



International Institute Rhode Island

Newsletter

Serving immigrants and refugees one family at a time since 1921

Fall 2006

Keynote Speaker Dr. Westy Egmont Celebrates IIRI's 85 Years of Serving Immigrants and Refugees **"Living together in all our diversity is our strength. This is still the genius of America."**

The 85th International Institute of Rhode Island (IIRI) Annual Board Meeting was an emotional event. A crowd of more than 100 sat in silence and tears as Mike Chea, Director of Translating and Interpreting Services, shared his personal journey from Cambodia to the United States. Those present felt pride in and hope for our newcomers as they heard from Dr. Westy Egmont, Governor Carcieri, Representative James Langevin, Lt. Governor Charles Fogarty, and Mayor David Cicilline. Paintings by Sidney Tillett and music by violinist Hagop Anmahian added to the international atmosphere and charm of the evening.

"It is the vitality and passion of immigrants that make this country what it is and IIRI is the best of the American spirit."

-Mayor David Cicilline

Ralph Posner, Board President, and Chuck Champagne, Board Treasurer, had good news to report on fiscal year 2006. IIRI had a significant turn around from last year with a \$70,000



Joe Weissfeld, recipient of the Nelly Ayvasian Awards, Presents Merrill W. Sherman, President and CEO of Bank Rhode Island with the Community Leadership Award.

surplus. Fiscal year 2006 was a record breaking year: \$2.1 million dollars awarded for program funding from private and public sources, \$300,000 raised in unrestricted gifts, and close to \$400,000 raised in revenue from Interpreting and Translating Services. Also in fiscal year 2006, 15,000 services were provided to more than 6,000 clients from 104 countries, more than 15,000 walk-ins received free on-the-spot immigration counseling, 27 education classes served close to 800 students, and 206 new refugees were welcomed to Rhode Island by IIRI staff. While this is good

good news for the Institute, demand for services and funding remains great. Students and clients are still waiting for services and there is an on-going waiting list of 500 people to enroll in one of IIRI's education classes.

Keynote Speaker, Dr. Westy Egmont (Founder, Association of New Americans; Former Executive Director, International Institute of Boston; Co-Chair, Massachusetts Advisory Council for Immigrants and Refugees) asked the audience to reflect on the importance of citizenship and giving legitimacy to ethnic organizations like IIRI who assist people in gaining U.S. citizenship.

Westy pointed out that while there are 33 million foreign born in the U.S. and America is an immigrant nation, people aren't choosing to become Americans. Only 40% of the immigrants in the U.S. become citizens where in Canada 70% naturalize. When people aren't naturalizing they are not participating, they are not voting, they are not feeling a part of the country or culture. In 1971, Canada

continued on page 4

In this issue:

Page 2:

-Refugee Employment Services helps new arrivals and RI employers

Page 3:

-You can help save 140 lives!
-Myth vs. Fact: Immigrants take the jobs of Americans.

Page 4:

-Continuation of articles
-Sign-up for IIRI's eNews today

New Refugee Arrivals Eager to Enter Rhode Island's Workforce IIRI's Refugee Employment Services assists clients and provides the business community with a motivated, more diverse workplace



Mateneh Bility, full time worker, mother of two, rides 4 buses a day, and grateful to be a Rhode Islander.

It takes two buses for Mateneh Bility to get to her job at the Courtyard Marriott Hotel each day. It takes two more buses for her to get home to take care of her two children. This may sound like a big effort to many but, Mateneh went through much more than this to get to where she is today. Arriving in the U.S. one year ago from Liberia, Mateneh was unemployed, illiterate, and spoke very little English, yet she brought two very important ideals with her - an amazing hope and an overwhelming motivation to succeed in her new life.

IIRI's Refugee Employment Services has been assisting new arrivals, like Mateneh and her family, and serving Rhode Island's business community by providing highly motivated employees since 1980. While backgrounds vary dramatically, refugees share a willingness to work hard, perhaps based on the fact that only 1% of the 12 million refugees worldwide ever get the opportunity to resettle in another country. "New refugee arrivals are dependable, tenacious, and respectful. The U.S. employment system is fast paced,

but through case management and counseling, refugees grow to understand the job market. They realize how many more opportunities they have here to make a better life for themselves and their families," says IIRI staff member Lynn Nelson who coordinates refugee clients in the Career Laddering Program, funded by a grant from the United Way of Rhode Island. Furthermore, most refugees are multi-lingual and bring a wealth of cultural experiences that enhance our state's diversity. And, all are legally authorized to work in the U.S.

