News From the Heights

4th Annual Family Literacy Night

By Alyssa Kenney

For the fourth year in a row Kennedy Heights Community Center hosted our “Family Literacy Night” on Thursday October 23rd. This year over eighty children and thirty adults from the community came out for an evening of fun literacy activities, dinner, and the opportunity to receive free books.

Upon arriving at the community center children received a cloth bag and then proceeded from room to room and activity to activity learning new things, practicing literacy skills and earning books for their participation. The activity areas were hosted by the Madison Public Library, Kennedy Heights Girls Inc., Lindbergh Elementary school, Kennedy Heights’ PASS AmeriCorp member and our Youth program. Books were provided by First Book, Lindbergh Elementary school and other donors.

After a community spaghetti dinner, families gathered for a brief program that included an introduction of staff and board members, a brief talk from Mary Hyde, the new principal at Lindbergh Elementary school, and a literacy skit written and performed by Girls Inc. participants.

Thank you to all the families, staff, donors, and board members that made the evening possible and successful.

Youth Program Volunteers

By Methuselah Thao

On October 18, 2008 Tong and I came to the center at 11:00 o’clock in the morning. We went to Kennedy Heights and helped Roy with books for Literacy Night. Roy found two stories and replaced the names with blanks. Tong and I worked on finding pictures that matched the page or description. When Roy printed the pages, Tong and I put the books together using yarn. We also played on the computer.

When Literacy Night finally came, the older boys in middle school came volunteered. Our neighbors arrived around 6 o’clock on October 23, 2008 at the Kennedy Heights Center for Literacy Night. Literacy night is a night when our neighbors come with their children and get books and food. There were games to keep the kids entertained like letter bingo. We gave books to little children. We wrote their names in the blanks to give them a book in which they were the main character and we gave out another book. After every one went home we cleaned up and left.

The reason for Literacy Night is to get most every kid to start reading, and to meet our neighbors.
Note from the Executive Director

This is the final edition of our newsletter for 2008. At the beginning of 2008 staff and board members set a number of goals for the year. The center’s goals for 2008 were to 1. Be greener 2. Host more community events that engage parents and teachers and 3. To purchase a new van. I am happy to report that we have accomplished our goals. In 2008 the community center eliminated the use of styrofoam cups, plates, and bowls from all of our programs and decreased our trash output. The center hosted two successful community events that were well attended by children and parents. And we purchased a “newer” van. We did this in addition to the great programs and quality services that we already provide to the community. We couldn’t have done it without you!

So many people and organizations play a critical role in all of our success—volunteers, funders, donors, area businesses, community members, friends, supporters, staff and board members. Despite economic challenges and increasing demand on so many of our services 2008 has been a great year in the neighborhood. Without your help 2008 would not have been a success. Thank you for making Madison a stronger community, Kennedy Heights a great neighborhood, and the lives of so many people so much more full.

Meet Our New AmeriCorps Member

By Mai Houa Vue

Greetings, Kennedy Heights Community!

My name is Mai Houa Vue and I am the new AmeriCorps member at KHCC. I work with the fourth and fifth grade After School Program and with Girls Inc. I recently graduated from UW-Madison with a bachelor’s degree in Consumer Science. After 4 years of college, I decided to take a break from school to get my feet wet. The reason I joined Americorps is because I enjoy being part of the community volunteering, working, and learning. My previous work with youth and children has led me to the position I am in today. My hope is that I will be able to make a positive impact on the kids who come to the center and in turn, I will become a better leader and mentor through working with them. My time at Kennedy Heights has been rewarding and fun thus far and I anticipate it to continue for the rest of my term. Please feel free to stop by the center to introduce yourself. I look forward to meeting and getting to know everyone!
News From the Heights

Girls Inc Enjoy Hotdogs and S’mores

By Christina Yang and Kelly Hongmanivahn

One of our favorite trips this year was to Picnic Point with the Sierra Club’s Inner City Outings. We had to hike all the way out to the end, which is where we had a campfire. While we were out there, we found a tree that looked like it had been blown over by a tornado and was hanging out over the water. It was so fun climbing out onto it, looking at the capital all lit up, and making duck noises. We wanted to sit out there for hours. After a little while, it was time to cook hotdogs over the fire and drink apple juice. While we were eating some of the girls told ghost stories. After dinner, we cooked marshmallows to make s’mores. They tasted so good!

