



Melvyn Colon, Executive Director of SINA, Inc.

Healthy by Design

SINA is partnering with other key nonprofits to improve the health of the community by improving the design of the environment. It sounds simple, but the myriad components are not always obvious.

This groundbreaking approach involves partners from different sectors – finance, urban planning, housing, healthcare and community development. Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Hartford Program is leading the team, and our other partners (so far) include the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, Capitol Region

Council of Governments, Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, Capital for Change, Partnership for Strong Communities, and the National LISC Health program. Called the Green & Healthy Housing Initiative, its planning is funded by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

While green building is an obvious element – nontoxic flooring and paints, better insulation and windows, geothermal heating and cooling – there is much more to it. Rehabilitating and managing properties can be done in healthier ways, and this project seeks to bring best practices to Hartford. Affordable, healthy housing lessens stress, increases financial self-sufficiency and improves health for residents, especially children.

Our goals include neighborhood interventions that encourage recreational exercise, improve community safety and outdoor activity, and increase access to healthy food. We’ll develop new collaborative partnerships, increase our knowledge base, and develop guidelines for property managers to follow.

We at SINA are excited about being part of this planning effort. Two of our partners, Hartford Hospital and the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, play a major role in maintaining the health of community residents. They have supported SINA’s housing initiatives because they have long recognized the link between healthy, affordable housing and overall community health.

RECOGNIZING VISION



SINA’s own Melvyn Colon received the Vision Award in Social Justice from Charter Oak Cultural Center at its 16th annual gala on May 18. The executive director of SINA, Melvyn previously held management roles at NeighborWorks America, YouthBuild USA, Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation, and Yale University and teaching roles at Tufts University and the University of Massachusetts/Boston. Reflecting on this honor, Melvyn said “This recognition from

the Charter Oak Cultural Center is one of the most significant honors I’ve received in my life, the more so because I am an awed admirer of Donna Berman’s success in transforming this former religious institution into an organization that works to keep alive the diverse cultural traditions of our city by offering opportunities to young people to learn and express themselves through instruction, art and performance.”

In recognizing Melvyn, Donna Berman, Executive Director of Charter Oak Cultural Center, cited his life-long commitment to community development, saying “Melvyn’s work has touched the lives of many people”. Jane Baird, Director of Government Relations at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center and SINA board chairman, says “we are delighted that Melvyn’s outstanding contributions have been recognized. The entire SINA board is very proud of him and this award.”

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About SINA

Since its founding in 1977 SINA has worked with community organizations on issues such as affordable rental housing, education, public safety, homeownership and commercial development. With dozens of apartment units rehabilitated, homeownership programs, and the opening of The Learning Corridor, its visible impact in the Frog Hollow, Barry Square and South Green neighborhoods has been significant and its community involvement has been a constant presence. SINA continues operations today in offices at 207 Washington Street. For more information call (860) 493-1618 or visit sinainc.org.

All articles written by Beth Pite.

SINA Helps Sally FIND SUCCESS



Photos by: Julian Bowen



SINA Reports SUMMER 2017

www.sinainc.org

SINA is a partnership between Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, Hartford Hospital and Trinity College. SINA’s mission is to restore economic vitality and improve the quality of life for the people who live, work, play, and study in the neighborhoods of South Hartford.





TRINFO CAFÉ: Bridging the Digital Divide

Trinfo Café - 1300 Broad Street, Hartford, CT

Director Carlos Espinosa has seen Trinfo Café evolve in its 17 years. He acknowledges many changes under various Hartford and Trinity leaders, but the mission of Trinfo has always been “to invest in the community to bridge the digital divide.” Trinity reaps the “political rewards of being a gracious neighbor” while providing unique experiences for its students and enabling them to put their liberal arts education to practical use.

Rosangelica Rodriguez was a Trinity undergrad and is now a graduate student in American Studies. She is the program coordinator at Trinfo Café, explaining that her fluent Spanish, computer skills, tutoring experience and time as a camp counselor all help her in this job. Rose finds that “teaching adults is harder, because they aren’t computer literate.” She laughs that “even though I have plenty of experience trying to explain technology to my parents, you’d be surprised how wide the gap is.” Many people don’t know how to apply for jobs online, so her team offers computer access, training and referrals to other nonprofits.

Collie has been a regular since his daughter signed him up a few years ago. He wasn’t computer literate, and credits Trinfo with improving his typing and spelling, which helps him find jobs. He also uses Facebook at Trinfo to keep in touch with family, and considers Trinfo his “home away from home.” Collie admires the staff, saying “anything you need, they’re here to help you, as long as you are respectful and follow the rules.”

Amy has been coming to Trinfo for five years, since she was laid off from work. She finds it a good place to job hunt and “an alternative means of socializing” because “being unemployed is boring and depressing.” The computer strategy games help her peripheral vision, impaired by glaucoma, and walking to Trinfo also helps her health. She likes “the personnel because they are very helpful and friendly, always scheduling fun events.”

Lauren is a Trinity student with a double major in Spanish and International Studies. She was attracted to Trinfo for the community-based, on-campus job. Lauren works the front desk, teaches computer literacy and translates scripts for on-line curricula. Students like Lauren motivate Carlos, who says “being in an environment of higher education, around young people, invigorates me.” He’s pleased to have served 11,000 registered users with 15,000 annual visits, while providing 300+ Trinity students with a nontraditional classroom experience.

