Parents join movement to create better future for their children

An immigrant and a grandmother of three children who attend school in City Heights, Seng Vo has served for many years as a volunteer at the Parent Center at Rosa Parks Elementary. She knows about sacrifice and dreams for the future: “We as immigrants, we suffered and sacrificed a lot to come to this country, some of us even gave up our life to find freedom, to come to this U.S. of A., and it’s all because of future of our children.”

Vo and her family, along with other parents and children in City Heights, now have a new partner to help them achieve success. The City Heights Partnership for Children, a new grassroots movement, brings together many community organizations to support parents, children and young adults in City Heights. The California Endowment, United Way of San Diego County, Neighborhood House Association, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, the California Endowment, La Maestra Community Health Centers, and San Diego State University all pledge their support for the City Heights Partnership for Children.

For City Heights families living in poverty and hunger, the upcoming holiday season can be especially tough. It’s American tradition to celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year’s Day, with food and lots of it.

The good news is that a number of nonprofit organizations distribute food – canned goods and fresh produce – in and around City Heights to needy families. Many of these same organizations also help residents apply for CalFresh public assistance, which comes in the form of a debit card that can be used to purchase food at grocery stores and some farmers markets, including the City Heights open-air market which takes place every Saturday 9 a.m.-1 p.m. off University and Fairmount avenues.

We have compiled a list of food providers with details about their programs:

Ayuda disponible para las familias que sufren por falta de alimentos

Por Helen Gao
City Heights Life

Para las familias de City Heights que padecen de pobreza y hambre, las fiestas de fin de año pueden ser particularmente difíciles. Tradicionalmente, en este país celebramos el Día de Acción de Gracias, la Navidad, Hanukkah y Año Nuevo con comida, mucha comida.

La buena noticia es que una serie de organizaciones sin fines de lucro distribuyen alimentos – embutidos y hortalizas frescas – en City Heights y los alrededores, a las familias necesitadas. Muchas de estas organizaciones también ayudan a los residentes a aplicar para el programa de asistencia pública CalFresh, a través del cual se puede utilizar una tarjeta de débito para comprar comida en las tiendas de alimentos y algunos mercados agrícolas, incluyendo el mercado al aire libre de City Heights que se lleva a cabo todos los sábados de 9 a.m. a 1 p.m.
Human Services Agency, San Diego State University and Price Charities have joined forces with public businesses, schools and others. The San Diego Unified School District endorsed the City Heights Partnership for Children at its Oct. 11 meeting.

Like Vo, Rosi Rangel, a mother of two children who lives in City Heights, is excited to about what the Partnership can do for her community. She is a parent representative for the Hoover High School cluster and has been a strong participant in the planning meetings so far.

Her feelings about the Partnership reflect those of many people in the community.

“The Partnership is working from the bottom of our hearts with commitment and as a team,” she said. “We keep the faith and believe that everything achieved with this group will be a legacy to our children, our grandchildren and families, for them to value their community, to work on their community and to work for the community.”

The City Heights Partnership for Children comes at just the right time as all schools are dealing with cutbacks in funding. The Partnership was set up with the belief that teachers and school leaders need the community to be involved in order to achieve the goals that parents want for their children.

“Schools are the heart of a community,” Donna Potter, a first-grade teacher at Heights Elementary School, said. “Parents, students and residents look at us for guidance and support. With money shrinking, our resources are limited. We do what we can, but it is getting harder to meet the individual needs of our children.”

Community organizations have supported City Heights schools for many years. Price Charities, San Diego State University, California Endowment, community health clinics and social service agencies, all have given generously to provide resources to assist families in City Heights. What is different about the City Heights Partnership for Children is the approach: a commitment by more organizations to help out, more coordination of efforts, and more research to identify the best solutions.

The Partnership has 5 goals:
1. Preparing children under the age of 5 to enter kindergarten ready to learn
2. Having all children able to read by the end of third grade
3. Achieving algebra proficiency by the end of eighth grade
4. Guaranteeing that all young adults graduate from high school
5. Preparing young adults to be successful in college or careers after they leave high school

The Partnership will begin with goal No.1: preparing children for success in kindergarten. Many children in City Heights are not attending preschool or are placed in daycare facilities that are not equipped to give them adequate preparation for kindergarten.

There are high hopes that the Partnership will become a model for the region. "We believe it will win and be successful because of the ownership of the teachers, and the students, and the parents, and everybody else who is involved in the Partnership," said Doug Sawyer, president and CEO of the local United Way.

"The initiative is off to a great start." The City Heights Partnership for Children is just beginning, and there is much hard work ahead, but we believe that the combined effort of the community and the partners will put youth on a path toward successful adulthood,” said Price Charities’ Ted Parzen, who helped bring the community together.