With a goal of being fully self-sufficient within 180 days from their arrival in Rhode Island, the staff is committed to working closely with refugees to aid them in a rapid transition into the American mainstream. Individuals are

While all refugees' backgrounds vary dramatically, they all share a willingness to work hard. They are flexible, determined, enthusiastic, appreciative, and motivated. All are legally authorized to work in the United States.

provided with an initial employment assessment to carefully determine experience, abilities, and transferable skills. Job readiness skills are gained via on-site classes that teach office skills, literacy, English as a Second Language, and cultural orientation with a focus on employer expectations. Staff also helps clients become enrolled in trainings and internships to help them get the

skills they need to begin careers as Certified Nursing Assistants, teaching assistants, and to attain various positions in the hospitality industry. Staff also assists clients with the interview process, filling out employment documents such as W-4s and I-9s, and job coaching.

IIRI Employment Services staff thrives on the achievements of new arrivals. Mateneh credits most of her success to Mary Ellen Lynch, Job Developer. Mary Ellen helped to set Mateneh up with the on-site job-training program at the Courtyard Marriott Hotel and because of her outstanding performance she was offered a permanent job. Patti O'Brien, General Manager of the Courtyard Marriott said, "Working with IIRI has been a



Lynne Nelson, with her CNA clients, Consolata Nyiraminani, and daughters Viviane Uwayo and Liliane Mukantwali at Viviane's graduation from her CNA Program. Consolata and Liliane both have their State License and work full-time. Viviane is currently looking for a full-time job with the help of Lynne.

great experience. The entire program has been a win-win for all!" With a mission of enabling all refugees to achieve self-sufficiency, IIRI's Refugee Employment Services continues to be a leading provider of resources for both employers and refugees.

Board of Directors

Executive Committee

Robin Torbron Warde, President
Ralph Posner, Immediate Past President
William Twaddell, First Vice President
Charles D. Champagne, Second Vice President
Dan Gorriaran, Board Treasurer
Mary Lovejoy, Assistant Treasurer
Joachim Weissfeld, Secretary
Lillian McGee, Assistant Secretary
Anne Maxwell Livingston
Melissa Trapp Mulhearn
Isabelle Hunter
Virginia da Mota
Genie Shao
Priscilla Wormwood

Board of Directors

Tim Buntel
Christopher Downs
Roberto Gonzalez
Topher Hamblett
Robert Huseby
William P. Kelly
Keith W. Marsello
Larry McCarver
Dawit Negash
Caroline Patterson
Juan Pichardo
Tony Ramos
Russel Robinson
Ellen Ruggiano
Moses P. Saygbe, Jr.
Carol Thomas
Phillip M. Weinstein

Board of Advisors

Anthony Andrade
Priscilla J. Angelo
Vincent Buonanno
William Castro
Elizabeth Chace
Steve Costantino
Polly Eddy
Lawrence Fish
Joyce S. Fleischer
Fred Franklin
George Graboys
Carol Grant
Alan Hassenfeld
Artemis Joukowsky
Nicholas Trott Long
Ira Magaziner
Tze-Ping Ng
Alexie N. Njoku
Nicolas Retsinas
Pablo Rodriguez
Augusto Rojas
Ana-Cecilia Rosado
Hillary Salmons
Yvonne G. Shilling
Mary Sloane
Friedrich St. Florian
Anne Szostak
John Hazen White, Jr.
Sheldon Whitehouse
Gladys Wyatt
Louis Yip

William Shuey, Executive Director

You Can Help Save 140 Lives!

YOU can help save 140 lives by sponsoring *Cultural Creations* - IIRI's larger than life, 140 piece Art Collection of brightly painted "images of celebration" designed by students, staff, board, and artists from the International Gallery and International Charter School.



So how can you help? By sponsoring the transfer of a *Cultural Creations* cardboard image to a durable vinyl banner uniquely designed by Malcolm Gear Designers, YOU will help to preserve a piece of Rhode Island's art history for all to enjoy at special events, parades, festivals and exhibits throughout the state. **AND your name, or your company's logo, can be displayed on the banner.**

- Sponsor one 4' by 6' banner for \$100 and get your name on it.
- Sponsor two 4' by 6' banners for \$175 and get your name on them.
- Sponsor one large 4' by 9' banner for \$250 and get your name or your company's logo on it.

For more information on being a *Cultural Creations* Sponsor, visit www.iiri.org or call 401.784.8634.

Immigrants: Myth vs. Fact

Immigrants do not pay taxes.

Immigrants pay taxes in the form of income, property, sales, and taxes and pay between \$90 and \$140 billion a year in federal, state, and local taxes.

