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# The Museum as a Community Organization: A Comparative Study of the Strategies Employed by Museums and Community Organizations in Partnership with Their Communities

Amy E. Birnbaum

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# **The Museum as a Community Organization:**

**A Comparative Study of the Strategies Employed by Museums and  
Community Organizations in Partnership with their Communities**

by

**Amy Birnbaum**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Museum Professions.

Seton Hall University

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Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor

## Preface & Acknowledgements

I began my journey to completing my MA thesis with the ideal that museums have the ability to make a difference in the world. Coming from the social services sector through my employment, I envisioned a connection between museums, history, culture and community services. After learning of the New Jersey Community Development Corporation, a community organization deeply involved in the history and culture of its community, I was inspired that my hopes for my professional future were not so far off-base.

With a new found passion, my concept for a thesis took off. I extend heart-felt thanks to Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Ph.D., my advisor, who encouraged my “unique” concept from the beginning and helped me to articulate a passionate jumble of ideas into a piece that I am very proud of.

I also extend a deep gratitude to four amazing professionals, who took time from their extremely busy schedules to assist me in my research. Thanks to Creighton Drury, who stood by me from conception to completion, and whose organization was the inspiration for my paper. Furthermore, I am indebted to Claudia Ocello and Rabbi Michael Gisser, who invited me into their museums and taught me a great deal about how museums *can* make a difference in the world. And, to Dr. Tulsi Maharjan, I admire and thank you for your passion, commitment and strength.

And, of course, I cannot say enough to thank my loved ones who offered me the encouragement and direction I needed to complete my thesis. I would like to thank my family, who sacrificed spending time with me, but were always there to listen when I needed them. And, most importantly, I would like to thank my fiancé Jason, who supported me patiently throughout this endeavor.

And now, as I end this journey, I ask you to consider this piece, not as a typical compilation of research or an exploration of accepted concepts, but as a new conversation for museums. I ask you to think about the possibility of a museum as a force for change within its community.

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## Abstract

Museums function to collect, preserve and exhibit objects in order to educate the public. Community-based organizations define social need and develop initiatives to make a difference in the daily lives of community members. In recent years, as museums have begun looking for ways to contribute to what they define as their communities, and community organizations have increasingly turned to arts and culture as tools to achieve their goals, the strategies these organizations employ to address community needs have begun to look strikingly similar.

Through a comparative study of four very different institutions, two museums and two “traditional” community organizations, this thesis will demonstrate that as museums become civically engaged, their functions begin to complement those of traditional community organizations. An examination of the concepts of community and civic engagement, recent trends in the museum field, and the role of culture, arts and history in communities will set the stage for the four case studies. The case studies include two museums, the Holocaust Museum and Study Center and The New Jersey Historical Society, and two traditional community-based organizations, the New Jersey Community Development Corporation and the Somerset County Cultural Diversity Coalition. These four organizations will be compared based on their initiatives in the areas of community partnerships, educational programming, collaborative efforts, creative exhibitions and community-wide events. Since the methods of community engagement in each of the case studies will be proven to be strikingly similar in form, a general conclusion will be made that community development corporations, community coalitions *and* museums can all be defined as “community organizations.”

The community is the focus of this examination. Indeed, this evaluation will explore ways in which each organization identifies and meets community needs. As museums begin to gain civic functions, and community organizations develop cultural and arts programming, it will be concluded that partnerships between the two are natural solutions to calls for civic engagement, as they join organizations with different skills, resources and specialties to design creative solutions to community needs. Partnerships will be established as the method of best practice for community organizations in addressing community needs.

## **CHAPTER 1: MUSEUMS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF COMMUNITY NEED AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

### **Introduction**

In America today, the term, “community organization,” conjures up a social service agency, local YMCA, community development organization, or United Way. The term refers to an organization that defines social need and develops initiatives and programs with the goal of making a difference in the daily lives of people living within its community. Such organizations play an active role in their communities, positively affecting people’s lives and in some cases even transforming a community as a whole.

Can a museum, even a modern, outward looking museum, ever be defined as a community organization? Museums traditionally have functioned to collect, preserve and exhibit objects in order to educate the public. In recent years, however, the American Association of Museums (AAM), in a pioneering effort, has encouraged museums to expand their scope and to enter into community life through civic programming and initiatives. The rationale behind this effort is that a museum that sees itself as a community organization is more relevant to its community, and, therefore, can hope to attract a larger and more diverse population. A civically engaged museum also possesses the potential to make a difference, even to have a transformative influence in the community. As museums have begun looking for ways to contribute to what they define as their communities, they have become a part of a broadened category of community-based organizations that comprises a variety of non-profit institutions that serve their populations through community building initiatives including education, community development, partnerships and programming.