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Quotables ...

At the Oct. 11 San Diego School Board meeting, more than a dozen speakers testified in support of the City Heights Partnership for Children. Here are excerpts from their testimonies.

"We have this great saying in Vietnamese: one tree won’t make a hill; with three, we will make a beautiful mountain high.”
— Seng Vo, grandmother, school volunteer, and leader of the Vietnamese parent-teacher association in City Heights

"We have not seen anything like this before you tonight. It is an unprecedented, extraordinary partnership, a coming together of the public and private sector, of various institutions, as you heard, driven by the authentic voice and power of parents and community leaders, and the hopes and dreams they represent for young people.”
— Robert K. Ross, president and CEO of The California Endowment

"The choice of schools as a focal point is a good one. Not only are our schools the one place where all of our children go, school outcomes are highly associated with social outcomes. For children to become successful in school, they must have adequate support in areas of family, safety, financial security and social connections.”
— Paula Ingrum, associate director of The Children’s Initiative

"There is no way that a single site would be able to generate the kind of support and the principals are excited to see what kind of resources this partnership can bring to bear.”
— Joe Austin, principal of Florence Griffith Joyner Elementary School

"In my 28 years as a police officer in this great city, I have never seen the type of collaboration, the type of heart to get things done, that I have seen demonstrated in City Heights. We have today an example of that in this initiative.”
— Capt. Lawrence McKinney, San Diego Police Department’s Mid City Division

"This is a fantastic collaboration of partners coming together, each bringing their skills and energy. How can it not work?”
— Zara Marseljan, CEO of La Maestra Community Health Centers

During the reunion of the Junta Escolar del 11 de octubre, más de una docena de personas se manifestaron en apoyo de la City Heights Partnership for Children. A continuación, transcribimos parte de sus testimonios:

"Los vietnamitas tenemos un gran dicho: un arbol no hace una colina; con tres, podemos hacer una hermosa montaña.”
— Seng Vo, abuela, voluntaria escolar y líder de la asociación de padres y maestros vietnamitas de City Heights.

"Nunca antes habíamos visto algo como lo que presentan estas novedades. Es una extraordinaria alianza sin precedentes, la unión de los sectores públicos y privados, de varias instituciones. Como escuchamos, nos guía la auténtica voz de los padres y líderes comunitarios, y la esperanza y sueños que representan para los jóvenes.”
— Robert K. Ross, Presidente y Director Ejecutivo de The California Endowment

"Escojer a las escuelas como punto focal es algo muy bueno. No solo son las escuelas el único lugar donde asisten todos nuestros hijos, sino que el éxito escolar se asocia con el éxito social. Para que los niños tengan éxito en la escuela, deben tener el apoyo adecuado en sus familias, tener seguridad, estabilidad económica y contactos sociales.”
— Paula Ingrum, Directora Asociada de The Children’s Initiative

"Una sola organización no podría generar este tipo de apoyo y los directores de las escuelas estamos emocionados con los tipos de recursos que la alianza puede ofrecer.”
— Joe Austin, Director de la Escuela Primaria Florence Griffith Joyner

"En mis 28 años como oficial de policía en esta gran ciudad, nunca había visto este tipo de colaboración, este tipo de iniciativa por hacer las cosas, como he visto en City Heights. Hemos tenido la oportunidad de mostrar un ejemplo de este tipo de iniciativa.”
— Capt. Lawrence McKinney, Director Ejecutivo de The California Endowment

"Esta es una fantástica colaboración de aliados que quieren trabajar juntos, cada uno con sus propias fortalezas, para un propósito de energía. ¿Cómo podría fracasar?”
— Zara Marseljan, Directora Ejecutiva de los Centros de Salud Comunitario La Maestra
A dozen homeowners in the Swan Canyon neighborhood of City Heights received an early holiday present from their neighbors — a facelift.

More than 700 volunteers, most either living or working in City Heights, descended upon 46th Street on the morning of Oct. 22 as part of Fall 2011 Facelift to paint fences and homes, haul trash, improve landscaping, and generally work to spruce up the neighborhood. The semiannual event is a joint venture between Community HousingWorks and volunteer groups working in City Heights.

Materials were provided through grants from the City Heights Project Area Committee, businesses and nonprofit organizations. A week earlier, more than 100 volunteers cleared canyon brush as part of Handy Day.

Thank your teacher
With Thanksgiving just around the corner, Mission Federal Credit Union, in conjunction with Cox Communications and Junior Achievement, has made it easy for students to say “thank you” to their teachers.

