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ROOTING OUT POVERTY

Official Newsletter of Project NOW



It's in Us!

A MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DWIGHT FORD

Recently, I had the opportunity to stand before our Board of Directors and present the “State of the Agency Report.” It happens every year during our annual board meeting and gives us chance to reflect upon the goals that were reached, the challenges we faced, and the forecast the direction for the future. I absolutely look forward to this presentation every year, not because we only had a few challenges or that we reached all our goals but because the organizational journey encompasses both highs and lows. In similar fashion our personal lives we experience free-flowing tears and days of wide smiles. We bear burdens and receive what some would refer to as blessings. We have fears that must be confronted, and we exemplify acts of courage. Project NOW is no different! We have endured challenge after challenge, but we have responded time and time again with innovation, shared-thinking, team well-fare and goal attainment. Years ago, I came across this quote from a great mind and public servant, Waldo Ralph Emerson, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” I am convinced that there is something great in you, in Project NOW, and our collective work. I witnessed this recently, when the unthinkable happened in our headquarters location. One of dutiful team members, James Vanlerberghe, entered our building after lunch. He collapsed and went into an unconscious state, and immediately the inner strength, compassion, and concern of our team went into action.

This issue:

It's in Us!

PAGES 01 - 02

In Memory of James
Vanlerberghe

PAGE 02

Energy Assistance

PAGE 03

Honor Home Ribbon
Cutting

PAGE 04 - 05

Caseworker Profile

PAGE 06

Neighbor of the Month

PAGE 07

Client Spotlight

PAGE 08

Batter Up!

PAGE 09



It's in Us! (cont.)

Mona Mejia immediately called 911 and then escorted clients out the back door. CPR was administered by Randall Keenan; La Ronda Birch our Human Resources Director remained at the ready and relieved Randall. Wendy Olenick stopped entrance into the building collecting documents from customers; a walk-up window was opened to continue services. An additional three team members were busy connecting to James' listed contacts and reaching out to his family. Others remained at a distance respecting both James and the work of the paramedics who arrived a handful of minutes after the call. Sadly, James passed but he did not make his transition alone--his Project NOW family was with him until end. I ask that you keep his family in your thoughts and prayers. Additionally, I ask that you remember his time with us, as that is something that death and departure can never take from us, the fact that we shared much more than time and space. We shared life and service! One of the ways we are going to remember James is to install AED defibrillators in locations and training in CPR to ensure we are prepared in case we are confronted in a similar challenge in the future. Please watch for upcoming communication concerning this matter and how you can help and share with others our efforts to secure these devices. Remember, whatever the challenge you have enough to confront it, endure it, and overcome it. Project NOW, there something good in us!

Dwight L. Ford
Project NOW
Executive Director



In Memory of James Vanlerberghe



James—known as Jim in his family--was the oldest of 5 children born to Rick & Rita (Miller) Vanlerberghe. Rick & Rita were high school sweethearts—the met at Alleman High School—and made their home in rural East Moline. James and his three brothers and one sister graduated from Geneseo High School. Jim lived with his parents until they moved to Florida in 2000 to escape the Midwest winters.

Rick and his family were so excited about Jim working for Project NOW since he could use the master's degree, he received from Nova Southeastern University. Rick says James loved all sports; he was a runner in high school, and he walked everywhere in the community—not thinking twice about crossing the river (and back) to attend Davenport activities. His dad said of him, “Jim was very smart and quiet, but he had a lot of opinions when you talked to him one on one.” James worked as a Project NOW Grants Accountant since 11/29/2021. He shared stories with co-workers of his love of traveling and time spent with friends at music events. James had just returned from a trip with some of his best friends to Minnesota, spending time at the Mall of America. He enjoyed working events at the TaxSlayer Center on weekends, especially during hockey season. He was proud of his Belgian heritage and routinely participated in a local Rolle Bolle club that had just celebrated its 100th anniversary in July.

Assistance

Project NOW has invested \$7.1 million dollars in the community -- demand is up

Project NOW's Low Income Home Energy Assistance program (known as LIHEAP) provides utility assistance to residents living in Rock Island, Mercer, and Henry Counties. The program, funded through the state, provides a variety of assistance including one-time payments, a percentage of income payments, reconnection assistance, and emergency furnace assistance for those at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.



“During this difficult time in America, when prices for the most basic of goods and services are skyrocketing, we are pleased to have made such a financial investment to lighten the weight and load that so many families are still carrying.”

DWIGHT FORD

Project NOW's Executive Director, Dwight Ford, says this past year the agency served more people in the LIHEAP program than ever before. The Rock Island based not-for-profit processed 6,520 applications that generated nearly \$7.1 million dollars in relief to the clients. The average payout for customer was \$593.00. Ford is pleased Project NOW was able to offer support and resources during this difficult season following COVID.

“During this difficult time in America, when prices for the most basic of goods and services are skyrocketing, we are pleased to have made such a financial investment to lighten the weight and load that so many families are still carrying,” noted Ford.

During the 2021 program year Project NOW provided \$5 million dollars in energy assistance. Ford expects next year to serve even more customers with the ongoing challenge of increased gas prices and inflation. The LIHEAP program will start back up again September 1, 2022.

Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony Kicks Off Project NOW's First "Honor Home"

Project NOW is rehabilitating single-family homes and duplexes for veterans (or essential workers) to rent at an affordable rate.

According to a recent study by Silos to Solutions, there is currently a shortage of affordable housing in the Quad Cities. The study indicates the gap to be 6,645 affordable units in the Quad Cities.

