

I N T E R N A T I O N A L I N S T I T U T E

Serving immigrants and refugees since 1921

Fall/WInter 2003

IN THIS ISSUE:

PAGE 1

*Refugee Arrivals

PAGE 2

*Executive Director Remarks

PAGE 3

*82 Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors

PAGE 4

*Alumni Corner:
Councilman Miguel Luna
*ICS News
*Draw Your Own
Conclusions

PAGE 5

*Myth Vs. Fact:
Immigrant Workers
Freedom Ride

Arrival of Liberian Refugees Galvanizes Community

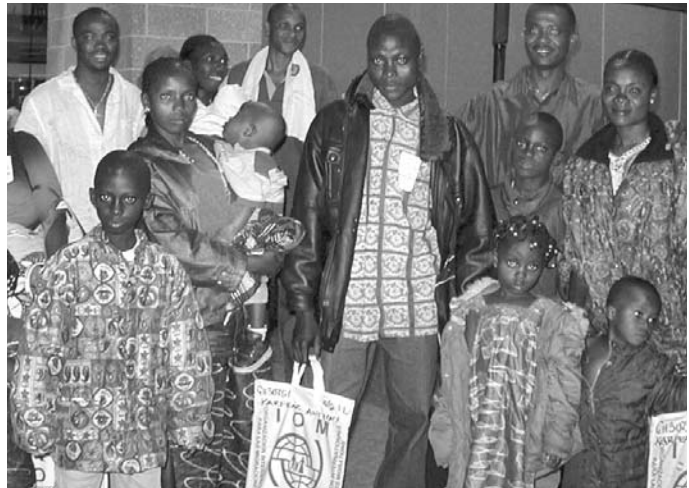
Civil unrest and civil war have raged in Liberia since 1979. Liberians have suffered through a ravaging of their economy, large-scale loss of family members, and displacement. During this time, a number of Liberians have successfully resettled in Rhode Island and have thrived. Refugee Resettlement Director Betty Johnson-Simons often marvels at not only how quickly Liberians have found meaningful employment and become homeowners—sometimes within two years—but also at their ethic of community reinvestment.

Beginning in September, this ethic has been thoroughly tested by the sudden arrival of 68 most at-risk

and vulnerable Liberians within a three-week period. Most of the new arrivals came with nothing but plastic bags containing their documentation. Unlike previous Liberian arrivals, many do not have family members who can help them adapt to life in this country. As Johnson-Simons emphasizes, “These were unexpected arrivals. They present a lot more challenges than the usual family reunification cases. We did not have time to prepare adequately for their arrival.”

Into this breach stepped the RI Liberian community, and with extra-human effort put forth by the Resettlement staff, sev-

eral area churches, the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, the Providence Schools Department, medical providers, and countless numbers of volunteers, the new refugees are getting settled. Resettlement Coordinator Terri Coustan offers this assessment: “The refugees have come out of a state of confusion and have established a trusting relationship with their case managers and are not as frightened and confused.” This progress is no small thing. Program



Above: Three Liberian Families arrive in Providence on September 12th

Assistant Firewoine Kassahun observes, “It’s been a very hard job even in terms of communication. The refugees come from different circumstances. They don’t necessarily trust the caseworker’s advice right away. Little by little, they are beginning to understand and adjust.”

The inspiring community effort is helping the Resettlement Department prepare for the anticipated arrival of 100 more Liberian refugees. The department has identified two crucial needs: first, cash donations to help purchase bedding and essential items for the next arrivals; and two, employers who are willing to train and employ the first wave of arrivals.

**INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
OF RHODE ISLAND**

Board of Directors

Isabelle Hunter, *President*
Ralph Posner, *First Vice President*
Robin Torbron Warde, *Second Vice President*
Charles D. Champagne, *Treasurer*
Carol Thomas, *Assistant Treasurer*
Lillian McGee, *Secretary*
Joachim Weissfeld, *Assistant Secretary*
Cynthia Mlyniec, *Immediate Past President*
Roberto Gonzalez
Anne Maxwell Livingston
Virginia da Mota
Alan Neville
Tze-Ping Ng

Representative Steve Costantino
Margaret Crosby
Kas DeCarvalho
Christopher Downs
Andrea J. Loup
Cate Roberts
Augusto Rojas
Russell Robinson
Friedrich St. Florian
Hillary Salmons
Genie Shao
Warren Simmons, Ph.D.
Melissa Trapp-Mulhearn
William Twaddell
Priscilla Wormwood