As part of its “I am thankful for my teacher” campaign, Mission Fed has established a webpage at www.missionfed.com/im-thankful to make it easy for students to submit notes of gratitude online. When the campaign ends on Nov. 30, the notes will be delivered to teachers.

Winning teachers who get the most thank-you notes will receive $150 Visa gift cards. Students of winning teachers will get a classroom party or field trip of their choice, as well as free Junior Achievement financial education classes. Schools with the most thank-you notes will win a $200 award.

Demosle las gracias a nuestros maestros
Como se aproxima el Día de Acción de Gracias, Mission Federal Credit Union, Cox Communications y Junior Achievement, han hecho que sea fácil que los estudiantes les digan “gracias” a sus maestros.

Como parte de su campaña “I am thankful for my teacher”, Mission Fed ha establecido el portal http://www.missionfed.com/im-thankful para que los estudiantes puedan escribir notas de agradecimiento en línea. Al final de la campaña, el día 30 de noviembre, las notas serán enviadas a los maestros.

Los maestros ganadores que reciban más notas de agradecimiento, recibirán tarjetas de regalo VISA de $150. Los estudiantes de estos maestros recibirán una fiesta para toda la clase o un paseo para la clase de su elección, así como clases gratuitas de educación financiera gracias a Junior Achievement. Las escuelas con la mayor cantidad de notas de agradecimiento se harán acreedoras a un premio de $200.

San Diego Unified Council of PTAs offers free training
The San Diego Unified Council of PTAs, along with the California Association of Compensatory Education, will hold a special training session on Nov. 12 to educate parents about the laws governing their school site council.

The training session will be held 9 a.m. to noon at the Ballard Parent Center in Old Town, 2375 Congress St., in San Diego. RSVP by phone at (619) 297-7821, or by email at sducpta@yahoo.com.

Copies of training materials in English and Spanish are available at www.sdcouncilpta.org and will be provided at the event.

El Consejo Unificado de PTAs de San Diego ofrece capacitación gratuita
El Consejo Unificado de PTAs de San Diego, junto con la Asociación de California de Educación Compensatoria, estará ofreciendo una sesión especial de capacitación el día 12 de noviembre para educar a los padres acerca de las leyes que gobiernan al consejo escolar.

La sesión de capacitación será de 9 a.m. a mediodía en el Ballard Parent Center de Old Town, ubicado en 2375 Congress St., en San Diego. Confiere su asistencia por teléfono llamando al (619) 297-7821, o por correo electrónico escribiendo a sducpta@yahoo.com.

El material de entrenamiento en inglés y español está disponible en el portal www.sdcouncilpta.org y también será distribuido el día del evento.

San Diego students’ math score gains tied to testing program
A free math assessment program used in recent years by the San Diego Unified School District to track individual student progress helped boost achievement, according to a new study released in October by the Public Policy Institute of California.

The study analyzed seven years of student data from fall 2001 through spring 2007 and found that academic gains were substantial — enough to move a student from the middle of the pack, at the 50th percentile in math, to the 57th percentile a year later.

The district mandated the use of the course-specific assessments from the Mathematics Diagnostics Testing Project under former Superintendent Alan Bersin. The testing results were used to help math teachers place students in appropriate classes and identify those who should attend summer school.

El aumento del puntaje de matemáticas de los estudiantes de San Diego asociado con el uso de un programa de evaluación
Un programa gratuito para la evaluación de los conocimientos de matemáticas que ha sido utilizado en los últimos años por el Distrito Escolar Unificado de San Diego para monitorear el progreso de cada estudiante ha ayudado a mejorar el rendimiento de los mismos, de acuerdo a un nuevo estudio publicado en octubre por el Instituto de Políticas Públicas de California.

El estudio analizó siete años de información recabada desde el otoño del 2001 hasta la primavera del 2007 y encontró que la mejora académica fue sustancial—lo suficiente como para aumentar el puntaje del estudiante del 50 percentil en matemáticas al 57 percentil un año después.

El distrito hizo obligatorio el uso del programa de evaluación a partir del Proyecto “Mathematics Diagnostics Testing” bajo el ex-superinten- dente Alan Bersin. Los resultados de las pruebas fueron usados para ubi- car a los estudiantes en las clases adecuadas e identificar a los estudiantes que necesitaban asistir a la escuela de verano.

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I have a passion for poor people. They really need our help. I especially love their kids. Some of them come into our clinic without shoes and unkempt. I love them immediately and want to help. You should see how happy they are when I talk with them and repair their teeth. I wish I had a video camera to capture their beaming faces as they leave my dental chair.

I love the City Heights community, and working here at the clinic. I can’t imagine working anywhere else. I could get paid $800 a day working in La Jolla, but this is where I’m needed. This is where I feel at home.

