

# HARLEM COMMONWEALTH NEWSLETTER

Volume 1 No. 3

Fall 2006

## Harlem Commonwealth Council Board of Directors

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## Publisher's Note

A major focus of Harlem Commonwealth Council has been that of serving the needs of the Harlem community through critical educational programs. As President and CEO of Harlem Commonwealth Council, I am always assessing the needs of the immediate community and beyond. In recent years, Harlem has experienced a tremendous growth of immigrants from the African Diaspora. An area of heavy concentration is that of the Senegalese families who are living and sending their children to school in the Harlem public schools. These families have particular needs, including learning English as a second language.

HCC was awarded the English Language- Civics grant quite recently as a response to meeting the needs of immigrant families in our community. On July 30<sup>th</sup>, through the office of Gloria Bynoe Thomas, Assistant to the Director, Institute for Research on The African Diaspora- City College, I attended a special reception for Cheikh Ahmadu Bamba of Touba, a prominent religious leader in Senegal. This reception provided me with the opportunity to address members of the Senegalese community regarding their English language needs, a critical area that empowers immigrants to navigate a difficult educational and social system on behalf of their children and families.

On August 14<sup>th</sup> HCC held their first class in EL-Civics. Response to the program has been enthusiastic and the class consisted primarily of West African, Haitian and Latino men and women. Some 125 participants are currently enrolled and another 200 or so are on a waiting list. In fact the demand has been so urgent that we are now considering launching an evening program.

The West African community reached out to me and invited me to discuss our educational initiatives on their radio show on September 16<sup>th</sup>, with particular emphasis on our New Ventures Program, another HCC initiative, for aspiring entrepreneurs. Following the reception and radio interview, I was contacted by a delegation of Senegalese women who outlined some of the racism they and their children experienced by teachers and fellow students.

They made a powerful presentation of their needs; educationally, and asked for Harlem Commonwealth Council's support in overcoming some of the obstacles immigrants are unnecessarily forced to deal with in their everyday lives. It is particularly painful to hear that their children are taunted, referred to as "monkeys" and verbally abused by other children in the Harlem community. It saddens me to know that in this twenty-first century, homebred bias and stereotype behavior exists in Harlem among our youth. The West African community is vibrant and strong and we should be welcoming them rather than harassing them.

By supporting and strengthening them, we, as a group grow stronger. Dr. Mays, who promoted Morehouse College into a world class educational institution, reminds us of this; "I hope we will make it clear to ourselves and our children that whether they believe in integration, separation or nationalism, there is no substitute for a trained mind. For the future belongs, always has and always will, to the man (and woman, I must add) who knows and the man (and woman) who has skills."

We at HCC are cognizant of the needs of the immigrants among us, and indeed of our own needs, and hope our educational outreach will embrace all.

The approach to the West African community was facilitated by Gloria Bynoe Thomas from City College, who also serves as an advisory member to our Education committee.



**DR. JOSEPH L. TAIT**  
PRESIDENT and CEO

## THINK and CREATE! Harlem Robotics Program

BY DR. C. JAMA ADAMS, CASTLETON CONSULTING

Children of African descent in New York City are doing poorly in terms of outcome measures in the following areas:

- Reading - 16% of fourth graders are proficient
- Mathematics - 44% of eighth graders are proficient in basic mathematics
- High School Graduation - 32% of Black students in New York City graduate from High School
- Special Education involvement - a disproportionate amount of Black boys are in the special education system
- Child health outcomes in Harlem
  - Asthma - almost twice the city rate
  - Injuries - almost twice the city wide rate.

There is an unrelenting pressure on the individual to be creative, to come up with fresh perspectives, demonstrate good self control and social skills.

**Think and Create!** is a joint project of Harlem Commonwealth Council, P.S. 154 and Columbia University's School of Engineering. The aim is to contribute to the development of the intellectual and social skills of the children of central Harlem.

Thirty children in grades three and four at P.S. 154 in central Harlem will participate in an after school enrichment program that will meet four days weekly, from 3-5pm. The students will take part in four interactive modules: photography, philosophy, dance choreography and robotics. These are interactive projects that also require the children to work in groups and to write and talk about their experiences.