Undocumented immigrants pay as well as evidenced by the Social Security Administration's "suspense file" (taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and social security numbers) which grew by \$20 billion between 1990-98.

(www.immigrationforum.org/about/articles/tax_study.htm)

Immigrants take jobs and opportunities away from Americans.

The largest wave of immigration to the U.S. since the early 1900's coincided with our lowest national unemployment rate and fastest economic growth. Immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs for U.S. and foreign workers, and foreign-born students allow many U.S. graduate programs to keep their doors open.

(Richard Vedder, Lowell Galloway, and Stephen Moore, Immigration and Unemployment: New Evidence, p. 13)

Immigrants do not want to learn English or become Americans.

Within ten years of arrival, more than 75% of immigrants speak English well; moreover, demand for English as a Second Language classes at the adult level far exceeds supply. Over 33% of immigrants are naturalized citizens and this number will continue to grow as more legal permanent residents become eligible for naturalization. The number of immigrants naturalizing spiked sharply after two events: enactment of immigration and welfare reform laws in 1996 and the terrorist attacks of 2001.

(www.aila.org/content/viewer.aspx?bc=17,142#section4)

Most immigrants cross the border illegally.

Around 75% of today's immigrants have legal permanent (immigrant) visas; of the 25% that are undocumented, 40% overstayed temporary (non-immigrant) visas.

(<http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/index.htm>)

For more information visit the Catholic Campaign for Immigration reform: www.justiceforimmigrants.org

Annual Meeting continued from page 1

instituted a Multiculturalism Policy promoting the elimination of cultural barriers, government support of ethnic groups, and government assistance for language learning. Although the U.S. has more foreign born than all the people in Canada, there is no such multiculturalism policy. In fact, there are not enough language learning opportunities in the U.S. - people that want to learn English are told to get to the back of the line. "We need to take the language issue seriously. It is a statement of our welcome," declared Westy.

The U.S. has policies of enforcement but does not have policies to encourage and help in the process of naturalization. The U.S. is



Music was provided by violinist Hagop Anmahian, a former IIRI student, and now plays with the Rhode Island Philharmonic.

about to spend \$12 million to construct a 700 mile long fence along the 2,000 mile Mexican border to keep people out. "Billions to keep people out, zero to welcome them in. What a message! We are a nation of immigrants. We inherited that. But that

is not how it feels these days." Westy went on to say, "You and I have to change that through conversation. Attitudes and policy must change in the halls of justice and congress and meaningful legislation must be passed."

This year's Nelly Ayvasian Award went to Joe Weissfeld, IIRI Board Secretary, attorney and former partner at Hinckley, Allen & Snyder. For the past decade, Joe has been a dedicated and generous supporter of the Institute providing his time and expertise on legal and financial issues and 'opening the doors' to offices, homes and hearts of many of his friends and colleagues on behalf of the Institute. This award is named after Nelly Ayvasian, a refugee from Soviet Armenia and a former Executive Director of the Institute, who made exceptional contributions to citizenship while inspiring immigrants and refugees to become invested and active members in their community. The Corporate Leadership Award went to Merrill W. Sherman, CEO and President of Bank Rhode Island, for her successful role as Co-Chair of the 20th Annual Spring Carnival Ball with John Hazen White, Jr. The Community Leadership Extraordinaire Award went to Erminio Pinque, founder &



Mike Chea, director of Interpreting and translating at IIRI shared a moving story of his journey from Cambodia to the U.S. to over 100 attendees at IIRI's 85th Annual Meeting of the Board.

director of Big Nazo. For more than two decades, Erminio has been intricately involved with planning and performing in the Institute's Spring Carnival Balls and has spearheaded the creation of IIRI's 140 piece "Cultural Creations" art collection. Also, Emily Masham received the Special Recognition Award for Volunteer Service and Bili Mason received the Special Recognition Award for gracing IIRI's walls with her collection of portrait photography.

IIRI Executive Director Bill Shuey thanked the outgoing President Ralph Posner and welcomed Robin Torbron Warde. Robin expressed that she is humbled and honored after 15 years of involvement with IIRI to take on the role of President. She acknowledged it will be difficult to follow in the shoes of outstanding Ralph. Bill also thanked the remarkable IIRI staff and Board. "We are a family here - brothers and sisters."

Contributors to our Donor Newsletter:

Lisa Marie Cramer
Pam Pomfret
Sarah Parrott

www.iiri.org

eNews

Sign up for our eNews at www.iiri.org to hear about our upcoming events as well as information on our programs and services, success stories, and what's going on at the Institute.