I was born in Vietnam, in a small city near the center of the country called Danang. I have four older sisters and two older brothers. We grew up in a low-income inner-city neighborhood, sleeping on the floor of the one-room house we rented.

By 1979, my father decided it was essential that we leave Vietnam. He saw no opportunity for our family’s survival under the communist regime, let alone the war that was in progress. He knew the military was going to take over family's survival under the war. He saw no opportunity for our family’s survival under the communist regime, let alone the war that was in progress.

Fortunately, our stay there would be relatively short because my father had already obtained our immigration papers to join him in the U.S. By 1979, my father decided it was essential that we leave Vietnam. He saw no opportunity for our family’s survival under the communist regime, let alone the war that was in progress.

My next four years were spent at San Diego City College and San Diego State University taking dental classes and pursuing a degree in biology. Upon graduation from SDSU, I attended the pre-dental training program on scholarship at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. The course lasted two and a half months. From there, I was accepted by the University of Southern California, graduating four years later at the age of 26 as a doctor of dental surgery.

My siblings and I all had four older sisters and two older brothers. We grew up in a low-income inner-city neighborhood, sleeping on the floor of the one-room house we rented. We had no food during the time we were out, and had survived only by measuring a few drops of water each day along with the sugar and lemon juice drops my mother had made for us in preparation for our escape.

We were taken to a camp called Phanat Nikhom, a processing center for Indo-Chinese refugees in in the Chonburi Province. Fortunately, our stay there would be relatively short because my father had already obtained our immigration papers to join him in the U.S. When we first arrived in San Diego, we were in a state of disbelief. We had finally made it.

I immediately enrolled in an English as a second language class at the adult school in City Heights. My English proficiency was poor. While studying English, I took a job as a receptionist in the dental office inside a Vietnamese grocery store. There I witnessed how people in pain could find immediate relief.

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HAMBRE, de P1

las avenidas University and Fairmount. A continuación le ofrecemos un listado de las organizaciones que distribuyen alimentos y le brindamos el resumen de cada programa:

San Diego Food Bank
Teléfono: (866) 350-FOOD
Website: www.sandiegofoodbank.org
San Diego Food Bank administra varios programas de asistencia alimentaria subvencionados por el gobierno federal. Algunas de estas funciones incluyen sus ingresos y producir otros tipos de documentación. Para averiguar si califica, puede llamar directamente al Food Bank.

El Programa Emergency Food Assistance es otro servicio subvencionado por el gobierno federal. Aunque las aplicaciones deben autenticar que sus ingresos están por debajo del 180 por ciento del nivel de pobreza federal y llenar un formulario, incluyendo sus ingresos y cantidad de dependientes, no tienen que entregar ningún otro tipo de documentación. Este programa opera el primer viernes de cada mes de 9 a.m. a 11 a.m. en Church of the Nazarene en Mid City, 4101 University Ave., y en New Hope Seventh-Day Adventist Church, 2420 32nd St.; así como también el primer viernes de cada mes desde las 9:30 a.m. hasta reparar todos los alimentos disponibles, en los departamentos Villa Alta en 4227 32nd St.

Otros sitios de distribución de alimentos de emergencia que operan durante el mes incluyen: Home Start en 5296 University Ave. Suite F2, abierto de lunes a viernes de 9 a.m. a 5 p.m., cerrado el primer viernes de cada mes y los días 24 y 25 de noviembre; Catholic Charities Family Resource Center Mid City, 6184 University Ave., abierto de martes a viernes de 9 a.m. a mediodía y de 1 a 4 p.m. a 3 p.m., cerrado los días 24 y 25 de noviembre.

Los Programas Neighborhood Distribution tienen diez puntos de distribución a lo largo de todo el condado mensualmente. Los más cercanos a City Heights son: Teen Challenge, 5459 Lee St., cerca de 54th Street y University Avenue que distribuye alimentos a los estudiantes de cada mes a las 9 a.m.; y LGBT Community Center, 5909 Centre St., cerca de University Avenue y Park Boulevard que distribuye alimentos el primer martes de cada mes a las 9 a.m.

Además, Food Bank también cuenta con el Programa de Mochilas “Food 4 Kids” para estudiantes de primaria de bajos recursos que no tienen acceso a alimentos durante el fin de semana. El programa no tiene un proceso de aplicación formal sino que se basa en referencias en las escuelas. Cuando se identifica a un niño para el programa, el tutor legal tiene que firmar un permiso para que sea inscrito. En la actualidad, cinco escuelas del área de City Heights–Cherokee Point, Fay, Adams, Edson e Ibarra– tienen niños inscritos en el programa.