William Shuey
Executive Director

The Feinstein Center for Citizenship
& Immigration Services:
401-784-8644

Interpreting & Translating:
401-784-8625

Education & Training:
401-784-8637

Refugee Resettlement &
Minority Health Promotion:
401-784-8611

Employment Services:
401-784-8649

Development & Communications:
401-784-8628

Executive Director Remarks

Shuey Speaks:

“My continuing passion would be not to point a finger in judgment, but to part a curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other’s presence, each other’s wonder, each other’s human plight.”
—Eudora Welty, *One Time, One Place*

This issue marks the debut of a regular feature interview of distinguished alumni of the International Institute. For this debut, Providence Councilman Miguel Luna reflects on his long association with the Institute and shares his vision for the city. Among his many insights, he raises three issues that resonate quite strongly with us at the Institute: the natural inclination of human beings to migrate in order to satisfy their self-sufficiency needs; the expanded perspective that results from leaving one’s home; and the necessity of applying that perspective for the common good.

At the Institute, we see Councilman Luna’s formula in practice on a daily basis through family reunification, a family’s journey towards citizenship, or construction of EI/Civics projects in English classes. Our clients come from all over the globe in search of safer or more prosperous lives, and a large majority return to the Institute on

behalf of friends or to volunteer, or in some cases, to work in order to give back in the form of services for the next generation of RI newcomers. Staff members, clients, and concerned volunteers share perspectives and form small communities in the name of mutual self-sufficiency. We learn from each other every day as we overcome the challenges posed by relocation into the United States.

Since the beginning of September, we have witnessed this kind of community mobilization to help us with the rapid influx of 68 Liberian refugees, the warm response from well-wishers after the unfortunate fire at the International Charter School playground, and the sheer joy expressed by charter school students who are developing their skills in two languages while being part of a successful academic program. Together, our actions shout down the words of talk show cynics and enable the best part of America: its generosity and the times when it welcomes new people and new ideas.

William Shuey
Executive Director



Top: Rima Al Habal gains U.S. citizenship



Bottom: IIRI students with Governor Carcieri at graduation

(Continued from pg.1)

Employment Case Manager Jessica Schweiger sees resettlement in two phases: “The first several weeks present transportation and paperwork issues and can get quite chaotic. After this, the long-term challenge of self-sufficiency begins.” Recently, a Rhode Island-based roofer has offered to train and

provide entry-level employment for several refugees. While logistics must be worked out, Ms. Schweiger is excited and hopes to hear from other concerned employers in the near future.

If you would like to make a cash donation or can provide employment-related assistance, please call Resettlement Coordinator Terri Coustan at 401-784-8607.

82nd Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors

Keynote Calls for Expanded Refugee Assistance

Keynote speaker Lavinia Limón, Executive Director of the Immigrant and Refugee Services of America, delivered a rousing keynote address that questioned the state of apathy in Washington toward refugee and immigrant assistance. Noting that only 26,000 of an allocated 70,000 refugees have been admitted into the United States over the past year, Ms. Limón asked, “If freedom is dangerous to those who take rights from refugees, then what can we say about our response to attack? Is freedom dangerous to us?” Ms. Limón, who has worked with refugees domestically and abroad for over twenty years, extolled refugees and immigrants as not people to fear, but as people who embody the American spirit of enterprise. Having recently returned from a trip to Iraq, she took time to recognize a similar spirit pervading among Iraqis today and gave special commendation for the individual American and British troops working with them. The troops were, she said, always extremely respectful, helpful, and genuinely concerned about the welfare of the Iraqis themselves.



Far Left: Keynote Speaker Lavinia Limon.

Left: IIRI board members Joe Weissfeld & Cindy Mlyniec



Above: Priscilla Wormwood, John Ricottilli, and Bill Shuey mingle at the Annual Board of Directors meeting.



Above: Good friends Rep. Steve Costantino & Community Leadership Award Honoree Rep. Thomas Slater

Multinational Photo Exhibit Opens

The Annual Meeting also marked the opening of “Global Faces: Hearts, Souls, and Cultures,” a photo exhibit documenting cultural anthropologist Dr. Bili Mason’s many travels overseas from 1954-2000. The photo exhibit, sponsored by the International Gallery of Heritage and Culture, provides 35 oversized color images of soul-probing portraits of elders, children, and exotic scenes from eighteen different countries. The exhibit will be at the Institute weekdays through December and admission is free.