While museums have become more involved in efforts to engage and improve their communities, community organizations, typically founded with the mission and function of building better communities, are increasingly turning to arts and culture as effective tools to achieve their goals. Most community organizations function to support their community,

whether it is through social services, educational offerings, economic development or cultural programming. In recent years, community organizations have incorporated culture and the arts into their initiatives, while remaining committed to their central civic purposes, in order to make their organizations more appealing to the public.

This paper examines four very different institutions, two museums and two “traditional” community organizations, in an effort to demonstrate that as museums become civically engaged, their functions begin to complement those of traditional community organizations. An examination of the concepts of community and civic engagement, recent trends in the museum field, and the role of culture, arts and history in communities will set the stage for the four case studies. The case studies include two museums, the Holocaust Museum and Study Center and The New Jersey Historical Society, and two traditional community-based organizations, the New Jersey Community Development Corporation and the Somerset County Cultural Diversity Coalition. These four organizations will be compared, not in order to find a common theme or trait, but to explore the ways in which they all meet community needs. Indeed, the community is the focus of this examination, not the museum collection or organizational mission. Each organization identified within this paper, whether museum or community organization, has addressed a need within its defined community through community partnerships, cultural outreach, educational initiatives and creative programming. The impact of these institutions on the community is the result of their initiatives, which, in turn, are shaped to meet the needs of that community. The organizations discussed in the four case studies differ in institutional mission and programming techniques, but the one theme that remains constant is that they try to transform their communities through civic engagement. Thus, community development corporations, community coalitions *and* museums can all be defined as “community organizations.” In support of this argument, it will become evident that as museums seek to increasingly become involved in their communities, many of their functions begin to overlap with

community organizations, which, in turn, are increasingly reaching into the cultural sector of society to inspire their populations.

### **What is community?**

The term “community” is difficult to define, and even when applied to organizations, it can have different meanings. When it comes to museums and most community organizations, there are two main ways to define community. The first is geographic. A community is often considered a group living a distinct area or district, which shares a common government.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the New Jersey Community Development Corporation has a geographical community that encompasses the city of Paterson and its surroundings, while The New Jersey Historical Society defines its core community as the city of Newark and its broader community as New Jersey. The second way to define community is based on “interest.” Communities of interest include groups of individuals possessing common cultures, ethnic backgrounds, or interests.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the Holocaust Museum and Study Center (HMSC), has a community of interest composed of Jewish individuals. HMSC also has a geographical community of local residents, Jewish and non-Jewish, who are involved in the Center. Similarly, the Somerset County Cultural Diversity Coalition serves ethnic interest groups through its culturally specific programming; however, the goal of the coalition is for all members of Somerset County to partake in the cultural programming. Often museums have both communities of interest and geographic communities, and AAM asserts that museums should be engaged with and serve both of these segments of the public.<sup>3</sup> The same is true for community organizations.

While identifying the geographic community of an organization is relatively simple, identifying a community of interest is often not so simple. Community life is shaped by a diverse group of perspectives held by various ethnic and economic groups. As a consequence, the path to community building is not always clear, as constituents have different visions, needs and goals.<sup>4</sup> Organizations can participate in community building initiatives through identifying the



individual needs of their defined communities and determining how they can best address these needs given their strengths and assets as an institution. In seeking to attend to these needs, museums and community organizations can fill a void and make a mark.

All communities have economic and social needs, which range from crime and racial conflict to the deterioration of neighborhood life and beyond. The challenge for museums and community organizations is to find a way to meet these needs. As will be illustrated in the case studies that follow, institutional commitment to developing appropriate initiatives and programming can often affect these issues in a positive manner. Museums' assets typically lie in their collections, which can be interpreted and capitalized upon to connect with and change community. Traditional community-based organizations possess the community building tools, including knowledge of social services, development, education, and community needs, that are necessary for the betterment of their populations. Museums can utilize their educational staff and collections to creatively solve problems and strengthen communities, while community organizations have the experience, foundational strength and tools to address societal needs. Therefore, both museums and traditional community organizations have the potential to transform their communities.

### **Museums and Civic Engagement**

Community involvement is a recent trend in the museum field encouraged by the central umbrella organization, the American Association of Museums (AAM). In the past decade, AAM has made community engagement a major part of its agenda. A number of museums are redefining how they can engage, and possibly even improve, their communities. For these museums, the focus of exhibitions and programming has moved from imparting knowledge to visitors to involving the community directly in the museum. We may refer to these museums as "civically engaged."

