

The Connection

FROM CREIGHTON TO CITY HALL



Donald Coleman
Richmond Public Schools
Board Chairman
7th District



FORMER RRHA RESIDENTS NOW NEW HOMEOWNERS



For 10 years, Patricia Gray and her 23-year old, son Robert were residents of RRHA's Whitcomb community. But now, after a lot of hard work, dedication and much patience, the Grays are homeowners. (pg. 4)

FORMER RRHA RESIDENT NOW SERVES AS RPS BOARD CHAIR

Donald Coleman grew up in RRHA's Creighton community. Today, as RPS Chairman, he now leads many of the schools he attended as a child. (pg. 2)

RRHA INTERIM CEO MESSAGE

T.K. SOMANATH

I'm excited to share with you another edition of *The Connection*! Since becoming Interim CEO in February, I have had the opportunity to interact with employees, residents, partners and friends who have given me greater insight of the agency's impact on Richmond and the many families we serve. My daily interactions also reaffirm my beliefs that RRHA will continue to be at the forefront of positive change in affordable housing and community revitalization, here in the City of Richmond! *Cont'd on page 2*





INTERIM CEO MESSAGE (cont'd)

In this edition of *The Connection*, we are very pleased to feature current and former residents who are making a positive impact in our communities, including Donald Coleman, Richmond Public Schools (RPS) Board Chairman and former resident, who overcame challenges and adversity of his youth to eventually attend VCU, start East End Fellowship Church and now serves as the Board Chairman for RPS.

And, we are pleased to share information about our youth and their academic success and provide important information for our seniors as May is Older Americans Month. I am humbled to have the opportunity to serve our families, communities and the city of Richmond as RRHA continues its progress to build vibrant communities!

Sincerely,
T.K. SOMNATH
Interim CEO



FROM CREIGHTON TO CITY HALL FORMER RRHA RESIDENT NOW SERVES AS RPS BOARD CHAIR

Donald R. Coleman is no stranger to overcoming obstacles. As one of seven children, Donald lived in Richmond's Creighton Court community. With both parents battling their own share of issues, there were times when Donald and his siblings were left alone by themselves, so Donald would oftentimes take the lead. During one of these instances, he ventured into the kitchen to cook his siblings breakfast and, in turn, sparked an apartment-wide fire. Once the fire department realized the siblings had been abandoned for several days, he and his siblings soon found themselves in the hands of Child Protective Services. They were eventually transferred to a foster home in the East End, where Donald stayed until he was about 15 years old. After that time, he and his brother Chris went to live with their dad throughout high school.

Growing up, Donald was a model student, earning the personae "Honest Don." "I believed early on that doing the right thing was important. When we went into the foster home, those were the kind of values they taught us, doing what's right," he mentions. He later went on to study at Virginia Commonwealth University on an academic scholarship after graduating from Armstrong High School. "While I was at VCU, I felt the call to go into ministry," he notes. After his third year in college, Donald took the full leap into ministry and received his ordination through an apprenticeship with his local church. In 2008, he co-founded (with Pastor Corey Widmer) his own church, East End Fellowship, which meets every Sunday evening at 4p.m. in Church Hill's Robinson Center.

In 2014, Donald was unanimously elected to serve as chairman for Richmond Public Schools Board, a position which suits him well considering he was re-elected again in 2015. Having been a student of Woodville Elementary, Nathaniel Bacon, George Mason, East End Junior High, and Armstrong, Coleman now leads many of the very same schools he attended in his youth.

"I think growing up in public housing, and then from public housing to a foster home, really helped me appreciate others helping me be who I am..," stated Coleman. "So a part of my role now in the School Board that I celebrate is getting the chance to give back. It really is public service. All I'm doing now is paying it forward" Today, Donald uses his experiences growing up to help fuel others to improve their lives. As a father of two, Shekinah and Selah, he lives in Richmond with wife Florence, who also grew up in the Creighton community. "I am forever grateful for God's blessings on my life," he notes.

For current RRHA residents and students, Coleman leaves this message: "Character counts. It's critical that no matter where you come from, you are a model to the rest of society, you're serious about life, about making a difference, about seeing your life improve, and making your community better."



RRHA AND RCHD WELCOME TANZANIAN VISITORS TO FAIRFIELD HEALTH RESOURCE CENTER

Last month, RRHA and Richmond City Health District (RCHD) welcomed Tanzanian Priest Erasto Ndahani and his wife Rebecca to the Fairfield Health Resource Center. During their three-week stay in Richmond, the couple, hosted by St. Paul's Episcopal Church, was interested to learn more about community health facilities and how to serve residents in low-income communities. In an hour-long discussion, Resource Center Supervisor Amy Popovich shared the importance of Richmond's health resource centers and how they serve communities throughout the city.