The students and their parents will also go on field trips to a museum, a robotic laboratory and to an art gallery.

The project is being funded in part by the Harlem Commonwealth Council, the Columbia University School of Engineering and the Department of Education/P.S. 154. C. Jama Adams, a psychologist and Assistant Professor at John Jay College is the program coordinator.

## HCC & SoBRO Partner to Bring EL-Civics Classes to Central Harlem

The Harlem Commonwealth Council, Inc., in partnership with the South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation, has responded to a growing demand by providing EL-Civics classes to non-English speaking immigrants living in the central Harlem area.

In keeping with its mission to stimulate the overall economic development of the Harlem community through the creation of enterprise, generation of jobs and empowerment of services, HCC is cognizant that there is a growing population of immigrants who speak languages other than English in their homes. As a result of this, HCC is committed to investing in the Harlem community by providing educational opportunities through programs that teach adult basic education and promote job readiness and retention.

It is HCC's belief that its EL-Civics program will help meet the growing demand for English language education in Harlem while encouraging these individuals to become productive American citizens.

The classes offered at HCC are utilizing SoBRO's EL-Civics curriculum which focuses on the individual, concentrating on his/her experience, knowledge, immediate needs and concerns, taking on community and national issues when necessary. Classes began on August 14<sup>th</sup>, and consist of 12 week cycles and will continue throughout the next year.

Current enrollment in the popular program is 125 students, most of whom come from West Africa, Latin America and Haiti. All have the green card which is a pre-requisite for qualifying for US Citizenship.

A continually growing waiting list of over 200 applicants clearly shows that HCC is on target with this program. To meet this urgent demand, it is considering launching an evening program.

For more information about this and other programs offered at HCC please visit our website [www.harlemcommonwealth.org](http://www.harlemcommonwealth.org).



**Raymond Maisonet- Instructor, bottom left, with EL-Civics Students on a field trip to New York Botanical Gardens**

## HCC New Ventures Programs For Entrepreneurs Begins!!

Harlem Commonwealth Council, Inc. is conducting a 16-week comprehensive entrepreneurial training program called the HCC New Ventures Program. It is designed for aspiring entrepreneurs located in the New York area. The program provides new and aspiring entrepreneurs with the fundamentals of smart business start-up. Using an enhanced version of the nationally acclaimed FastTrac® business curriculum, classes are facilitated by business professionals who are experts in an array of relevant fields. The HCC New Ventures Program participants receive instruction and hands-on training in business planning, finances, operations and human resources. New to the program, participants are also receiving instruction in life skills, such as the importance of goal-setting and time-management.

This program featured guest speakers, such as Vera Moore, acclaimed actress and Founder and CEO of Vera Moore Cosmetics, Princess Jenkins Co-founder of the Brownstone and Founder of Women in the Black and Deanna Brannon Smart, Product Manager, American Express. The HCC New Ventures Program is held Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, 6-9pm, at Harlem Commonwealth Council, Inc.'s offices located at 361 West 125<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY. The next course is scheduled to begin in February, 2007. To learn more about open house and orientation dates please call (212) 749-0900.

**HCC Awarded \$700,000 Grant from under the Office of Community Services of the Department of Health & Human Services for renovating Commonwealth Industrial Park**

**HCC in partnership with South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (SoBRO) receives \$118,000 grant from the Workforce Investment Act Title II Funds for Adult Basic Education and Literacy Services Programs**

**JPMorgan Chase Grants HCC \$3,500 for its New Ventures Program for Entrepreneurs (A FastTrac® Training Course)**

**In Memoriam  
HCC Founding Member  
Preston Wilcox  
December 27, 1923 – August 12, 2006**

Preston Wilcox, a long-time activist in the Civil Rights movement, founding member of Harlem Commonwealth Council, Inc., and well known Harlem leader passed away August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

Wilcox was a graduate of Morehouse College and Columbia University. He was one of the first Black basketball players to sign to a professional basketball team in New York City.

Wilcox, who also was instrumental in the decentralization of public schools in central Harlem, was a founding member of the National Association of Black School Educators and publisher of the AFRAM Associates Newsletter.