Outstanding Rhode Islanders Named

Outstanding Rhode Islanders honored at the International Institute for their exemplary community efforts include Lynn Kramer and Melissa Trapp-Mulhearn, Neil Steinberg, Cate Roberts, and Senator Jack Reed. Each of these honorees received special appreciation awards. Rhode Island Representative Thomas C. Slater received the Community Leadership Award for his efforts on behalf of the residents of the Southside Neighborhoods of Providence. Finally, this year’s recipient of the prestigious Nelly Ayvasian Volunteer Award was Craig d’Ambra, who served on the Institute Board of Directors for more than fifteen years, distinguishing himself as a past Board President and a key leader of a highly successful capital campaign.

*Special thanks to the nearly 100 people in attendance representing Institute staff, friends, and partners. Among the attendees were Lieutenant Governor Charles Fogarty, Providence Mayor David N. Cicilline, and Providence City Councilman Miguel Luna.

Alumni Corner- Miguel Luna



Above: Miguel Luna on Avencemos

Freshman Providence City Councilman Miguel Luna's long history with the Institute begins with his mother's enrollment in classes and continues with his tenure as a student and teacher. During the interview, the Councilman noted the irony of a Providence, whose new leadership reaches out to immigrants and underserved people and a national leadership that appears to create obstacles.

On being an immigrant: "When I was coming to the United States, I had two jobs plus I was doing volunteer work. Then when there was no work, I came to the International Institute. I met Bill Shuey and these people—the Institute staff and all of the students there—became my family. My family was in the Dominican Republic. At the Institute, I was able to work a lot with people and learned about different countries. I learned the history of the blacks, the Italians, the Irish, the Portuguese, and the Jewish, and tried to learn their struggle. Okay, so, I thought: how can we Latinos learn from the past of somebody else as opposed to having to repeat it."

On immigration: "When they get assimilated, people tend to forget their heritage, that there were no Italians allowed in this place, or there were no blacks allowed in that other place. I think that people tend also to lose stuff out of their own history. You know, have you gone back and traced how your ancestors came to this country? In order to understand your history, you have to leave or you have to return to your place of origin. This helps you to understand the impact. When you forget where your ancestors came from, it's a dishonor to the struggle, a rejection of who you are, and what makes this country strong, in

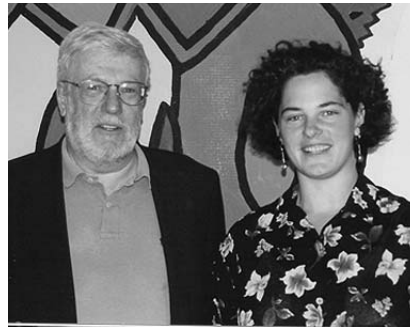
(Continued on pg. 5)

Building Excellence in Pawtucket

Over the summer, after an international search, the International Charter School found a new director: Julie Nora. Bilingual in English and Spanish with a working knowledge of French and Portuguese, Ms. Nora brings expertise to her position as a leader in education reform, bilingual education, and classroom practice. She established herself as an ESL teacher in Rhode Island and California and as an Equity and Diversity Program Planning Specialist at Brown University.

Of her hiring, Charter School Board President William Shuey says, "We feel fortunate to have someone of Julie's caliber to head the school. We anticipate the next several years to be filled with great academic achievement by the students and

unprecedented growth for the school." Ms. Nora emphasizes that her role is one of cultivation as she extends the groundbreaking work of her predecessor, Deborah Schimberg. Among the school's existing assets she lists three highlights: community interest as reflected in capacity enrollments, waiting lists, and eager parents; an innovative dual-language curriculum that is additive of heritage cultures and language rather than subtractive; and a newly renovated building. Since her hiring, the charter school received confirmation of one more asset: academic performance. In its first round of third grade testing, the school ranked among the upper half of elementary schools for the state and well above average among schools in its service districts of Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls.



Above: William Shuey and new ICS Director Julie Nora

DRAW YOUR OWN CONCLUSIONS . . .

This edition of Draw Your Own Conclusions highlights the round-the-clock community effort supporting the recent resettlement of Liberians from the Ivory Coast.

Total number of Liberian refugees resettled from 9/10/03-10/15/03 and number of children placed by the Providence School Department: 68 and 33

Average total number of staff and volunteer hours spent per day during this time period: 165

Estimated numbers of volunteers, volunteers on the waiting list, and churches offering cultural mentoring assistance: 125, 20 and 5

Estimated poundage of clothing donated since 9/10/03 and average pounds per refugee: 1000 and 14.7

Total dollars as of 10/15/03 donated & number of cash donors: 1,960 and 30

Total dollars donated by the Rhode Island Foundation through their Basic Human Needs Fund: 5,000

Ratio of involved community members to refugee arrivals: 3 to 1

A special thank you to the following organizations whose contributions are not easily quantified: Liberian Association, RISE Clinic, Providence Mayor David Cicilline and staff, Hasbro Children's Clinic, Miriam Hospital and Adult Clinic, Providence School Department; Providence-area Realtors and Landlords.