The visitors also had an opportunity to share information about their home, Mwitikira, a village of 6,000 people on a high plain in central Tanzania. With a limited number of hospital beds and transportation to medical resources, villagers are often unable to seek treatment for preventative and treatable illnesses such as malaria. The village also has access to one source of clean water, a well where villagers can draw water for domestic needs. Amy Popovich, Richmond City Health District Resource Center Supervisor, notes of the visit: "It was a pleasure to meet with Father Erasto and hear about what life is like in Tanzania. It reminds us all that having access to fresh water and shelter is truly a gift."

Despite the nearly 7,000-mile distance between Tanzania and Virginia, both Father Erasto and Rebecca wish to stay in contact with RRHA and RCHD. The Ndhani's stated that they enjoyed their visit to Richmond and are eager about the new friendships created during their stay.



RRHA WELCOMES CHIEF DURHAM TO GILPIN

of Police, Alfred Durham, as well as several RPD officers, VA State Police officers, RRHA officials and others. While crime is on the decline in Gilpin, as the area has seen a 56% crime reduction so far this year alone, "it's very important that we continue to engage the community," notes Chief Durham.

To launch the 45-day Gilpin Court Violent Crime Reduction Initiative, the Richmond Police Department (RPD) recently held a Community Walk throughout the Gilpin community. During the walk, Gilpin residents had the chance to meet the new Chief

To continue to enhance the partnership with RPD, RRHA and the community, Chief Durham shared that RPD Lieutenant Jody Blackwell will serve as the community liaison for the department with RRHA. Some of the Chief's

goals for RRHA communities, specifically, are to "reduce crime, build better relationships with the citizens so they feel comfortable in coming to the police when they have issues, and engaging youth in the community, says Durham. "It's nothing more satisfying for me than to see kids run up to me," he adds. The Gilpin Court Violent Crime Reduction Initiative will be in place through May 30th and will involve enforcement, visibility, outreach and area improvements, with the goal of reducing violent crime.

DANCE YOUR WAY TO FITNESS!



Recently residents came out to have fun while getting fit! For 10-weeks, now through June 19th, RRHA residents can take advantage of dance-based fitness classes on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from 11am to 12pm, at the Calhoun Family Investment Center, 436 Calhoun Street. The classes, led by certified fitness instructors, are FREE and geared towards all fitness levels. Prizes and giveaways will be given weekly to encourage participation. RRHA provides transportation for all interested residents. "I plan to come to as many classes as my schedule allows," said Vickie Johnson, RRHA resident. "This is great for community. People will be able to get out the house and get some exercise!"

During the recent kick-off event, attendees received free health screenings provided by Virginia Commonwealth Commonwealth University School of Nursing and learned ways to live a healthier lifestyle. Dance Your Way to Fitness is provided through a partnership with RRHA, Sports Backers and the YMCA.



FORMER RRHA RESIDENTS NOW NEW HOMEOWNERS



For 10 years, Patricia Gray and her 23-year old son Robert were residents of RRHA's Whitcomb community. But now, after a lot of hard work, dedication and much patience, the Grays are homeowners.

"When we moved into Whitcomb Court, we were thankful for a roof over our head, but we knew that this was an opportunity for us to save and accomplish our goal to be self-sufficient again," said Patricia.

Robert, as an allied health/nursing student at J. Sargeant Reynolds, knows firsthand the value of hard work. While living in Whitcomb, he worked several jobs with a goal of saving up enough money to purchase a new home. Oftentimes, public transportation would not align with his job commute times, so he did the next best thing—rode his bicycle. After much dedication, Robert and his mother were soon on their way to becoming new homeowners.

Today, all moved in, the family is helping their former neighbors achieve homeownership as well. "We had some really great neighbors and great support from our realtor," said Robert. "Now that we've accomplished our dream of owning a home, we're dedicated to help our old neighbors." "Everyone deserves a chance," he adds.

RRHA congratulates the Gray family on achieving their dream of homeownership, and we wish them much success in their future endeavors!

EAST END REVITALIZATION - THE VOICES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In March, residents of the East End community joined RRHA, City of Richmond officials and The Community Builders, Inc. (TCB) in sharing the latest progress regarding the East End Transformation to date.

Rob Fossi, Mid-Atlantic Regional VP for The Community Builders (TCB), master developer for the revitalization, comments, "We have submitted an application for tax credit financing which, if successful, will go a long way toward completing ensuring that the first phase will be under construction by early 2016. The continual assistance of residents and stakeholders, especially the detailed guidance that they gave at the charrette, was an essential component of the successful program our team submitted to Virginia Housing Development Agency (VHDA)."