## HARLEM

BY PRINCESS HARDWELL,  
THURGOOD MARSHALL ACADEMY

Harlem is more than a black community. It is the only place in the world where beautiful writers, such as Zora Neal Hurston, and brilliant musicians, like Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington lived. In Harlem, history has been and is being made.

One can never get bored in Harlem. There are places like the Apollo Theatre where a person can go to hear all kinds of music ranging from Jazz to Hip Hop, or the restaurant Sylvia's where they can taste magical soul food with assortments like collards greens and candy yams. Harlem never sleeps. There is a constant flow of people learning, talking, and involved in some type of entertainment. Residents of Harlem walk the streets with their heads held high, not in an aloof manner but instead in a proud-to-live-in Harlem way. There are black churches with pastors inside letting the congregation know that everything is going to be fine and encouraging them to keep their heads up even in times of heartache.

Yet, Harlem is a struggle. Blood, sweat, tears, and smiles are normal in Harlem because of the hardships we have faced and that we are facing. Residents of Harlem are descendents of slaves who played a significant role in building America. Our ancestors were stolen from Africa and forced to be slaves; despite those previous circumstances, we are still here in communities, such as my home Harlem, being strong and living our lives to the fullest extent.

Despite all the positive things about Harlem, I still have to worry about friends or family members being harassed by police because of their skin color or economic status. I have to worry about people even of my own color selling poison like cocaine and ecstasy, who may look at it as a lucrative, illegal way to acquire money; but in actuality, they really are killing their own brothers and sisters with the poison they put up for sale.

My Harlem home is a contradiction. Although it is a place where I feel accepted and loved, it is also a place where I have to worry about being sold out. Many new expensive apartment buildings are being built in Harlem, but black owned businesses are losing their leases. And, because the majority of the residents of Harlem are not of the high financial status, we are being kicked out and being replaced by people who could never be *real* Harlemites.



**Princess Hardwell**

## HCC INITIATIVES

- HCC NEW VENTURES PROGRAM (A FastTrac® Entrepreneurial Training Course)
- THINK AND CREATE! Harlem Robotics Program Supported in part by Columbia University
- EL-CIVICS Program (SoBRO Partnership)
- SCHOLARSHIP and INTERNSHIP Programs
- ALICE KORNEGAY Computer Learning Center

## Education Is the Key to Opportunity



**BY BILL PERKINS, FORMER CITY COUNCIL  
DEPUTY MAJORITY LEADER**

### *Education was my salvation.*

I grew up in East Harlem. My mother raised me with two brothers and a cousin herself. We didn't have very much, but she fought to get me into good schools and instilled in me the importance of hard work and getting a good education. She told me education would open doors of opportunity, and make just about anything possible.

My mother was right. I saw many other kids – many smarter and more talented – who didn't make it. But because of her guidance and support and with the help of dedicated teachers and good people in the community, I was able to get a good education, go on to become Deputy Majority Leader of the

City Council and now be the Democratic nominee for State Senate from this area.

I commend the Harlem Commonwealth Council for their internship and scholarship programs. It's never been more important to provide our children with greater access to higher education and to take advantage of a simple right -- the right to earn their own way in life. These services make a real difference in the lives of our children and our community.

I am excited about the opportunity to continue my service to the community as your next State Senator. For too long, government in Albany has been part of the problem when it comes to education. I stand determined to make sure that every child in our community, our city and our state receives the best education possible, and the same opportunity to succeed in life as I had.

It starts with getting our schools the resources they need. The highest court in the state has confirmed what we all already know; our schools are not getting the money they need to provide a quality education. I look forward to working with a new Governor, Eliot Spitzer, to finally resolve the CFE lawsuit and fix the most inequitable school funding formula in the country. All children regardless of where they live are entitled to quality education. We need to reduce overcrowded classrooms, repair broken-down schools and provide safe schools so that our teachers can teach and our children can learn. We must bring

technology into the classrooms, invest in our libraries and make our classrooms conducive to learning.

We must start younger and provide opportunities for higher education. Too often, children have fallen behind before they even make it to school. To raise student achievement, we must invest in early childhood education and help all children start school ready to learn. And we must give students the chance to go to college by making the CUNY and SUNY systems more accessible and affordable.

