

Richard de Meij Rules



Richard de Meij (fourth from the right) being honored with a SINA outstanding volunteer award in 2004.

SINA originally recognized this amazing teacher in 2004, when we presented Richard de Meij with an outstanding volunteer award. Back then, he lived in Frog Hollow and was a language teacher in West Hartford, but he has since become a teacher in Hartford at the Global Communications Academy.

Born in Aruba, Richard grew up speaking Dutch, Spanish, English and Papiamentu, an official language of Aruba. He attended college in Florida, majoring in Speech and Language Pathology and Applied Linguistics. While there, he was part of a German apprenticeship program that made him love teaching. "It opened my eyes to the power language gives someone," he said. "It enables people to express themselves, to extend an invitation, to talk about their families, and to tell their stories. To witness this is amazing."



Richard de Meij receiving the 2018-2019 CT Language Teacher of the Year award

Seeing language as a way of connecting people, and as the doorway to knowledge, Richard explains "language lets you access the fullness of the city. Teaching someone a language is giving them a key to better know their neighbor." In 2019, Richard's dedication was recognized when he became the first teacher from Hartford and the first black teacher to be honored as the State of Connecticut language teacher of the year.

Stay updated on past awardees by visiting the *Where Are They Now* blog at www.hartfordheroes.com.

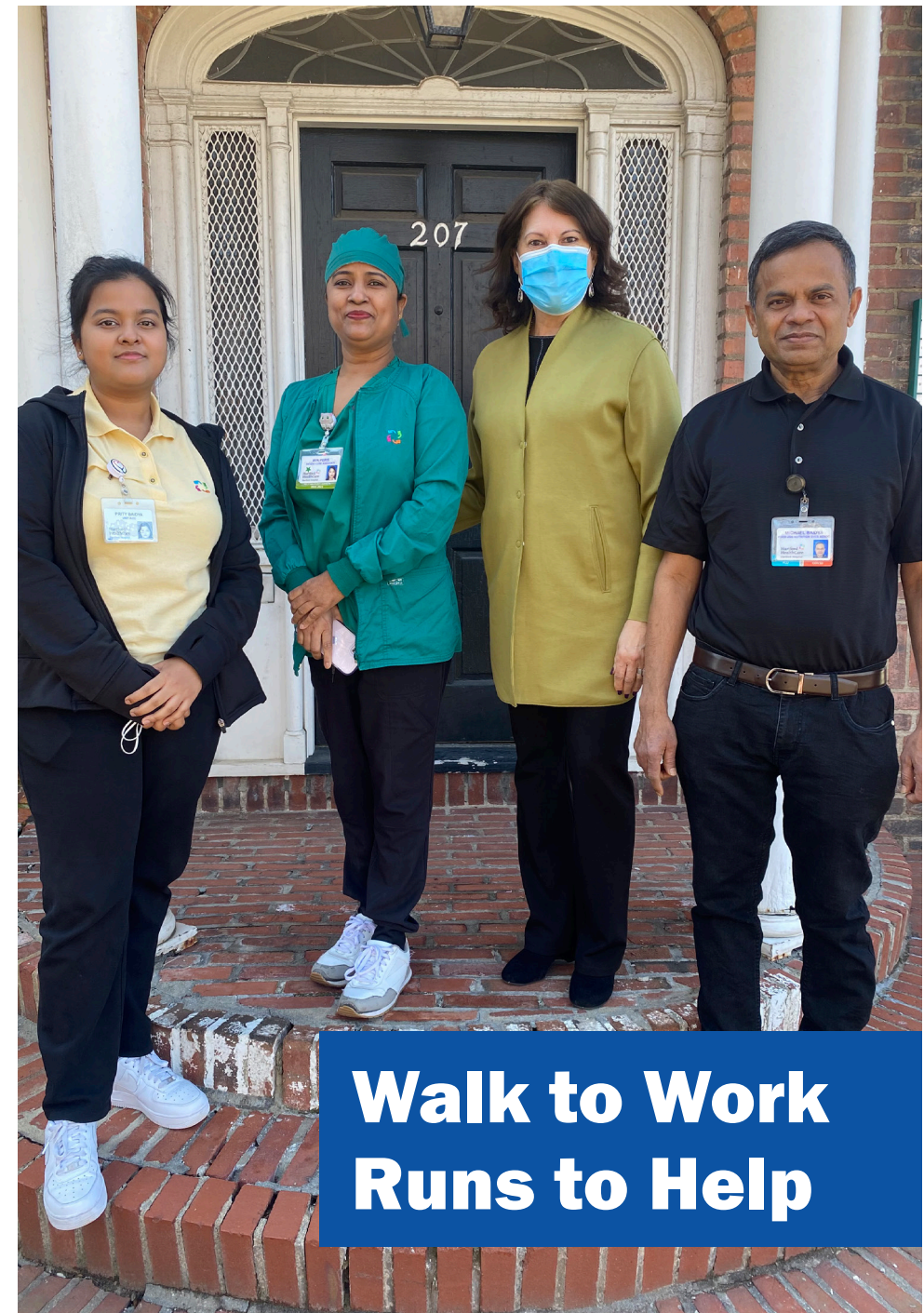


SOUTHSIDE INSTITUTIONS
NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE

207 Washington Street
Hartford, CT 06106

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 www.sinainc.org.



SINA is a partnership between Connecticut Children's, Hartford Hospital and Trinity College. SINA's mission is to work cooperatively with community stakeholders to restore economic vitality and improve the quality of life for the people who live, work, play, and study in the neighborhoods of South Central Hartford.



