should have any questions or need further assistance, please call Aldelis Vasquez at:

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Latino Civic Engagement Academy to Implement a New Phase of Leadership Training

SINA in partnership with the Connecticut Puerto Rican Forum have secured funding from the Latino Endowment Fund/Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for the Latino Civic Engagement Academy. Later this year, another phase of leadership training will be conducted specifically for leaders interested in running for boards of education.

Introducing Early Reese, SINA's new Executive Board Member



SINA welcomes Early Reese as secretary/treasurer to the Executive Committee of SINA's Board of Directors. In May 2005, Early Reese joined Trinity College as vice president for finance and treasurer. He came to Hartford with 30 years of financial experience from PriceWaterhouse-Coopers, Philip Morris, and the U.S. Olympic Committee.

As Chief of Finance and Administration at the U.S. Olympic Committee, he managed all aspects of finance, facilities, and information technology for the organization, reducing operating budget deficits, spearheading construction projects, upgrading technology services, and working with the investment team to manage their endowment. During his 21 years at Philip Morris, he served in a variety of financial, accounting, and information services positions.

Reese served as chairman of the board of trustees and as chairman of the finance and audit committee for Virginia State University. A certified public accountant, he holds an M.B.A from the College of William and Mary and a B.S. from Virginia State University. He is a former president of the Richmond chapter of the National Association of Black Accountants and a former member of the special education advisory board for the Richmond Public Schools.

"We are excited about Early Reese joining the SINA Board. His background and experience in finance and community service will provide us with additional expertise to work on our goals of improving South Hartford. We have put him to work already appointing him as treasurer of the Board." Kevin Kinsella, Chairman of Board, SINA

"Trinity College is proud to be a member of SINA and is pleased to continue to be an active partner in making our neighborhood and Hartford a better place to work and live. Trinity College is committed to being a good neighbor and resident of the community." Early Reese

2005 YEAR IN

Education

Understanding that education is an essential component of long term community development, SINA's 2005 activities included:



- The collection of more than 4,000 children's books, in less than two months, from SINA member institute employees for the Cops-N-Kids program. In December, the Cops-N-Kids Program was featured by Dean Kane on Channel 3.
- Awarding three students with SINA/Ivan A. Backer Scholarships at Bulkeley High School's 2005 Senior Recognition Event. The recipients, Ashley Nieves, Ruben Castillo Rosa and Anna Tuminska, each demonstrated high levels of academic ambition as well as leadership and community involvement.



SINA's Scholars of the Month participated in an Outdoor Leadership Training Day.

- The first annual text book scholarships presented to four students from Capital Community College who achieved a GPA of 3.0 or better and who reside in the SINA targeted neighborhoods.
- Initiating an Outdoor Leadership Training Day for SINA's Scholar of the Month recipients at Hartford's Riverside Park. On May 26, 2005, 28 of the 34 scholars participated in innovative activities allowing them to explore their individual limits while developing leadership skills and personal vision within a group context. "I learned how to work with others and learned how to face difficult challenges." Tiana B. (Junior at A.I. Prince Tech)



Officer Jim Barrett (top) and Officer Roberto Sanchez (bottom) were interviewed by Channel 3's Dean Kane about their participation in the Cops-N-Kids program.

Public Safety

In 2005, SINA made public safety an ongoing priority by:

- Sponsoring a round table discussion with South End elected officials.
- Working with HART (Hartford Area Rally Together) to stimulate activity on Hartford's public safety subcommittee.
- Hosting a public safety forum that highlighted the need for programs that help youth deal with grief.

REVIEW

Community Service

Continuing its tradition of recognizing community leaders, SINA awarded five Neighborhood Service Awards at a November 14 Recognition Event held at the Institute of Living. Honored at the event were Maxine Sullivan, Shannon Raider, Reynaldo Morales, Carlos González, and Edie Lacey.

Edie Lacey, a winner of a Neighborhood Service Award in 1998, received the honor an unprecedented second time with a special Lifetime Achievement Award.

Community Sports Complex

By the end of 2005, Hartford's Southside could see the new Community Sports Complex begin to take shape. With the structural frame in place, the facility progressed towards its purpose as a community resource and ice rink for Trinity College men's and women's hockey teams. The Complex will include an ice rink, fitness activities, and space for other recreation programs.



The Community Sports Complex takes shape as an ice rink and a recreational area.

Economic Development

In addition to the visible streetscape progress, Park Street revitalization moved forward this past year with:

- A \$1 million commitment from Governor Rell to help fund Phase II of the Park Street streetscape project which will include facade improvements, security enhancements, and parking improvements.
- The long-awaited designation of a developer for Plaza Mayor, the marquis gateway to Park Street. The site will be developed by Plaza Mayor LLC, a partnership between Theodore Amenta of A & Co L.L.C. and Solaris Group LLC.

