



"People Helping People Build Community."

2009-2010  
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The Promise of  
Community Action

"Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other."

FIRST STATE COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY

# Front Line News

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## First State: Cultivating the Seeds of Change

May is National Community Action Month. This is a time for those of us involved in the community action movement to spread the word about the work we do. First State hosted several open house events this month to educate the public about what we do and also to learn from the people in our communities what their needs are and how we can better meet those needs. We challenge you to think of creative ways that you can become involved in your community and make your little corner of the world a better place to live in.

In addition to the activities related to Community Action Month, community action agencies across the country are in the spotlight now because of our President's enactment of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA), more

popularly known as the Stimulus Act. Community Action agencies, including ours, have been trusted with the task of determining what programs will be funded with a portion of the monies that will come from the passage of the act. This is a big task and one we take very seriously. We are working closely with our board members, state government, community members, and staff to determine where the funds will do the most good.

The funds from the act are a one-time deal and the seeds they will provide are precious. It is critical that those seeds be sown into fertile ground and produce a crop that will keep on giving long after the initial funding is gone.

Once the initial seed funds are distributed, we will monitor the



Bernice Edwards

selected programs to ensure they have everything they need to grow strong and prosper.

It's an exciting time and we are grateful for the opportunity to participate. We have over 43 years of experience in helping communities grow and succeed and we look forward to a bountiful harvest this season.

Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers as we move forward.

## Senior's Finding Opportunities in a Tough Economy



For those over the age of 55, finding meaningful employment can be difficult even in the best of times. For many local seniors, finding a job in

this tough economy can seem to be a hopeless pursuit. However, there is at least one bright spot for Sussex County seniors looking for extra income. It's called **SCSEP** - Senior Community Service Employment Program. This program, which is administered in Sussex County by First State Community Action Agency, specializes in helping seniors prepare for and find employment. And best of all, they're hiring....

SCSEP's mission is to provide employers with trained, motivated, older workers who, because of age, demonstrate talent, experience, responsibility, wisdom, and experience. "We currently have 81 participants in the program and are looking to recruit 17 more," says Roy Hazzard, Program Manager of the SCSEP program.

The SCSEP program provides employment training and work experience for persons 55 years and over who meet the financial guidelines (with limited resources). As a participant, seniors will receive job training and placement and earn minimal wages as well as worker's compensation supplemental to any existing income. In times past, individuals have found jobs in local nonprofits such as libraries, community centers, social services agencies, and other places like First State.

In fact, the national SCSEP has helped millions of Americans find jobs in community service and the private sector. Each year, more than 100,000 participants receive job training and over 20,000 are placed with for-profit, non-profit, state and government employers. In Delaware alone, the SCSEP program at First State has successfully provided employment and training for over 5000 elderly persons within the past 40 years.

For more information on the Senior Community Service Employment Program or to apply, call Roy Hazzard at 302-856-7761 ext 109.

## Children get a Lesson on Seat Belts & Safety



Pictured:  
An airbag  
fires off  
during  
mock crash  
demonstration.

Last March, two dozen students from the La Casita Homework program in Georgetown, DE spent the day taking part in a vehicle safety training course developed specifically to teach young children about the importance of seatbelts, airbags, and vehicle safety laws.

The impromptu training was created in response to the recent van crash in Bridgeville that took the lives of two young girls ages 9 and 12. Neither child was wearing a seat belt.

"La Casita depends on van transportation to take kids home and my hope is that kids are really safety conscious

while they're riding," says Joe McCarron, Program instructor of La Casita. "We want to have a safe program."

Mike Love, an instructor from the University of Delaware, facilitated the training. After the indoor presentation, the kids ventured outside to watch a seatbelt and airbag demonstration given by three officers of the Delaware State Police.