Volunteer Spotlight

By Roy LaValley

As the Youth Program Coordinator at the KHCC, I have been extraordinarily lucky to have Jeff Peterson volunteering with my program since shortly after the school year started. Jeff has been coming on Wednesday nights to help with our media literacy unit. With as many as 12 kids looking up news stories, editing them, and filming them, Jeff’s help has been invaluable.

Jeff is a Junior at UW-Madison majoring in Political Science. He heard about our program through his service learning class. Jeff said, “After hearing about the programs offered at Kennedy Heights I knew that it was the type of positive environment that I wanted to be placed in.”

“I have found the staff to be highly competent and helpful in enabling me to see the great work being done at the center for the kids and for the community at large. My interaction with the boys and girls of the center has been truly enlightening.”

Jeff also helped to make our Literacy Night a success by helping our Youth Program volunteers to make books for the younger kids that came in.
Devil’s Lake Hiking Trip

By Jordan Jerry & Mary Hooser

At the beginning of October, Girls Inc. went hiking at Devil’s Lake. It took us almost an hour drive to get there. We had lunch by the lake and then went for a hike. We hiked almost all the way up to the top of the rock stairs. At the top we could see over the pretty lake. When we were up there we stood on a big rock and Lisa took our picture with the lake in the background. We were very careful climbing up because some of the rocks were steep and slippery in places. After the long climb down, we were tempted to jump into the lake because it was a pretty hot day and the lake looked so beautiful.

Madison Community Foundation Supports Computer Lab Upgrade

Many Kennedy Heights community members depend on our community technology center for computer use, technology education, and Internet access. Each day adults, youth and children use the lab to complete homework, search for employment, keep in touch with family, and many other everyday needs. In the past our computer lab was unsupported by staff, slow, and occasionally unable to meet the needs of community residents.

Over the past year the community center has been offering beginner computer classes for adults in English and Hmong; project based technology workshops for middle school youth and extended public access hours. Recently the computer lab upgrade was completed. The lab now has new monitors, additional software, improved networking hardware, and more workstations for residents. The community technology center program has been generously funded by the Madison Community Foundation and private donors. Without their support our computer lab would not serve the Kennedy Heights community so well.

Some space is still available in the Tuesday evening adult class, contact Lo Chang at 244-0767 for more information or to sign up.

Target Foundation Supports Everyone Reads Program

Kennedy Heights Community Center recently received a Target Foundation grant to support literacy activities with our Early Childhood and After School programs. The generous support from Target will help fund community literacy events, regular reading programs, and ensure that the center has adequate materials to support literacy activities for all children in the neighborhood. The Target Foundation grant supported our recent Family Literacy Night community event.
News From the Heights

Jody Schmitz Retires

By Alyssa Kenney

For the past 23 years Jody Schmitz has been an active part of the Kennedy Heights team, she began her tenure at Kennedy Heights as a social work intern and helped to organize the building of the community center. She also has worked as the Executive Director, Volunteer Coordinator and Adult Program Coordinator. Jody has brought many new and wonderful things to the Kennedy Heights Community over the course of her long tenure.

Jody started the community theater program that connects Kennedy Heights residents to performing arts throughout the area. Jody also helped community members to found the Women’s Group which has organized knitting groups, sewing circles, health discussion groups, cooking and nutrition classes and published a cookbook.

One of Jody’s most significant contributions to the community is the weekly food pantry. Jody recruited the volunteers and put the systems in place to start a successful pantry which serves over 80 families every year and has been continuously running for the past ten years.

In addition to all of her program contributions Jody has been a support person for adults in the community. Many adults regularly stop by and talk with Jody about their lives and their concerns.

While Jody’s regular presence will surely be missed, she plans to continue to volunteer and to join the center’s

Girls Inc. Wins Fit Kids Award

By Alyssa Kenney

On Saturday, September 6th Kennedy Heights’ Girls Inc. group participated in the Fit City Challenge Fun Run. Twelve Kennedy Heights girls completed one loop around the Capitol Square and finished their race by crossing the Ironman Wisconsin finish line on Martin Luther King Blvd.

After the race the girls participated in the Fit Kids Celebration on Monnoa rooftop. The girls heard the mayor speak about the importance of physical activity, showed off their double-dutch skills and served as volunteer face painters for younger children.

Kennedy Heights’ girls high participation in the event won them a Fit City Fun Run award from the Wisconsin Sports Development Corporation. Congratulations to our fit girls.
Would you Like to Learn Hmong? Would you Like to Teach Hmong?