Working behind the scenes to help transform the East End vision into reality, in partnership with RRHA, the City of Richmond and TCB, is the Informed Neighbors Corps (INC). The Community Builders, Inc. partnered with Virginia Commonwealth University's Center on Society and Health and Richmond Promise Neighborhood to establish the INC in Creighton Court in 2014 to enhance community engagement and information sharing between TCB, the City of Richmond, and RRHA, while promoting resident leadership.

"TCB recognized early on that substantive, ongoing engagement-with and participation-from residents, not just on the typical design and development issues, but also how to think about and deliver companion programming and services, would ultimately determine how impactful this initiative could become," notes Fossi.



Comprised of about 17 residents, INC members have been educated on politics, advocacy leadership, meeting operations, public housing, community development, subsidies, and more. The Informed Neighbors Corps volunteer their time to keep their neighbors informed on all revitalization efforts, they perform outreach in the community encouraging participation in the process and serve as resident advocates. Recently, they were trained as surveyors to assist with the residents' needs assessment and went out into the community to pinpoint what exactly residents felt were needs in the community. They asked questions regarding resident vision

for the community, neighborhood views on services, education and household goals. "We felt that having someone you know from your community to engage with you in this way was a lot more effective than having researchers come out," notes Gladys Medder, TCB's Mid-Atlantic Resident Service Director. "They have, in two months, completed over 286 assessments," she adds.

The information from these needs assessments will assist TCB in creating an effective relocation plan and inform what services and programs will be deployed in the advancement of the community.

"They are doing really impactful work in the community and their ability to include their neighbors in this process has been just admirable," says Medder. In the months to come, the INC will continue to engage fellow residents with monthly "Chat and Chews" to better enhance the East End redevelopment process.

Recently, Interim CEO T.K. Somanath had a chance to attend one of their monthly meetings to provide information and to extend thanks for their involvement in the East End Revitalization.



YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION FORUM IN MOSBY



In March, the Mosby Tenant Association and the Richmond Continentals hosted a Youth Violence Prevention Forum at Mosby Court's community room. Designed to be a community-wide discussion around the growing trends of youth violence, both panelists and attendees got the chance to delve into some of the deep issues affecting our youth.

"If we work together, we can do a lot of good...we can solve this problem," noted Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott. The Congressman spoke

on the correlation between crime and education and discussed the importance of the proposed Youth PROMISE Act (Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education).

Many of the common themes revealed the need for more youth opportunities, key partnerships, accountability, and student encouragement within communities. Several audience members also agreed that in addition to these issues, the lack of parental involvement proved a challenge as well.

In closing remarks, Mrs. Patricia Willford, Mosby Court Tenant Council President, noted, "I learned a lot from the panel and the different programs that we can turn our tenants too...I learned that there is a lot I can do in my community to make it so much better." Ms. Nkechi George-Winkler, president of the Richmond Continentals remarked, "we hoped the forum sparked an open dialogue with community leaders, concerned citizens, law enforcement and parents on what we could do together to actively participate in shaping a positive future for our youth."



RRHA STUDENTS SELECTED AS VAHCDO SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS!

We are proud to announce that FOUR college-bound students from RRHA communities have won \$2,000 scholarships through the Virginia Association of Housing and Community Development Officials (VAHCDO). VAHCDO is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing housing and suitable living for Virginia families. The state-wide competition was fierce and our students excelled and proudly represented RRHA and the City of Richmond! Meet our VAHCDO scholarship winners! The students will receive their awards when they attend the VAHCDO annual Scholarship Luncheon being held in Virginia Beach.

Congratulations RRHA Scholars!

(l. to r.)

- Rakiya Ibrahim, Gilpin, Thomas Jefferson High School
- MeShawn Macklin, Oscar E. Stovall, Thomas Jefferson High School
- Virshon Carrington, Whitcomb, Thomas Jefferson High School
- Shakera Vaughan, Fairfield, Open High School



THE 1,000TH RRHA RESIDENT RECEIVES CPR TRAINING IN APRIL



The Richmond Ambulance Authority (RAA) conducted its 1,000th resident Hands-Only CPR training in April! Through grant funding provided from Altria and the Bloomberg Foundation, the RAA provides Hands-Only CPR as a part of RRHA's New Tenant Orientation. All new public housing residents participate in mandatory briefings through the New Tenant Orientation.