In the crash demonstrations, kids witnessed the possible outcomes of an accident where seat belts are worn and where they aren't. The two passenger dummies, a mid-size adult and infant (in a car seat), were placed in a half-size vehicle - like that of a typical sedan - then flipped around to resemble a crash/collision situation. "When seat belts are worn, the chances of a passenger surviving are greater," said Corporal Mendez. But in cases where seat belts are not worn, even ill-properly worn, the worse case scenario likely oc-

curs—as in the case of 3-yr old Alexis Downes of Laurel who was killed in a car accident back in October 2008. "The impact of a crash can cause a toddler to be thrown from the car," said Mendez in an attempt to drive home the message.

The young onlookers stared in amazement at the mock scenery as one of their peers whispers, "don't be a dummy, wear a seatbelt." For many of their immigrant families, this training may prove to be time well spent. "These kids will take this message home to their parents, most of whom don't speak English and aren't aware of all the driving and safety laws," says facilitator Mike Love. "That's what's important."

Love left the children with advice to take with them to their parents and families. "Remind your parents to put their seatbelts on," Love says. "By simply saying, 'Mom, Dad, I love you so much and I want you to see me grow up' you can save a life."

## Chef Gary Papp Stirring Up Great Things for First State

When our Executive Director, Bernice Edwards, set out to find a new chef/instructor for our "Now We Cooking" vocational food service program, she knew exactly what she wanted and her standards were high. Professionalism. Expertise. Integrity. Commitment. Those qualities were at the top of her list. And, of course, they better know how to cook!

Determined to settle for nothing less than the best, Mrs. Edwards began the search by networking with her peers throughout the DelMarVa area. This was followed by several rounds of advertising in local papers which netted interviews with viable candidates. After six weeks of stirring the pot, she was content to wait and let the cream rise to the top.

The cream of the crop turned out to be Chef Gary Papp - former executive chef at the Buttery Restaurant in Lewes, DE. Chef Papp met all the requirements and then some! And yes, he surely can cook! Chef Papp accepted the position to join the staff at First State Community Action Agency and took over the training program in March of 2009.

In just a few short months, Chef Gary has already had a remarkable impact on the minds, attitudes, and abilities of the young students. And he's brought with him a multicultural experience that is adding new twists and style to Culinary Arts Program. His French-inspired background has given him a unique perspective on culinary teaching methods and he often draws upon this to inspire his students to be creative and skilled cooks.

"I am teaching the students to apply Classic French techniques to contemporary global cuisine," he says. "I incorporate geography, culture, history and math into the daily routine along with utilizing exotic ingredients from around the world." Students have studied cuisines from all over the world including Europe, South America, The Mediterranean, Asia, Polynesia, The Caribbean, and regional U.S. "It's a pleasure to share my knowledge and love for international food," he adds.

"The students are excited!" says MaryAnn Morris, Program Manager of the *Now We're Cooking* Program. "For the first time, they have been introduced to foods from other cultures, preparing fresh ethnic dishes from scratch while learning to appreciate diversity."



Chef Papp is the CEO/ Founder of Essential Chef LLC, a private service offering catering, food-service training & consultation.

And that's not all. Chef Papp's runs the kitchen like a Master Chef, simulating a real restaurant and professional environment that challenges students to develop their skills to the highest level possible. To satisfy the student's craving for sweet delicacies, Chef Gary occasionally invites his wife, Lorraine - a pastry chef - to teach baking techniques.

The results have been nothing short of amazing. Since Chef Gary's arrival, there has been a dramatic improvement in student's knife skills, understanding of healthy foods, food preparation and safety, teamwork, and other job related skills.

"I could not be more proud of the spirit of cooperation and professionalism Gary brings the *Now We're Cooking* Program," says Morris. "He's a wonderful asset to both the program and First State and I look forward to working with him next year."

And while the search is over for Mrs. Edwards, the journey is just beginning for Chef Papp and his students.