SINA Helps Sally Find Success

Sally Vazquez is living proof of the power of SINA’s approach – working cooperatively with community stakeholders to improve quality of life by providing educational and economic opportunities for people in South Central Hartford. She used the job training, education and networking available through SINA to build a new life for herself and her children, while creating a rewarding career.



The SINA Job Center in 2000.
Now the SINA office.

Sally had arrived in New Britain from Puerto Rico as a single mother with two children, and soon her son was in an ambulance being rushed to a hospital with serious lead poisoning. She says “I can’t forget that day – it changed my life. We lost everything and I started over.” They had to move to a shelter in Hartford and utilize food stamps, but Sally was able to obtain job training through the First Step program. Fortunately, she was placed in a job at the SINA Job Center.

“I was lucky. My English was poor, but I’m a fighter, and I did my job.” She asserts “SINA believed in Sally!” when she was at a low point, without a high school diploma or relevant work experience. They encouraged her and opened doors. Sally worked at the SINA Job Center for a year, while also working part time at McDonalds and taking ESL courses.

SINA’s director at the time, Luis Cabán, helped her get a data entry job at Mi Casa, where she took on progressively more responsibility. Mi Casa emphasized culture, and Sally’s role expanded to include teaching dance to children. That program grew and Sally was promoted to program coordinator. When Mi Casa was able to obtain funding for a family support position, Sally was ready for the new challenge.

As a 2008 recipient of SINA’s Neighborhood Service Award, Sally is forever grateful to the people who believed in and mentored her. She is thankful for the opportunities she was given to prove herself.

Opportunity knocked again in 2011, when Mi Casa created a family resource center in the Maria Sanchez School. Sally stepped up, and was so successful that she was asked to open a similar center at the Asian Studies Academy. When Mi Casa merged with the Hispanic Health Council, the 21st Century Program was developed to provide enrichment for 100 students at Sanchez, and Sally was tapped for it. She continued at this pace, working two jobs with increasing responsibility, while raising three kids and marrying.

This past fall, Sally decided it was time for a change. She accepted a position in the Hartford school system as School and Family Support Service Provider. While still at Sanchez, she now has broader responsibilities for activities like the PTO and the school’s governance council. She says “I love what I do!” and is thrilled about being able to do more for families, inspiring them to achieve by sharing her personal experiences.

Sally recently became foster mother to a relative’s four young children, in addition to her own three and their dog. She is thrilled that her oldest son is now in college. Sally herself is working on an associate degree, having earned her GED in 2014. As she says “I’m not stopping, because I need to have something for my future. I still want to grow!”

A final note: although the SINA Job Center, which was key to Sally’s early efforts to find a job to support her family, is no longer in operation, SINA is working to develop a Career Navigator Program to help residents like Sally find job opportunities with the large employers in the neighborhood.



Sally receiving the 2008
SINA Neighborhood
Service Award



Taste of the Neighborhood

Donde Julio Restaurant
83 Park Street, Hartford, CT

Donde Julio Restaurant may seem unassuming, but when you enter the cozy space a big personality warms the room. Diana Arbelaez is co-owner with her husband Julio, and her welcoming energy is obvious immediately – as are the delicious aromas emanating from the kitchen at the back.

Founded in 2011 on Park Street, the restaurant was a dream-come-true for Diana and Julio, both of who had lots of experience under their belts. Julio worked in a restaurant for 15 years, and Diana in a corporate cafeteria and in customer service, preparing them perfectly for their own place. As she says with a smile, “If I can make this much working for other people, I can do it for myself.”



Diana Arbelaez at the front counter of
Donde Julio Restaurant

Diana describes the menu as international, with offerings of Colombian, Peruvian and Mexican food, plus burgers, salads and her famous soups. “Your menu is my menu,” she adds, explaining they often fill custom requests, or cater office lunches and parties. Reviewers rave about her American and Columbian breakfast combinations of eggs, potatoes, steak, chorizo, or rice and beans. Lunch offerings range from tasty salads to arepas, corn griddle cakes with toppings like chicken, beef, shrimp, onions and tomatoes. Diana is particularly proud of her soups, made without salt because she believes fresh ingredients are tasty enough. The SINA staff strongly endorses her usual Wednesday special, platano soup!

It is important to Diana that everyone feel welcome, so she keeps the place low-key and affordable. The variety of people on Park Street appeals to her and she chuckles at some of the sights she’s seen, saying “I love this street because you can always entertain yourself.” She cherishes the diversity of the neighborhood and cites the many local residents, doctors, nurses and lawyers who eat there regularly.

Knowing that restaurants tend to be risky businesses, she adds “I already have a plan B, just in case,” but the success of their Hartford restaurant led them to open a second location last year, at 534D Middle Turnpike in Manchester. The new restaurant is open 9:00 am to 8:00 pm Tuesday through Thursday, until 9:00 pm on Friday and Saturday, 10:00-8:00 on Sunday, and closed Monday.

Donde Julio Restaurant is located at 83 Park Street, near the intersection with Main Street. It’s open from 7:30 am to 7:00 pm every day except Sunday, when the hours are 9:00am—2:00pm. Stop in this week to say hello to Diana and enjoy her good service, friendly atmosphere and delicious food.



Sancho De Carne - Meat Stew