And we must get parents more involved. Study after study suggests that when parents are more involved, children do better. We need to work to encourage parent involvement and we must work to make it easier for them to do it.

Education is the key to opportunity. We must place it in the hands of every child in our community.

Hinton Battle  
Theatre Laboratory  
in Partnership with  
HCC

## HCC Internship Program A Success!

*John Dewey, one of the most influential thinkers on education in the twentieth century stated that we learn best by doing. His attention to experience and reflection, democracy and community and to environments for learning have been seminal. These are the same elements that nurtured an extremely excellent paid intern experience for eight young women and men from the Harlem community.*

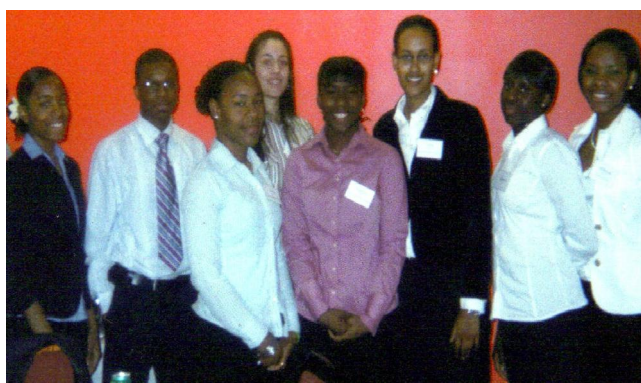
*Harlem Commonwealth Council* took a tremendous step this 2006 summer in preparing and strategically placing eight summer interns in businesses where they became at least partially prepared to face the world of work in the future. Much of the credit is due to the cooperation, hard work and preparation of *Dr. J.L. Tait, President and CEO of HCC* in identifying and engaging the partnerships of leaders from major businesses and corporations.

The remaining credit is due to those leaders who eagerly invited students into their businesses, firms and organizations. Interns were placed with *Dr. Tait, President and CEO of Harlem Commonwealth, Inc., Mr. Joel Pickett, Chairman and CEO of Gotham Organization, Inc., Mr. Robert Fauser, President of Van Wagner Communications, LLC, The Honorable Percy Sutton, founder of Inner City Broadcasting and leader of WLIB radio station, Mr. Ross Jacobs, Partner of Cogswell Realty Group, Mr. Steven Williams, President, Danforth Development Group, Ms. Debbie Brown, Vice President of City National Bank of New Jersey, and Mr. Drew Greenwald, President of Grid Properties.*

*Mr. Joel Pickett*, welcomed Makeeda Marshall into *Gotham* by providing her with a "real work" experience where she learned something about the construction and contracting business. *Gotham* is a company that has a reputation for developing both rentals and condominium buildings. Makeeda's experiences included reviewing contracts, logging them and redistributing them using a company template. She worked with change orders that tie directly into the project manager and the architect. Makeeda left her internship at the end of the summer knowing about a field of work that she had no idea existed for women. *Van Wagner*, an industry leader in the development of outside advertising, specializes in outdoor advertising throughout the country and internationally. Through

the "hands on" approach of *Mr. Robert Fauser*, Cheryl Perry was able to experience the world of advertising in a way that she had never dreamed. Cheryl stated that working with *Van Wagner* was a very good experience for her.

Sofia Mohammed was extremely pleased and excited with her internship at *WBLIS*. *Percy Sutton* once stated, "If you



2006 Interns

pray for only one thing, let it be an idea". This giant of a man must have prayed for many things, for he is a true leader by example for his community and the world. *Percy Sutton's* company, the *Inner City Broadcasting Corporation*, purchased New York's WLIB AM, which became the first black owned radio station in the city. Sofia had the opportunity to work with a *legend* in working at *WLIB*. Sofia was able to work in a relaxed and, as she describes it, "a laid back" environment, she learned key principles in the world of radio. She worked in the studio with *Guy Black*, one of the broadcasters. She thought that was "pretty cool".