The term “civic engagement” relates to community involvement in a practical and comprehensive manner. Civic engagement is defined as, “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.”<sup>5</sup> As such, civic engagement is the steps that are taken to address community needs. Daniel E. Stetson in *Mastering Civic Engagement* puts it perfectly: “Civic engagement is about bridge building, and then walking over the bridge.” Institutions that are civically engaged move beyond community outreach, and strive to have a public purpose and build better communities.<sup>6</sup>

Civic engagement involves both the community and the institution as active agents. It is a partnership between an organization and the population it serves. The case studies to follow will demonstrate formalized partnerships between museums and outside organizations, as well as informal relationships between museums, community groups and individuals. As will be shown, a relationship can be formed between an institution and the community it serves through program expansion, institutional partnerships, institution-wide commitment to a civic role, and the direct involvement of community members.

In his essay, “The Civic Landscape,” published in AAM’s publication *Mastering Civic Engagement*, Christopher Gates, president of the National Civic League in Denver, suggests that museum’s can become civically engaged through programming.<sup>7</sup> Gates’ lectures worldwide on problem-solving and strategic planning within communities. His expertise is in community building. With increasing diversity in communities, there is a greater need for building connections between individuals within a community. Gates claims that to foster “social connectedness,” museums can celebrate the diversity of cultures and attract diverse audiences by offering creative and interactive programs, which improve the quality of life for individuals, communities and societies.<sup>8</sup>

But museums’ civic engagement goes beyond programming. Museums house priceless collections and are seen as cultural institutions that enhance the prestige of an area. While their main functions are collection, preservation, research, exhibition and education, museums also

encourage exploration, continued learning, self-expression and discovery.<sup>9</sup> In her contribution to *Mastering Civic Engagement*, Ellen Hirzy affirms the centrality of museums to their communities, “Museums are community institutions in the most basic of ways. They are established, familiar parts of the landscape. They contribute to the economy and to cultural tourism. They have strong connections to schools. They are places to meet friends, find shelter from hot weather, shop for a birthday gift, see a film or a performance, have a cup of coffee, or feed the spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

The evolution of the museum-community relationship can best be traced through the efforts, research and projects of the AAM, which represents the American museum community as the leading organization in disseminating best practices and standards in the museum field. As AAM asserts, museums can become community centers through their role in public education and by providing visitors a place to meet and understand their greater community. AAM’s website goes on to state that, “American Museums are grounded in the tradition of public service and hold their collections and information as a benefit for those they were established to serve.” With 2.3 million museum visits per day and 865 million museum visits each year, American museums have great potential to become civically involved.<sup>11</sup>

AAM began to recognize the importance of civic engagement in the 1980’s. In 1984, the Association published *Museums for a New Century*, which explored the position of museums and museum professionals, recommended educational initiatives and collaborations and represented the first formal effort to include non-museum professional in museum research. In 1992, AAM published *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* to further the notion of a museum as a public place of learning and to advocate for the integration of public service into museums’ missions, goals and operations.<sup>12</sup>

AAM’s recent “Museums and Community” initiative was perhaps its most comprehensive and far-reaching research project to explore the position of museums in their communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1998, AAM launched this initiative to support the museum field in building

stronger community relationships. The research consisted of six community dialogues between July 2000 and April 2001. AAM's Museums and Community initiative was unique in that it sought to look outside the museum field for guidance on how museums can become, "credible and effective agents for community vitality and change."<sup>13</sup> The dialogues were held between community representatives, who had never before been involved with museums, and museum professionals. Community leaders were brought into the communication, illustrating AAM's commitment to building stronger relationships with the community. Over seven hundred participants, from diverse demographics and institutions, discussed the possibilities for museums in creating new relationships to benefit community life.<sup>14</sup>

Many conclusions were drawn from the Museum and Community initiative, but the main one was that museums are expected by their communities to be civically engaged. This expectation presents a new challenge and responsibility for museums. Museums and Community project participants, Kim Igoe and Alexandra Marmion Roosa, noted that, "every museum has a unique and essential civic role and a responsibility to contribute to the health and vitality of its community."<sup>15</sup> In accordance, Maria-Rosario Jackson, Director of the Urban Institute's Arts, Culture, and Communities Program, states that "AAM has given the museum field a noble challenge—to stretch its boundaries, step away from the sidelines, come to the center of civic life, and become a more active participant and even a leader in social-capital and community building processes."<sup>16</sup> The Museum and Community initiative concluded with the "Museums and Community" Resolution, passed by the AAM Board of Directors in 2002. It urged museums to become more active in collaborating with their communities. It also stressed the responsibility of museums to their communities in responding to community needs and helping to define and meet goals for the future.<sup>17</sup> AAM has subsequently disseminated the knowledge gained from their initiative through professional seminars, including "Building Community Connections" in 2003, and various publications, including *Mastering Civic Engagement: A*

*Challenge to Museums* and *A Museums and Community Toolkit*, both published in 2002, and AAM's *NewStandard* publication.