By Alyssa Kenney

Dennis Lincoln recently stopped by to chat with me about his hopes for the center in the next year. One of the things that Dennis thinks the community center should try to offer in the next year is classes or workshops that would teach Hmong language to residents and staff that are interested in learning. Dennis went on to explain that he feels like it would really help the community if neighbors knew how to greet and thank each other in different languages. He feels that it is important for English speaking community members to reach out and learn a little more about the language and the culture of their Hmong neighbors.

Staff at the community center agree. We think it would be great for the community center to offer a Hmong language class for beginners, but we need two things for this to be successful. 1. We need enough people that are interested in learning Hmong that would be available the same time each week. 2. We need a volunteer teacher, someone that would be willing to work with a group of absolute beginner once a week for six or eight weeks. Are you interested in becoming a student? Might you be able to be a teacher? Please call Alyssa at the center 244-0767, if we can get enough interested people we can make this happen.

Early Childhood Program News

By Nicole Cummings

"What's my job going to be today?" is the first question you will most likely hear in the preschool room each morning. Having "jobs" each day builds critical thinking, independence, language and pre-reading skills. Watering our plant, helping set the table for breakfast, and being the calendar counter are a few of the most coveted "jobs".

We have acclimated to the changing seasons, exploring the simple joys which fall offers: collecting & sorting leaves, finding "stars" inside apples, and scooping out pumpkins/gourds. After roasting and tasting pumpkin seeds, our preschoolers reported varying reviews: "it tastes like popcorn", "it's good", "I like them", "it's yucky", "these are nasty", "they're salty, I think they taste good." (You never know what you like or don't like until you try!)

A big THANK YOU for all of those who were able to attend our Family Literacy Night - it was a busy, yet successful evening. Thank you to all of our volunteers!

The biggest news in the Early Childhood Program is the installation of our very own toilet in the classroom. This may seem uneventful, but when you are 3, 4, or 5 years old - it's a big deal! An enormous THANK YOU to our friends at United Way. Because of you, we will now have more time to provide one on one learning opportunities. Thank you!
News From the Heights

Asian Outreach Hosts Financial Literacy Night

Hnub tim Friday December 5th Qhov chaw pab cov neeg Exias yuav muaj ib pluas hmo noj thiab muaj ib tus qhua Kabzoua Moua tuaj nram Dane County Extension tuaj nws yuav tham txog niyag txiag, kev cia niyaj thiab kev siv nyiaj. Kawm txog koj tsev neeg yuav txuag niyaj li cas rau cov hnub so caij so thiab txhua txhua hnuv siv niyaj. Kawm txog seb muaj kev pab li cas rau koj thiab koj tsev neeg yuav haisun koj muaj lus nug txog kev siv niyaj kev cia niyaj (ces kav tsij tuaj). Peb muaj hmo pub dawb rau nej noj peb pab zov nej cov menuam, Yuav muaj sij hawm ntau heev rau nug thiab tham txog sawv daws. Tos txais txhua txhua tuj neeg tuaj koom.

By VamMeej Yang

On Friday December 5th the Asian Outreach Program will host a dinner with special guest Kazoua Moua from Dane County Extension who will speak on money issues, budgeting and financial literacy. Learn about how your family can budget for the holiday season and everyday life. Learn about resources available to you and your family if you have financial questions or need budgeting assistance. A full dinner and child care will be provided, there will be plenty of time to ask questions and talk with your neighbors. All are welcome.

Upcoming Community Center Events

November 13th & 14th
The Early Childhood and After School Programs are closed for construction of a new bathroom.

November 20th
The Board of Directors meets from 5:30—7:30 all residents welcome. Childcare provided.

November 24th
Turkey baskets are distributed from 1:00—6:00 PM for families that pre-registered.

RSVP will host a Folk Art Fair for children and families from 3:00—5:00 PM. Come learn about traditional arts and get hands on experience trying new things like wood carving, yo-yoing and more. Refreshments provided.

November 27th & 28th
Center is closed for Thanksgiving holiday

December 5th
Financial Literacy Workshop and Dinner in Hmong 5:30—7:30

December 24th—28th
Center Closed

Dec. 31st—Jan. 4th
Center Closed

January 5th 2009
Regular programming resumes.

Editor: Alyssa Kenney

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More Photos From Family Literacy Night