Además de ofrecer ayuda alimentaria directa, el Food Bank también ayuda a los residentes de bajos recursos a ayudar con el programa CalFresh, el programa de estampillas de alimentos de California. Los hogares que califican reciben un promedio de $200 en beneficios al mes a través de una tarjeta de beneficios que se parece y funciona como una tarjeta ATM.

The Episcopal Refugee Network
Teléfono: (619) 283-1337
Website: www.sudaneserefugees.com
Episcopal Refugee Network, una organización sin fines de lucro que comenzó ayudando a los refugiados de Senegal y que ha expandido sus servicios para ayudar a refugiados de otras partes del mundo, cuenta con un programa de asistencia de alimentos especialmente adaptado para recién llegados.

El Director Ejecutivo de Network es Major Malou, refugiado que huyó de la guerra de Sudán y llegó a los Estados Unidos en 1995. El programa está afiliado a la Diócesis Episcopal de San Diego y tiene oficinas en City Heights ubicadas en 4305 University Ave. Suite 630, en donde también ofrecen otros servicios, tales como asistencia de vivienda y servicios de traducción.

Jewish Family Service of San Diego
Teléfono: (858) 452-3663
Website: www.feedingamericasd.org
Feeding America San Diego opera la Despensa Juvenil “Hand Up” en St. Paul’s Cathedral, 2728 Sixth St. en el lado oeste de Balboa Park. Se distribuyen alimentos cada jueves de 1 a 3 p.m. Se recomienda que todos los que planean recoger alimentos lleven consigo una identificación legal.

Feeding America San Diego
Teléfono: (858) 452-3663
Website: www.feedingamericasd.org
Feeding America San Diego, parte de la red nacional Feeding America, es un programa de asistencia alimentaria para familias, niños y personas de la tercera edad. Uno de sus programas más importantes es la Despensa Móvil “Metro”, que distribuye alimentos con la ayuda de varias iglesias del área central de San Diego, incluyendo a Church of the Nazarene en Mid City. Se distribuyen tres veces por semana a las 3 p.m., jueves a las 9 a.m. y sábado a las 9 a.m. También puede encontrar el listado completo de los puntos y horario de distribución de la Despensa Móvil “Metro” de Feeding America en su portal.

Al igual que San Diego Food Bank, Feeding America tiene un programa de mochilas para los niños que están en peligro de pasar hambre durante el fin de semana. La actualidad ayuda a 2,400 niños de 20 escuelas a través de todo el condado y está aceptando aplicaciones en su lista de espera. La aplicación está disponible en línea.

La organización también ofrece asistencia para aplicar a CalFresh. Durante la temporada de fin de año, los bancos de alimentos tienden a ver un aumento en la demanda de alimentos. Todos aquellos que tienen la suerte de no necesitar ayuda, deben considerar donar a las agencias que se dedican a luchar contra el hambre.
San Diego Food Bank
Phone: (866) 350-FOOD
Website: www.sandiegofoodbank.org
The San Diego Food Bank administers several federally-subsidized food assistance programs based on income eligibility, as well as the Neighborhood Distribution Program which has no income restrictions.

The federally subsidized programs target special groups, such as seniors, mothers with children and pregnant women. Eligible recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can apply for CalFresh, California’s food stamp program. Qualifying households receive an average of $200 in food benefits per month in the form of an Electronic Benefits Transfer Card, which looks and works like an ATM card.

Besides direct food assistance, the Food Bank helps low-income residents apply for CalFresh, California’s food stamp program. Qualifying households receive an average of $200 in food benefits per month in the form of an Electronic Benefits Transfer Card, which looks and works like an ATM card.
Residents celebrated Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) in the Urban Village Park the Friday before Halloween. The traditional Mexican holiday celebrates friends and family who have died. The City Heights Business Association provided tables and canopies for organizations and residents to create private altars honoring the deceased using sugar skulls, marigolds, and the favorite foods and beverages of the departed. Some monuments also included humorous poems written to living friends and family as though they were dead. The event closed with onstage performances at the Performing Arts Annex. Photos courtesy of Enrique Gandarilla of the City Heights Business Association.
Community HousingWorks está mejorando a City Heights una casa a la vez

Community HousingWorks (CHW) comenzó operaciones en City Heights hace 29 años como un programa para promover la compra de viviendas, embelezamiento del área y restauración de la comunidad. En la actualidad, CHW (anteriormente conocido como Neighborhood Housing Services) continúa su misión y ha expandido sus servicios.