*Cogswell Realty Group* is a full service real estate company. They have a full in-house staff that provides acquisition, development, leasing asset management, construction management, property management and consulting services for office, residential and industrial properties for institutional clients and its own portfolio. Davia Steeley could not complain about any of her multifaceted experiences at *Cogswell*. *Ross Jacobs*, structured Davia's work experience so that she was constantly learning something new. She accompanied *Mr. Jacobs* to meetings with the architects for other projects going on in Harlem. All of the partners and key personnel at *Cogswell* and its work locations contributed to making Davia a "happy camper" as she faces the world of work in the future.

*Mr. Steven Williams*, has renovated millions of square feet of office, retail, and residential space, and has worked as a development partner with numerous non-profits to reposition

their investment properties; maximize their return on investment. Bryce Tarrant was fortunate to be chosen by *HCC* to work with *Williams* at Danforth for the summer. Bryce had the opportunity to visit sites that were under renovation, such as the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Plaza. Bryce was amazed and fascinated by the work that went into planning for a project. Bryce described his experience as "wonderful".

*City National Bank of New Jersey* is a minority owned and managed community bank. It is located in New York and New Jersey and has an overall rating of "outstanding". *Debbie Brown*, Vice President, was most enthusiastic about providing an internship for HCC intern, Joselin Jimenez. Joselin, under *Ms. Brown's* supervision learned the basics of banking. Her experiences included dealing with checking and savings accounts. Using the CADET system, locating customer profiles, maintaining logs of checks received and the Chex system, which is used to determine if the bank should establish an account for a new customer. Joselin was extremely happy with her work experience.

Shatique Waiters expressed her experiences at *Grid* as a "life-changing" experience. *Drew Greenwald*, by providing a variety of experiences for Shatique in real estate, was able to open her eyes to a career that she had never thought of even considering. The highest thanks we can give to *Grid Properties* staff is that they helped Shatique, a young woman, break the traditional mold by giving her a choice of a non-traditional and very lucrative career in real estate development. She has expressed that due to *Drew Greenwald* and *Grid*, this is a real potential in her life choices.

Johnetta Cuff was the "lucky" young woman who was placed at HCC. Johnetta was provided the opportunity to work in all facets of the programmatic facets of HCC. She worked with Tracey Milhouse, senior staff person, with the Senior Citizens Computer class. Johnetta stated that this internship proved to her that she is not a failure. In working with *Dr. Tait*, Johnetta was able to understand the philosophy and reality of the importance of the internship program and the world of work, because she worked side-by-side with the *visionary who made it happen*.

## Figure Skating In Harlem:

*What Can You Build on a Foundation of Ice?*

**BY SHARON COHEN, FOUNDER,  
FIGURE SKATING IN HARLEM**

What can you build on a foundation of ice? If you ask this question to the hundreds of girls who have benefited from Figure Skating in Harlem (FSH), the first after-school ice skating and education program of its kind in the country, you will find a clear answer: Teamwork. Leadership and Confidence. Founded in 1997 by former competitive skater Sharon Cohen, FSH now has a staff of 20 strong that uses the unique sport and art of figure skating as an exciting way to teach girls life lessons in responsibility and perseverance as well as encourage their academic achievement and personal growth in a supportive atmosphere.

*Sixteen year old Sarahn O'Uhuru who joined the program at the age of seven says, "With confidence I can truly say that Figure Skating in Harlem has changed my life. Through the program I have learned the meaning of commitment, tenacity, dedication and perseverance."*

Today, FSH serves 100 girls, ages six to eighteen that live in the Harlem community. Participants maintain a B-average in school, practice and perform on the ice at Riverbank State Park on 145<sup>th</sup> Street, and attend tutoring, counseling, and theory classes that relate skating to academic subjects. Students also go on cultural field trips, and guest teachers lecture on topics from physiology to finance.

At its heart, FSH is truly a community-based organization that receives tremendous support from parents and family, while effectively addressing the needs of Harlem girls. From the exciting annual ice show to the *Soul on Ice* Winter Skating Party, to the long list of celebrities who come out to cheer our girls on, Figure Skating in Harlem has inspired a decade of positive change and will continue to develop the potential in each of its students. To learn more log on and visit [www.figureskatinginharlem.org](http://www.figureskatinginharlem.org).