(Alumni Continued from pg.4)

terms of who we are as a country. Who [has the right] now to speak of the immigrants coming over and not remember the history of their own struggle?

America is made of a lot of people coming from different countries, differing ideas, different languages but with one concept of freedom. People tend to immigrate; it's natural to move to look for a better life. Wherever we are, we are all immigrants, just as the Indians followed the buffalo and the Africans kept moving to where the water was."



Miguel Luna and his mother at IIRI in 1986

On Providence: "We are living in exciting times. We have a new mayor and a new vision for how the city should be behaving. We have a new city council reflecting on the past and becoming more proactive and also wanting to be part of, not the old, but the new Renaissance. These different visions that we bring as immigrants make this city an exciting place to live. In my street, I have African Americans, East Asians, Whites, Latinos, Native Americans, and Africans. So, it's a different way of thinking, not only that someone comes from another country. It's not just bringing people together, but a challenge to one another. What is the best way? We bring all different ways of thinking, different experiences. What is the best way to grow the city? If the city invests in the communities, should we invest in those areas, especially those in deplorable conditions, to attract people from the outside or should the city improve the quality of life of the people already living here 25-30 years? In the city council and in the agencies, that has brought an exchange of ideas and a struggle about the best way of looking at things. It's exciting but there are challenges . . . in terms of the school system, how do you educate a Latino vs. an American? What are the different approaches? This challenge is the excitement."

Myth Vs. Fact...

Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride (IWFR)

MYTH:

The goal of the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride is "to erase the legal basis of citizenship and allow the free flow of tens of millions of Mexicans into this nation with no controls at all." —Terry Anderson, *LA Times*, 10/4/03

FACTS:

*The IWFR was organized by a coalition of immigrant's rights and labor organizations to call attention to inequities in legislation and labor practices regarding immigrant workers.

*The IWFR has a broad "five-point agenda: a new legalization process for undocumented workers; an accessible 'path to citizenship'; a commitment to family reunification for immigrants waiting for relatives abroad; extension of labor protections to all workers; and strengthening of civil rights and liberties to insure equal treatment of immigrants." —Julia Quiroz-Martínez, *The Nation*, 10/27/03

***The following is a first-hand account of the Freedom Ride from Catharine Hellwig, Executive Assistant at the Institute, illustrating one woman's struggle with the citizenship accessibility issue:**

They poured off the bus in a seemingly endless stream waving banners. Songs and chants filled the air "Olé, olé, olé! Freedom Ride!" "¿Qué queremos? ¡Justicia!" The Boston bus of the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride arrived in Providence en route to stops in Connecticut, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and then Washington, DC, where the 18 buses would meet and caravan to Liberty State Park (NJ) and a mass rally in New York City.

The hours on the bus together allowed us to become a family. A fellow rider spoke with conviction of her nephew killed off of the shores of Florida while seeking a better life during a violent time in Haiti. "Auntie," he said as he asked her to lend him money for the fateful trip, "I am dying slowly here- a little every day. It is my only choice." So many Freedom Riders- from 16 different countries on our bus- had similar stories. The individuals that I rode with demonstrated humility, optimism, and above all strength. As she finished, my Haitian friend promised that she would never give up her personal battle with the struggle waged in the name of her nephew: "If the bus breaks down, I will walk, and when I can no longer walk, I *will* crawl."



Above: The New York City Immigrant Workers Freedom Rally



The International Institute of Rhode Island, Inc.

645 Elmwood Avenue
Providence, RI 02907
www.iiri.org

tel: 401.467.5940 fax: 401.467.6530



NON-PROFIT
ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 564
PROVIDENCE, RI

**Welcome To The Following New
Staff Members:**

Elizabeth Jardine
HRIC Workforce Investment Facilitator

Karen Marsh
FIP World of Work Caseworker

Patricia Haskell
Fiscal Director

With Gratitude:

Fleet Works
For kindly painting our facility

**BankRI, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers,
and Women & Infants Hospital**
For their wonderful donations to the new
Liberian refugees resettled in September

CVS/pharmacy
For generously donating office furniture to both our
sites in Providence and Pawtucket

Congratulations:

Refugee Resettlement Program
For receiving a community category Alpha Award from
the National Job Corps Association