Housing

In the area of housing, SINA made strides in the South End through both development and advocacy. SINA's 2005 successes include:

- Completion of the \$10.4 million Cityscape Apartments project.
- Advocacy leading to legislative approval for the \$100 million Housing Trust Fund for Economic Growth & Opportunity.
- Initiation of Phase 3 for Cityscape Homes, which involves the renovation of three single-family homes to be sold as affordable



Above are examples of Cityscape Homes and Cityscape Apartments.

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICE AWARDS



Representatives from SINA's member institutions with the 2005 Neighborhood Service Award recipients. Standing: Sherry Marconi, Benjamin Diaz, Kevin Kinsella, Aura Maldonado, Edison Silva, Edie Lacey, Maxine Sullivan, Debra Borrero, Steve Balcanoff, Robert Sampl, Luis Caban. Kneeling: Carlos González, Reynaldo Morales, Shannon Raider, Joe Barber

"If you looked up the word neighbor in the dictionary, you would want to see Reynaldo Morales' picture there," said Steve Balcanoff, Manager of Non-Medical Community Programs at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. Indeed, each of the five presenters at SINA's 15th Annual Neighborhood Service Awards Recognition Event conveyed a similar deep personal esteem for the award recipients.

At the November 14 event, the recipients, Maxine Sullivan, Shannon Raider, Edie Lacey, Reynaldo Morales, and Carlos González, were honored for their individual service to the Southside community. Their accomplishments ranged from volunteering as a street captain to running an urban agriculture program for youth.

"Sometimes we get caught up in our own world," said Kevin Kinsella, Vice President, Hartford Hospital. "But when you read the descriptions of what they are doing, you will go home saying 'I need to do a little more.'"



NSA recipient Carlos González speaks with other guests at the 2005 awards ceremony.

Maxine Sullivan

Maxine Sullivan has devoted the last 33 years of her working life to the students of Hartford's Public Schools. As a School Counselor, Maxine's motivation has been to help students achieve their full potential. Retired in June 2005, Maxine's commitment to helping students began with five years at Quirk Middle School, continued with 24 years at Naylor and Kennelly, and concluded with four years as Head Counselor at Bulkeley High School.

"There are many different responsibilities to the job, but the one that I've always viewed as most important is the role of the advocate," Maxine described. Over the years she has seen a long list of dramatic success stories, where students facing serious problems were able to achieve great success.

"Maxine is absolutely amazing in terms of the commitment to and compassion for her students that she shows in all of her work," said Steve Balcanoff, Manager of Non-Medical Community Programs at Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

Shannon Raider

Shannon Raider has combined educating teenagers, developing communities, implementing urban agriculture, and fostering healthy nutrition into one program: Grow Hartford, a project of the Hartford Food System. Under Shannon's tutelage, Grow Hartford turned one acre of land on Laurel Street in Frog Hollow into a community garden.

"We have nine youth on our crew, and we use cash incentives to help them develop job skills," said Shannon. The youth work in the garden growing organic fruits and vegetables, and then earn stipends by selling the produce at the Laurel Street Farmers Market. Through the program, students develop micro-enterprise skills while learning about healthy lifestyles and food choices.

"In working with Shannon, I have seen a passion for what she does that you don't see in a lot of people," said Joe Barber, Director, Office of Community Service and Civic Engagement, Trinity College. "Shannon is thinking globally and acting locally to bring an important program to kids who really need to see that someone cares."

Reynaldo Morales

As a volunteer Street Captain, Reynaldo Morales has worked tirelessly to improve Madison Street and the Frog Hollow community that surrounds it. A ten-year resident of Frog Hollow, Reynaldo has focused his efforts on public safety and quality of life issues. "I just try to get involved with helping to solve the problems that we all know are facing our community," said Reynaldo. Reynaldo has also demonstrated a commitment to helping those who are sick and disabled.

"Reynaldo is one of those residents who cares enough about his community to go out and give it his best effort to get everyone else on his street involved with working toward the solutions," said Nilda Santana, Community Educator for the Aetna Center for Families. "He's a real rising star in Frog Hollow."

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Precluding the Crisis: Responding to Connecticut's Urgent Need for Affordable Housing

In a statewide study released on December 19, 2005, business economist Donald Klepper-Smith titled Connecticut's need for affordable housing "a crisis in the making."

"High housing prices threaten the state's economy and must be addressed quickly, said Klepper-Smith, who conducted the econometric study commissioned by The Partnership for Strong Communities, a statewide housing policy organization.

The study's findings indicate that, without more affordable housing, Connecticut may be in danger of losing its competitive edge. Since 2000, housing prices have escalated, but personal income growth has severely lagged behind this increase, the study says. "If this disparity between housing prices and income growth continues, it may threaten Connecticut's ability to attract and retain our quality workforce and thereby damage our capacity for long-term economic growth."

Committed to economic growth in Hartford's Southside, SINA has been on the front lines of creating affordable housing for many years. Its work has included both homeownership and rental opportunities, such as the Cityscape Homes project, launched in 1996, and the Cityscape Apartments, initiated in 2003.