La Directora Ejecutiva de CHW, Sue Reynolds dice que los fundadores de CHW escogieron el área para ofrecer sus servicios porque “City Heights siempre ha sido un vecindario especial”, con una gran cantidad de residencias a precios asequibles. Originalmente, CHW ofrecía préstamos de rehabilitación a los propietarios que querían mejorar la apariencia de su casa propia. El programa evolucionó ofreciendo préstamos a las personas interesadas en comprar vivienda por primera vez y expandió sus servicios a todo el condado. Después de unirse a otra organización sin fines de lucro en el 2002, CHW se expandió en su contorno creciendo y administrando variadas unidades de alquiler. En la actualidad, se ha convertido en una compañía hecha de bienes raíces y firma de préstamos que sigue operando como organización sin fines de lucro.

Demostrando su compromiso con el progreso de City Heights, CHW estará inaugurando una oficina en las avenidas Fairmount y University en enero del 2012, “para demostrar que vale la pena invertir en esta comunidad,” dijo Reynolds. De acuerdo a Reynolds, no existe en la actualidad ninguna inmobiliaria en City Heights que le demuestre a los residentes y visitantes que la comunidad tiene propiedades en venta y que hay personas que quieren mudarse aquí.

Con la caída del valor de las propiedades en los últimos cinco años, algunas personas se preguntan si sigue siendo más deseable ser propietario de una vivienda o rentarla. A pesar de que la decisión de comprar vs. rentar es personal, muchos estudios han demostrado que ser propietario de una vivienda conlleva muchos beneficios sociales y económicos para la comunidad y el propietario.

Reynolds dice que City Heights aumentó en forma constante su tasa de propietarios de residencias durante la década del 90 y del 2000, hasta que el mercado colapsó en el año 2007. City Heights se encuentra en un momento crítico en su historia ya que los juicios hipotecarios

Community HousingWorks begins in City Heights 29 years ago as a home ownership program to remove blight and restore the community to its glory days. Today CHW, formerly known as Neighborhood Housing Services, continues that mission with expanded services.

CHW’s Chief Executive Officer Sue Reynolds says CHW founders chose this area to set up services because “City Heights has always been a special neighborhood,” with its mix of affordable homes. Originally CHW offered only rehabilitation loans to homeowners seeking to improve their owner-occupied residence. The program evolved into offering loans to first-time homebuyers and spread to the entire county. After merging with another nonprofit organization in 2002, CHW expanded into building and operating rental units. Today, it is a full-fledged real estate and lending firm, operating as a nonprofit.

Demonstrating its commitment to improving City Heights, CHW will be opening an office on Fairmount and University avenues in January 2012 to “send a message that this community is worth investing in,” says Reynolds. There are no current real estate store fronts in City Heights to show residents and visitors alike that properties are for sale and people want to move in, according to Reynolds.

With the drop in home values over the past five years, some people are questioning the desirability of owning versus renting. While the decision to rent versus buy is an individual decision, many studies have shown that homeownership brings numerous social and economic benefits to the community and the homeowner.

Reynolds says City Heights made real progress in home-ownership rates throughout the 1990s, but fell off until the market crashed in 2007. Now City Heights is in a critical time as foreclosures have the possibility of destabilizing neighborhoods. Since January 2010, CHW has helped more than 1,900 homeowners fight foreclosure county-wide, more than 100 of those in City Heights. Prior to 2007, Reynolds says foreclosures were virtually nonexistent in San Diego.

One positive aspect of the real estate market crash is that CHW has been able to buy foreclosed homes at discounted prices. It then sells, and rent them to owner occupants for a small profit. The program has benefits for everyone involved. The neighborhood gets improved housing with quality green construction materials. Homebuyers pay a reduced price for their house, and CHW is able to use the profits to invest in the rehabilitation of more homes. The process leads to neighborhood stabilization and community pride.

CHW recently went through a rebranding process to better explain to residents what services it offers. Its new tagline is “Own, Rent, Achieve.” CHW helps people “Own” through down payment assistance programs, rehabilitation loans, foreclosure assistance, direct home sales, and real estate agent services. CHW helps people “Rent” by providing attractive rentals at a cost they can afford, sized to fit their family. CHW owns 29 rental complexes county-wide, with two in City Heights. CHW helps people “Achieve” their dreams by offering access to child care, English as a Second Language classes, exercise programs, as well as adult literacy and financial fitness workshops.

— Staff report

CHW’s next Homebuyer Education class on Nov. 12 is free to City Heights residents, and its next Financial Fitness class is on Nov. 15. Classes are available in English and Spanish. To learn more about services offered by Community HousingWorks, visit www.chworks.org or call the following numbers:

Foreclosure assistance: (619) 282-6647 ext. 5468, or email stopforeclosure@chworks.org.
Homebuyer assistance: (619) 282-6647 ext. 5465, or email homeownership@chworks.org.
Financial fitness: (619) 282-6647 ext. 5465
Affordable housing: (619) 282-6647
City Heights Square is open for business

Walgreens, the first commercial tenant in City Heights Square, welcomed customers on Oct. 14 with a "soft opening." The national retail chain store is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week at the high-traffic intersection of Fairmount and University avenues. Walgreens has street level as well as underground parking and a pharmacy with extended hours, including weekends.