The Executive Director of Project NOW, Dwight Ford, believes housing is the anchor of all opportunities and is excited to announce this new "Honor Home Program."

"This endeavor honors the commitment of veterans while strengthening our community service to one another! It's about honor. It's about a place to call home."

Dwight Ford, Executive Director
Project NOW



Ford says veterans who have supported and provided service to others should also receive service and support when needed. "Our veterans often do not ask for much and choose to live a life of giving to others. We are fortunate, here in the Illinois Quad Cities, to have an opportunity to witness the support and service they give. Home to an Army installation (Rock Island Arsenal), we are also close enough to witness those who continue to face financial challenges due to high unemployment rates after transitioning from active duty. This endeavor honors the commitment of veterans while strengthening our community service to one another! It's about honor. It's about a place to call home."

Honor Homes (cont.)

A ribbon-cutting reception was held in June at the first completed honor home at 620 14th Street in Rock Island – an attractive, single-family home built in 1900. The fully furnished, two-bedroom home is waiting for a veteran or small veteran family to move in. According to Project Now's Community Services Director, Ron Lund, the home was donated to Project NOW in 2016. Project NOW's team ripped up the floors, replaced the support beam, put up walls, installed a new furnace, water heater, air conditioning, carpeting, and appliances. Estes Construction, Sisters of St. Benedict, United Way, and Modern Woodmen of America helped fund the work with their donations. Humble Dwellings provided all the home's furnishings. The monthly rental for the home is \$490, and after five years the occupant can exercise the option to purchase the home. Fair market rents are about \$800 a month for a two-bedroom, one-bathroom house. Lund says there are 26,500 veterans in the Quad Cities.



The other homes that will become Honor Homes are as follows:

505 13th Avenue Rock Island, IL
103 N. Elm Street Kewanee, IL
402 7th Street Moline, IL
929 12th Avenue Rock Island, IL
518 6th Street Rock Island, IL





Caseworker Profile

One of Project NOW's caseworkers, Armando Ochoa, spends most of his day helping homeless individuals find apartments, identifications, food, blankets...whatever is needed. And last month, "whatever is needed" was expungement of prior arrest records so a client can have a better chance at finding employment.

Armando's client had hit a cement wall—no one wanted to hire him with his background, but he could not hire an attorney to help clean up the record. Expungement is not a service Project NOW offers, but Armando wanted to help. He conducted research, made some calls and began scouring the Internet to find out how to file motions to seal or expunge years-old offenses.



Armando Ochoa

**Armando
Ochoa's mantra
is "Why leave to
others what you
can do yourself"**

Armando, who was planning to be an attorney at one point in his life, taught himself how to fill out the necessary paperwork. Over the course of a few weeks, he filed several motions with the Rock Island Circuit Clerk's office. "I really liked learning and doing this and it was exciting," he said.

Armando says he has always lived by the mantra "why leave to others what you can do yourself" and in this case, his hard work paid off. His client's records were successfully expunged and now the 52-year-old client is looking for a truck-driving job. The client, perhaps inspired by Armando, is talking about someday owning his truck and running the business. Armando was happy to help and continues to remind others not to take no for an answer. He says if something is blocking you...do your due diligence and more than likely you can make changes.

"We are proud of all of our hard-working employees, and when they go above and beyond the like Armando we want to lift up that leadership. THANK YOU for living out our mission to move people up and out poverty. We appreciate you," said Executive Director Dwight Ford. 😊



Project NOW Is the Neighbor of the Month:

Project NOW was honored at the Moline City Council as commercial "Neighbor of the Month" for our excellence in residential property improvement and maintenance. We are pleased to accept the honor with our neighbors and friends in the Floreciente neighborhood--the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Mississippi Valley, Boost Mobile & the Floreciente Neighborhood Association. Thank you, Mayor & Aldermen!



Please plan to attend our 2nd annual Floreciente Block party scheduled for late September. We will be celebrating National Hispanic Heritage month with our neighbor and partner, the Quad Cities Hispanic Chamber. Stay tuned for more details but plan on a great afternoon of arts & crafts, snow cones & neighborly conversations.



Client Spotlight: Angel Mitchell

--A little eavesdropping helped one of our renters succeed

28-year-old Angel Mitchell arrived in Rock Island as a teenager with no place to live. She was couch surfing and working a minimum wage job trying to make enough money to live on her own. One day she heard her co-workers talking about Project NOW's LIHEAP program (utility assistance) and wondered if our agency could help her find affordable housing. We had a youth housing program at the time that provided her with a safe, affordable place to live.



Once her housing was secured, she could focus on her future -- one that included going back to school to become a CNA. Angel received her certification in 2013 and has been working as a CNA for almost nine years. She credits Project NOW with jump starting her career. "Project NOW helped me get on my feet; they were super helpful and if someone is smart and wants to get ahead, they should contact Project NOW," said Mitchell.

Angel's next move is going back to school—again—this time for an LPN certificate (licensed practical nurse). We wish her well and we are excited to be part of her journey. She often wonders if she were not eavesdropping that day in 2013 where she would have ended up. "It would not have been easy that is for sure," she added. Best of luck, Angel. We will be cheering for you!



Batter Up!

Take me out to the ballgame....and that is exactly what Project NOW staff did this month. Our staffers had a great summer night, with hundreds of other Quad Cities River Bandit fans, cheering on the local team. We love our partnership with the owner of the club, Dave Heller. Thank you for supporting us. Go, Bandits!