In 2005, SINA expanded its efforts to include statewide advocacy for legislation, including the \$100 million Housing Trust Fund that will benefit the neighborhoods SINA serves by increasing affordable housing development opportunities.

Entering 2006, the urgency of Connecticut's affordable housing crisis is receiving increased recognition. The release of the econometric study last December brought widespread attention to the issue and the need for action. With the reality of Connecticut's precarious economic situation being absorbed, affordable housing is becoming more of a mainstream issue, motivating response from the movers and shakers in the state.

For SINA, the new year also heralded the promise of an even greater collaboration through participation in the Affordable Housing Steering Committee. The cooperative efforts leading to the success of the Trust Fund has brought cohesiveness to the group. Staffed by CT Partnership for Strong Communities, the Committee includes more than 43 members representing homebuilders, bankers, business executives, educators, municipal officials, realtors, environmentalists, attorneys, not-for-profit organizations, and other groups.

"Housing is not the most important issue, but it should be the most important hub issue," said David Fink, Policy Director, CT Partnership for Strong Communities. "Housing connects to everything else - transportation, education, environment, job growth, etc."

The Committee's goal: to shepherd a wide-reaching affordable housing campaign. When rolled out this spring, the campaign will move forward with an ambitious agenda that includes producing affordable housing ideas for legislative consideration, as well as marketing, outreach, research, and dissemination of data. SINA's Executive Director Luis Cabán has been involved with the Committee since 2004 and currently participates in the Outreach subcommittee.

Summary of Key Findings

From the DataCore Partners LLC study "A Crisis in the Making: The Need for Affordable Housing in Connecticut"

- 1) The "affordability gap," reflecting the difference between escalating housing prices and income growth, has widened in recent years. Connecticut median prices for single-family homes have risen four times as fast as Connecticut nominal personal income for the period between 2000 and 2004.
- 2) Housing affordability has become a key issue for many income groups, with increasingly more moderate-income households being particularly affected.
- 3) The current housing affordability problem in Connecticut has become more pronounced in recent years.
- 4) Using a regression model comparing cost of living data with rate of change in long-term employment, DataCore Partners estimates that for every 10 percent that Connecticut housing prices exceed the national average, the state loses 1,900 jobs in the long run.
- 5) With labor shortages already evident, affordable housing for workers is an issue important to Connecticut's "business competitiveness."
- 6) Affordable housing and quality of life are major factors in attracting a future replacement workforce for Connecticut, and failure to address the problem could lead to continued loss of population and workforce.
- 7) Affordable housing for Connecticut's workforce will be beyond the reach of its new workers, an even more important economic issue in years to come, because 62 percent of Connecticut's new jobs through the balance of the decade are expected to pay less than \$40,000/year.
- 8) The number of "households in jeopardy of leaving" Connecticut because they cannot find affordable housing is estimated to be between 25,700 and 38,550 as a reasonable range, representing 2 to 3 percent of all Connecticut households. Yet, creating new affordable housing would provide significant economic benefits. The tax revenue impact in either case would be dramatic.
- 9) There is an "opportunity cost" in additional jobs and revenue from failing to provide more affordable housing. Conversely, building more affordable housing would provide significant economic benefits.
- 10) Connecticut now has a housing environment of "haves" and "have-nots"; those whose incomes have not enabled them to enter the housing market have seen their ability to rent or own a home slip further and further away.



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Neighborhood Service Awards

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Carlos González

Teaching Hartford youth the job and life skills that will prepare them for living in the real world is Carlos González's goal in his role as supervisor of the after-school Horticulture Vocational Training Program at the Institute of Living, Hartford Hospital's Mental Health Network. Carlos works with high school students who are deemed at-risk by their school counselors. He teaches the students the skills of landscaping and horticulture, focusing on tropical plantscape design, installation and maintenance. Students in the program also practice flower-arranging skills, and then deliver flowers to Hartford Hospital patients.

"My goal is always to start out by teaching the basics, like showing up for work on time, having a positive attitude and a good work ethic," said Carlos. When students complete the training, Carlos and the other program staff try to help place them in outside jobs.

"He's a role model and a mentor for the kids," said Sherry Marconi, Director of Rehabilitation Services. "He can relate to them on a level that none of the rest of us can."

Edie Lacey

Already a recipient of the 1998 SINA Neighborhood Service Awards, Edie Lacey is being honored for an unprecedented second time with a special Lifetime Achievement Award from the director. Edie has spent the past 20 years in active civic involvement. For the past 12 years, she has worked on the Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ). The award marks her retirement as chairperson of the Frog Hollow South NRZ.

"Edie has shown such extraordinary dedication to this community that we felt it was important to give her special recognition for her exceptional community service," said SINA Executive Director Luis Cabán. "She has gone above and beyond in her work at focusing community attention on the efforts of the NRZ and helping to make those improvements a reality."



Steve Balcanoff, Early Reese and Edison Silva congratulate Reynaldo Morales on his community contributions.

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.

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