**Sharon Cohen  
Founder, Figure Skating in Harlem**

## The Benefits of a Banking Relationship

**BY JACINTH FAIRWEATHER-PANTON, BANK  
MANAGER, CHASE BANK 125<sup>TH</sup> STREET BRANCH**

The Banking Industry is an essential part of our lives. The industry has the capital resources and commitment necessary to support the financial needs of individuals, businesses and different branches of government.

Banks are financial intermediaries which facilitate the payments between people, businesses and governments. Banks lend to consumers to finance purchases such as homes, education, automobiles and household goods. Additionally, banks provide small businesses with the resources to get started and to grow successfully. Banks also work with state and local governments to fund different public initiatives such as schools, roads and health care facilities.

For the average individual, the primary benefit of a financial institution is to provide a safe place for storing wealth; having a bank account generally provides you with a place to

keep your money. If an individual does not have a bank account it is very likely that they carry around large sums of cash, and very often they keep cash at home. This is not the safe or prudent thing to do. Additionally if money is lost, stolen, or destroyed, there is no recourse to replace it; conversely, bank accounts are, by and large, federally insured. Customers will be reimbursed for any unauthorized or fraudulent transactions charged to their account. Banks also provide individuals with easy access to their funds through checks, debit cards, ATMs, and online banking services.

Another benefit of a Banking relationship is the elimination of check cashing fees. Individuals without a banking relationship may be forced to deal with storefront check cashing operations. In most instances, an account holder may negotiate a check at their bank without incurring any additional cost. Additionally, because banks are more likely to do business with their existing customers, customers have a better chance to secure a loan. Having a bank account also improves your chances of obtaining financing from other lenders. In determining the applicant's ability to repay a loan, prospective lenders will determine whether the borrower has an account

and the balances maintained in that account. Typically, the more money you have, the more likely it is that you will be approved for a loan.

Equally important, banks provide customers with a wealth of free financial information through one-on-one consultation with financial specialists. Customers are able to obtain expert advice through financial specialists such as mortgage representatives, financial advisors, and retirement specialists at no cost. These services are invaluable to individuals who are contemplating a home purchase, college funding, retirement, etc. Banks also routinely host free financial seminars where information is disseminated in a group forum.

Finally, there are so many advantages to having a banking relationship. To determine how you can benefit from having a bank account, it is important to examine your needs and what is most important to you. Choose a bank based on ease of doing business, customer service levels, range of services offered, and convenience.

## ALICE KORNEGAY COMPUTER LEARNING CENTER

HCC recently volunteered to conduct computer literacy classes for residents of 1775, Marion Scott and Alice Kornegay Houses in East Harlem.

Classes are held in the Alice Kornegay Computer Learning Center which is named after long-time community activist, east Harlem resident and important HCC board member. The center is located in the 1775 Houses at 126<sup>th</sup> Street and Park Avenue.

The Computer Learning Center is equipped with 15 computers, including 2 Apple Imacs, and serves as an

arena to provide the residents of 1775 Houses with the skills and resources needed for learning and advancement through computers and to a degree narrow the technology divide. The center also acts as a meeting place for the residents to meet and socialize. Classes are offered to senior citizens and run in 16 week cycles. Recruitment for the next cycle is presently underway.



### IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

*The following is a listing of all elected officials representing Harlem Residents.*

*\*Dial 311 for all non-urgent calls*

George Pataki  
Governor  
(518) 474-8390

Michael Bloomberg  
Mayor, NYC  
(212) 788-9600

Charles Rangel  
Congressman  
(212) 663-3900

David Paterson  
New York State Senate  
(212) 222-7315

Eric T. Schneiderman  
New York State Senate  
(212) 928-5578

Hillary Rodham Clinton  
United States Senate- NY  
(212) 688-6262

Charles Schumer  
United States Senate- NY  
(212) 486-4430

Inez Dickens  
Councilwoman- District 9  
(212) 928-1322

Robert Jackson  
Councilman- District 7  
(212) 928-1322

Adam Clayton Powell, IV  
State Assemblyman  
(212) 828-3953

Keith L. Wright  
State Assemblyman  
(212) 866-5809

Scott Stringer  
Manhattan Borough President  
(212) 669-8300

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