A Walgreens spokesperson said market research showed the area has a growing demand for pharmacies. Combined with the fact there are 92 residential units on the floors above the retail space, Walgreens felt the area was ripe for expansion.

Walgreens is bringing 25 new employment opportunities to City Heights, along with a commitment to being a good neighbor. The store employs a Community Leader whose job is to identify and create local events, such as school supply and toy drives, fundraising walks and health information campaigns.

A grand opening celebration is scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 11. Meanwhile, City Heights Square apartments and its first residents move in on Oct. 28. The apartments offer an array of amenities found in today’s modern housing developments, including granite countertops, custom paint, walk-out patios or balconies, and gated underground parking. Built-in washers and dryers and basic cable TV are included in the rent.

To better serve families, the complex features a rooftop barbecue grill and play area with a clubhouse and computer room. The complex is located within a short walk of public transportation, schools, stores and restaurants. Some three-bedroom units are still available for rental.

— Staff report
Smoke-free housing legislative efforts advance at city and state levels

By Manuel Andrade and Mary Baum
Social Advocates for Youth

The San Diego Smoke-Free Project and the Tobacco Free Communities Coalition receive many calls from people complaining about secondhand smoke inside their apartments. This public health concern has led the Smoke-Free Project and its partners in the health community to work together to find a policy solution to reduce secondhand smoke exposure in apartments and condominiums in the City of San Diego. After gathering data and public opinion about this issue, the Smoke-Free Project made a presentation to the city’s Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee in 2009.

Because of the presentation and public comments from residents, the committee ordered a task force to be formed to explore a policy solution. To get buy-in from those who would be impacted by such a policy, the Smoke-Free Project invited all stakeholders involved in housing matters to participate, including apartment associations, managers, landlords, tenants, researchers, tenants legal rights groups, law firms, and agencies working in prevention.

The task force concluded that a nuisance ordinance would be the best option because it would ensure that the issue would be largely dealt with on a tenant-to-tenant basis with limited enforcement required by apartment managers or owners. The ordinance would serve as a tool that landlords and tenants could utilize to reduce the impact of secondhand smoke or marijuana smoke in apartment complexes. It also could be utilized by tenant legal rights groups as a means to reach agreements between tenants before taking civil action.

The Smoke-Free Project recognizes that emotions run high around this issue. There are conflicting perspectives about smokers’ and non-smokers’ rights, but current state legislation has clarified that it is within the law to restrict smoking in multi-unit settings, including inside units. On Sept. 7, 2011, Gov. Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill 332 into law.

Senator Alex Padilla introduced SB332 to expand the availability of smoke-free housing in California by allowing landlords to prohibit smoking in rental units. “While more than 80 percent of Californians do not smoke, there is currently very little smoke-free housing in California. Living in multifamily housing should not compromise the health of renters or their children. This new law will provide tenants with healthier choices,” Padilla said. The law goes into effect Jan. 1, 2012.

The Smoke-Free Project would like to thank San Diego Councilwoman Marti Emerald for supporting our efforts and working with the city attorney to review the nuisance ordinance submitted to her by the task force. We also would like to thank Senator Padilla for his work on SB332 that will support local municipalities in their efforts to protect multi-unit housing residents from secondhand smoke exposure.

— Manuel Andrade and Mary Baum work for the San Diego Smoke-Free Project at Social Advocates for Youth, also known as SAY San Diego. The nonprofit organization has been in existence since 1971.

Refugee youth from Crawford High School recently completed a three-month, arts-based workshop on food justice that was run by The AJA Project as part of the media collaborative, Speak City Heights. During the final month of programming, students continued to look critically at the issue of food access by photographing, and comparing and contrasting the farmers market in City Heights with the one in Little Italy. They also interviewed parents and elders to get an inter-generational perspective on food security. Finally, they examined photographs in the media related to the famine in Africa and discussed what happens to a society when too many people are hungry.

For some people who were born eating fresh garden foods, [farmers markets are] a better way for them to continue with their farming, and it’s a good way for others to learn how to grow healthy food that have all nutrients.”

Rhema, age 15, originally from Kenya

“I always thought all American food was healthy. It makes you fat so you’re healthy. Because in Africa, if you’re skinny, you’re not healthy. But if you’re fat, then they think you are healthy.”