Walk to Work Runs to Help

These days, our anchor institutions rely on our Walk to Work program more than ever. Elsa Huertas, SINA's Career Navigator, is rising to the challenge. Hiring needs are severe and candidates hard to find, so human resources departments are asking for help.

Connecticut is not immune to employee shortages driven by the national "great resignation" and mental health crisis. Illnesses, quarantines and hiring delays put pressure on existing employees and leading to even more hiring demand from our anchor institutions. On the supply side, there are many common concerns among job candidates complicating the job search process. Elsa has observed concerns over childcare, transportation, and COVID fears in multigenerational households. People are considering the cost/benefit analysis of working, especially in lower paid and part time jobs.

Fortunately, SINA has been able to help in several ways. Reaching out to colleges and other partners, Elsa identified healthcare graduates and recommended necessary training programs. She shared information with our anchor institutions about hiring obstacles such as sick time policies, state regulations, and the importance of follow up with qualified candidates – many of whom were playing a waiting game for best offers. Recruiting younger people, who used to take entry level jobs, was particularly challenging. Not only do they prefer remote work, but, due to COVID falsehoods and hospital employee vaccinations requirements, Elsa spends a lot of time dispelling myths.



One instance where Elsa addressed this hiring shortage began at a neighborhood cleanup, where she met Joty, a young woman whose parents needed jobs. A nurse in her native Bangladesh, Irin, Joty's mother, found it difficult to get work here despite her skills and experience. Elsa helped Irin prepare for interviews and successfully apply for a PCA job on the Star Team at Hartford Hospital. That success led to career assistance for her husband, Michael, who was

hired in catering. Finally, their other daughter, Prity, worked with Elsa and found a job as a unit aide at the hospital. The entire family is are grateful for "Miss Elsa's help" and thrilled to be working in good jobs, close to home, that enable them to make plans for their family's future. Part of that plan is to buy a home through the Homeownership Incentive Program (HIP) which they will qualify for in October, the one-year anniversary of their date of hire

For information, contact Elsa Huertas at ehuertas@sinainc.org.



Trinity College Liberal Arts Action Lab Students presenting the digital archive at the Park Street Library at the Lyric to community members

Frog Hollow Histories

SINA and Trinity are working together on an oral history project for Frog Hollow, telling the story of our neighborhood in the words of the people who live here. When we unveiled our Hartford Heroes murals we planned to create a digital walking tour, too, using interviews conducted as part of the oral histories.

Logan Singerman, SINA's Director of Community Engagement and Communications, explains "We now have plans for several themed digital tours – heroes, public art, community spaces, and voices of Frog Hollow." Trinity's Community Action Lab class conducted 20 interviews to uncover these themes. A different Community Action Gateway class helped with Spanish interviews and translations, and now two more Trinity students are working with SINA to put the tours into a digital format.

"This has been a personally inspiring experience," says Logan, "and I'm moved by the amount of passion brought out by the process." Trinity students agree, emphasizing that the experience has helped them remove barriers and feel like part of the neighborhood.

For more information on the project read the Trinity College Liberal Arts Action Lab blog post found at www.sinainc.org/featured-news.

Healthier Homes

SINA was recently awarded a grant from LISC as part of the Building for Health program. It will allow us to make our properties even better for tenants by controlling waste, reminding people not to smoke, and fighting rats, which spread disease.

Dean Iaiennaro, SINA's Director of Real Estate Development, explains "the grant will allow us to install door sweeps on 82 apartments in 13 of our buildings, making tighter seals on interior doors to keep rats out. We will also provide each apartment with a new, stainless steel, self-closing kitchen trash can. We're hiring

HEALTH SPOTLIGHT

Keeping Kids Safe

The pandemic has turned lives upside down and children are particularly vulnerable, with family losses, changes at school and more. Many kids need help with anxiety or depression, but don't know how to ask. Childhood is an important time when lifetime habits are formed, so SINA is sharing this information from Connecticut Children's pediatric psychologist Bradley Jenson to help parents cope.

First, figure out if your child's behavior has changed. If they're having trouble at school or spending less time with friends or family, don't jump in to fix it. Instead, watch for changes in sleep patterns, favorite activities, or moods and negative thoughts.

If you notice these things, ask gently about the changes, staying calm and thoughtful. You might say "I noticed you're staying in your room more. Can we talk about that?" In your home, be sure to talk about mental health openly, and how you're coping with your own feelings, to show your child it's normal.

Hard questions about suicide or drugs are ok, too, as long as you stay calm, because they show your child that it's ok to share feelings with you. If you think your child is a danger to themselves or others, call 211 for advice, or 911 if it's an emergency.

It's important to learn to listen to your kids. Sit with them, encourage them to share feelings, and don't try to solve the problem. Instead of telling them what to do, you might say "that sounds really hard." Let your kids know that feelings are ok, such as anger, stress, fear, or loneliness. Simply talking helps relieve stress. It also reminds your kids they can come to you for help.

If your child needs more help, talk to their doctor or school counselor. You can also find help by calling Connecticut Children's Center for Care Coordination at (860) 837.6200.

a mason to inspect and repair any holes in the stone and cement foundations of our buildings, which are at least 100 years old." These improvements will limit residents' possible exposure to plague, salmonella, rat bite fever, and other viral or bacterial diseases spread by rats and the insects they carry.

The grant will also fund signs on every floor, at the entrances and exits, saying "no smoking, no vaping." Since smoke is a well-known cause of cancer, asthma and other diseases, we hope these reminders will help prevent illnesses among our residents.