"WHAT HOME MEANS TO ME" POSTER CONTEST

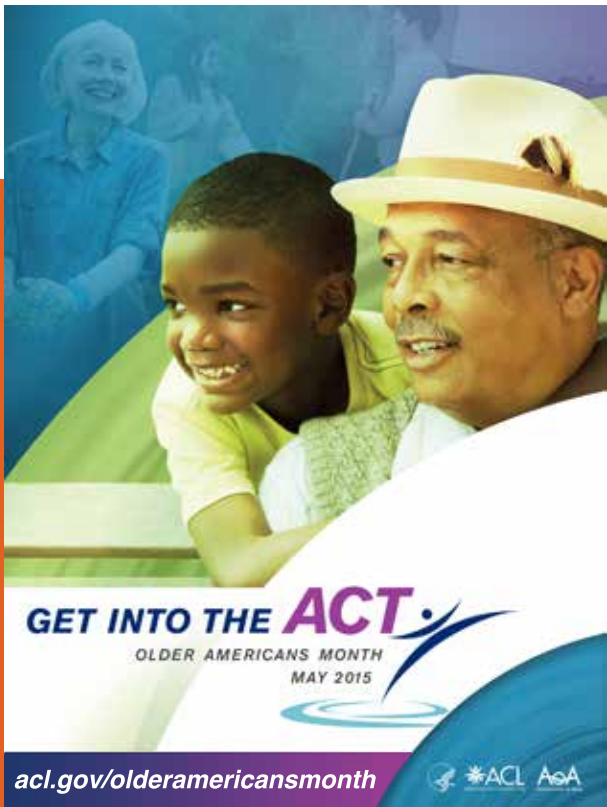
Several RRHA students have already sent off their submissions for the annual "What Home Means to Me" poster contest, sponsored by the Virginia Association of Housing and Community Development. Our students' entries will now join other elementary, middle and high school submissions from various housing authorities across the nation! Good luck to our participants!



CONGRATULATIONS RRHA PARTNERS



RRHA congratulates all of our current and former partners who were recognized at the 2015 Metropolitan Business League Awards Dinner & Reception last month! Fastbreak General Contractors received the Extraordinary Startup Award. Fastbreak, a Tide-water-based commercial and industrial construction company, is a current partner with RRHA in the development of the 18-unit Blackwell Terrace Senior Cottages. Nickkol Lewis of Visual Appeal, LLC, a former RRHA partner, received the League Leadership Award. As a graphic design consultant in branding and marketing services, Nickkol has worked with RRHA on several marketing projects. Canterbury Enterprises, also recognized, has been a construction contractor for various public housing revitalization projects.



SENIOR ACTIVITIES

Sponsored by City of Richmond
Office on Aging & Persons with Disabilities

THE 32ND ANNUAL OLDER AMERICANS MONTH LUNCHEON "GET INTO THE THE ACT"

Thursday, May 21, 2015

10 am – 11 am Exhibits

11:00 am – 1:00 pm Program and Luncheon
Featuring Old School Music Performed by Back 'N Da Day

Second Baptist Church

3300 Broad Rock Boulevard

Luncheon Tickets: \$17.00 per person

Ticket deadline: May 11, 2015

For additional information or tickets contact
Saundra Rollins, **804.231.9306**

acl.gov/olderamericansmonth



COMPUTERS 4 SENIORS

4 Week Beginner's Class

May 8, 15, 22, 29, 2015

10:15 am – 12:15 pm

West End Library

5420 Patterson Avenue

Richmond, VA 23226

5 ON 5 SENIOR BASKETBALL

Thursday, May 14, 2015

11:00 am – 1:00 pm

Humphrey Calder Community Center

414 North Thompson Street

Richmond, VA 23221

(Ages 50+)

FICTION FOCUS SENIOR BOOK CLUBS

Friday, May 15, 2015

10:15 am – 12:15 pm

Westover Hills Library

1408 Westover Hills Blvd.

Richmond, VA 23225

Monday May 18, 2015

10:15 am – 12:15 pm

East End Library

1200 North 25th Street

Richmond, VA 23223

Tuesday, May 19, 2015

10:15 am – 12:15 pm

North Avenue Library

2901 North Avenue

Richmond, VA 23222

All programs are FREE to City of Richmond residents, excluding and are available for those ages 55+ except where noted
To register or for additional information call the Senior Helpline 804.646.1082 or visit our website at www.richmondgov.com/officeonaging

RRHA STAFF COMPLETE THE MONUMENT 10K!

Congratulations to the RRHA staff that recently participated in the Ukrop's Monument 10K race held Saturday, March 28th! The race draws over 36,000 runners, joggers and walkers from the region. We are so proud of the hard work and dedication of our RRHA staff! Congrats!