Meghaney, age 15, originally from Kenya
The Vietnam War also brought Cambodian refugees to City Heights

By Jon Luna
City Heights Life History Columnist

Around the time Vietnamese refugees started settling in City Heights in the 1970s, Cambodians displaced by the Vietnam War also found their way to our community.

Less than half the size of California, Cambodia is located in Southeast Asia, surrounded by Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos. During the Vietnam War, Cambodia tried to maintain neutrality in the hopes that other armies would respect its borders and not fight in its territories. However, the North Vietnamese, supported by communist allies, decided to camp out in the jungles of Cambodia near the Vietnamese border. In its efforts to defeat the communists, the U.S. government began bombing Cambodia, turning it into another battlefront in the Vietnam War.

Upheaval and chaos ensued. Multiple factions within Cambodia warred with one another to gain power. One of those factions was the Khmer Rouge led by the communist revolutionary Pol Pot. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, captured in the movie The Killing Fields, 21 percent of the country’s population, about 1.7 million people, would lose their lives to execution, starvation or disease.

In 1975, the Khmer Rouge attacked the capital, Phnom Penh, and took it over. The city was overcrowded with more than two million refugees displaced by war. As the last few U.S. transport helicopters evacuated people from the city, children observed the evacuation and waved goodbye. The Khmer Rouge shelled the evacuation zone, firing mortars into crowds of people.

During the 1980s, more than 114,000 Cambodians immigrated to the United States with large concentrations settling in Stockton, Long Beach, Los Angeles, and a fraction coming to San Diego, specifically City Heights.

Some of the earliest Cambodian refugees came to the U.S. because of groups known as Voluntary Resettlement Agencies, or VOLAGs. These agencies were often affiliated with American churches. They were originally set up in 1975 to assist with the first wave of Vietnamese refugees. VOLAGs were abundant in City Heights. They took on the responsibility of finding sponsors who would assume financial and personal responsibility for refugee families.

Refugees are overwhelmingly resettled in metropolitan areas with large foreign-born populations, such as City Heights. It makes sense because they need access to local, state, and federal support to help them succeed economically and socially. Affordable housing, health care, and access to jobs – essential to refugees’ survival in a new country – are more easily found in metropolitan areas.

City Heights was a welcoming environment for the Cambodian refugees. By the time they arrived here, the first wave of Vietnamese refugees had already blazed a trail for immigrants from all over the world to make their home here.

— Jon Luna is a first-generation Filipino-American who was raised in City Heights. A San Diego State University graduate, he still lives in City Heights and works regularly as a substitute teacher at Hoover High School and other City Heights public schools. He is also pursuing a master’s degree in history from the University of San Diego.

Art students beautify the Boulevard

By Beryl Forman
El Cajon Boulevard Business Improvement Association

The El Cajon Boulevard Business Improvement Association (BIA) started a pilot recycling program in 2009 by placing 10 recycle bins on the Boulevard. Noticing the recycle bins looked similar to the trash bins, the Association got the idea to bring more art to the Boulevard and help identify the recycling bins from the trash bins located next to them. They worked with graphic art students at San Diego State University to develop several options.

The original intention was to choose only one design, but the BIA Board was so impressed they decided to select three student designs. Congratulations to Kristin Hardy, Sonya Calderon, and Cat Hunt for providing creative design work which greatly enhances the Boulevard’s garbage and recycling bins.

The bins are reclaimed standard city trash bins with a custom fabricated top. In the coming months the Association is expanding the number of recycling bins to 20. Photos courtesy of the El Cajon Boulevard Business Improvement Association.
Christmas tree and poinsettia fundraiser

With the holidays coming up, there is a great way to make a donation and get something in return to brighten your house in time for Christmas. The La Maestra Foundation is hosting a Christmas tree and poinsettia sale to raise money to support its health centers and community development programs in City Heights and elsewhere.

Noble fir trees that stand four to eight feet tall require a donation of $25 to $40. Potted poinsettia plants in a variety of colors and sizes — locally grown, from the well-known Paul Ecke Ranch — require a donation of $8 to $25. Donations are tax-deductible.

Plants and trees will be available from Nov. 28 through Dec. 23, or until they are sold out. Pre-orders to ensure availability will be accepted through Nov. 23. For pre-orders, call (619) 584-1612 ext. 3021 or email gsosa@lamaestra.org. Ask about delivery and post-holiday hauling services.

Submit events to editor@cityheightslife.com.

We want to hear from you!

Please submit photos taken in City Heights to editor@cityheightslife.com to be included in our Community Photo Showcase! Story ideas, articles, letters to the editor and comments are also welcome.