## First State Tax Team Bringing Home the Dough!



Nothing is certain but death and taxes and this year's tax season was certainly - well - **taxing!**

The First State Mobile Tax Unit was at it again, providing individuals with free tax preparation services throughout Sussex and Kent county. These services were made possible through the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Campaign, a statewide initiative designed to help individuals with low to moderate incomes save and receive money! The tax team filed federal and state returns for **740 individuals**, creating a cost-savings of hundreds of dollars per person. A total of

over \$1,000,000 dollars in federal refunds and \$840,000 in state refunds was dispersed among these clients. Now that's a lot of dough!

"So many people benefitted and were appreciative of our services," says Traci Spriggs, coordinator of the agency's tax unit. "The response to our services was demonstrated in so many ways—verbally and often through the offering of food for the volunteers. Clients would bring donuts, pizza, and subs throughout the campaign to show their gratitude."

Along with the bountiful rewards of tax reimbursement, the clients were also educated on the importance of saving and having financial goals.

"It is a very rewarding service for the clients and First State Community Action Agency. This is one more way First State Community Action Agency holds true our mission," Says Executive Director, Bernice Edwards.

Congratulations, Tax Team, and Thank you for a job well done!

## Look Who's NEW at First State!



**Mr. Kenneth Morgan**  
Family Resource Coordinator  
*Cars for Careers*

While helping clients obtain reliable transportation for employment, Mr. Morgan will also be responsible for providing *comprehensive* case management, assisting economically challenged families to become self sufficient in the areas of education, employment, housing, transportation, and income with hopes they will become more self-reliant and less dependent upon governmental benefits. That's a tall order but we have confidence in you, Ken! Welcome aboard.

## Local Youth & Organizations Team up to "Kick Butts"



Saturday, March 28, 2009—First State Community Action Agency teamed up with

Georgetown Boys and Girls Club to host a "Kick Butts Day" celebration in Georgetown, DE. Over 160 young people from Sussex County joined thousands of kids across the country to take part in an nationwide, anti-tobacco campaign designed to empower kids to be advocates, leaders, and activists in the effort to stop youth tobacco use.

Part of the celebration included a cigarette butt clean-up which was postponed due to heavy showers. However, the rain didn't dampen the spirits and drive of the youth. Large numbers of kids still congregated in the multipurpose rooms of the Boys & Girls Club to learn about the effects of tobacco and second-hand smoke. Groups performed original songs, dances, and short-skits encouraging their peers to not smoke. The day ended with a mini-carnival and a basketball and chess tournament at the Georgetown Armory.

"This event gave our youth in Sussex County an opportunity to stand out and speak up against something as harmful as tobacco and the devastating impact it has on

one's health, family, community, and the environment," said Sandi Hagans, Program Coordinator of First State's DPN and Afterschool Program at Richard Allen.

**Consider the facts** - Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S., killing over 400,000 people annually; 53,000 people die from second-hand smoke every year. Every day, more than 4,000 kids try their first cigarette; another 2,000 kids become addicted smokers, one-third of whom will die prematurely as a result. In Delaware, 24% of high school students and 45.2% of middle school students smoke cigarettes.\*

The facts speak for themselves. Educational efforts like these are necessary for our communities.

When participants were asked to comment about the event, thirteen year old Kenya Neal remarked, "I thought it was very fun and I learned a lot. I will definitely tell my friends not to smoke, EVER!" Her older sister chimed in. "I mean, Smoking is sooo NOT cool!"

"Our goal is to see our children living

successful, healthy, smoke-free lives." says Bernice Edwards, Executive Director of First State Community Action Agency. "This day, we can say we saw more of them becoming part of the solution and not the problem."

\*Sources: American Lung Assoc., Delaware Division of Public Health, and The Campaign for Tobacco Free kids 2007-2008 reports

Special thanks to the Delaware Division of Public Health's Tobacco Prevention Community Contract. Funding for the Contract is provided by the Delaware Health Fund and managed by the American Lung Association of Delaware.



Youth listen as Volunteer Wanda Hopkins talks to them about smoking.



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**We're on the Web!**  
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*People Helping People Build Community.*

Splashing Up Waves of **FUN**