The role of museums within their communities is evolving constantly. With support and leadership from AAM, museums can begin to establish valuable relationships and partnerships with their communities. These relationships serve the community, but they also greatly benefit individual museums through an increase in perceived value of the institution, as well as an increase in the number of visitors. A museum that is civically involved benefits both the museum and community. This notion is confirmed in *Mastering Civic Engagement*: "Civically engaged museums serve the public better and see increases in their attendance and credibility, employee productivity and moral, and community support."<sup>18</sup> If a museum commits to working closely with its community, civic engagement will become the natural intersection between the museum and its community. The connection will be made through the services, programming and partnerships between the individual museum and its population.

### **Community Organizations**

Both museums and community organizations are creating positive changes within their community through their civic-minded initiatives. In an article prepared for AAM's *A Museums and Community Toolkit*, several scholars agree that, "Museums are not the only organizations working to reinvent themselves as civically engaged institutions, and there is much that we can learn from our colleagues."<sup>19</sup> In order to understand how museums and community organizations can be similar to one another, it is important to define the term community organization. M.G. Ross, a scholar who wrote influential texts on the meaning of community organizations, defines this type of institution by its function. Ross saw a community organization as one that engages in:

“...a process by which a community identifies its needs or objectives, orders (or ranks) these needs or objectives, develops the confidence and the will to work at these needs or objectives, finds the resources (internal and/or external) to deal

with these needs or objectives, takes action in respect to them, and in so doing extends and develops co-operative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community.”<sup>20</sup>

Civic engagement is characterized by initiatives to address public needs, and Ross’ concept of a community organization directly parallels this. Therefore, civic engagement is implicit in functioning of a community organization.

Community organizations possess an in-depth knowledge of the community. Most of these organizations were founded through community partnerships and for a public purpose. Their function is typically to represent and support the community, whether it is through human and social services, educational initiatives, and/or cultural offerings. In *Mastering Civic Engagement*, AAM actually considers the role of community building organizations, precisely because so many of them engage in cultural activities. Daniel Kertzner, program coordinator in the Communities Department of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, comments on the culture of community organizations involved in civic based cultural programming: “The missions, histories and tasks of these organizations obviously differ from those of museums. However, the process they used to become catalysts in their communities—and establish both relationships with the wider community and the internal practices to support those relationships—can help museums transform into civic enterprises.”<sup>21</sup>

Community organizations are increasingly becoming involved in cultural and the arts in their efforts to build community. Many have recognized Maria-Rosario Jackson’s point that “arts and cultural activity is an essential dimension of community and community building processes.”<sup>22</sup> Defining arts, culture and creativity within the scope of civic initiatives is a difficult task, as the meaning of these terms becomes dependent on the values, interests and lives of stakeholders within a community.<sup>23</sup> Though research on the integration of culture and the arts into community organizations is sparse, recent initiatives by the Urban Institute in Washington, DC have made wide-ranging progress in the area. The Urban Institute has led an extensive research and dissemination initiative, the “Culture, Creativity and Communities Program,” to

investigate the role of culture and the arts in community. The Urban Institute recognizes that their research is at a new stage of development; however, the Institute asserts that the inclusion of culture and creativity within community initiatives can be meaningful when it considers community interests, needs and values.<sup>24</sup>

Though the impact of the arts and culture on communities is not well-documented, the Urban Institute found a long tradition linking community, culture and the arts. More than half of all non-arts organizations surveyed by The Urban Institute were involved in arts and cultural activities in some form, and for organizations in the field of community, youth or educational development, the percentage increased to two-thirds.<sup>25</sup> The Urban Institute also emphasized that when community organizations worked in the realm of culture and the arts, the major benefit was the creation of quality programming. The Institute's research has shown that involvement in the arts supports higher educational achievement and the development of self-esteem, problem-solving skills and greater communication in youth.<sup>26</sup> In evaluating the effectiveness of arts and cultural involvement in the programming of non-arts organizations, the Urban Institute found that overall community development agencies do recognize the value of cultural programming in community initiatives.<sup>27</sup>

As community organizations begin to appreciate the value of integrating culture and the arts into their programming, their functions become similar to those of museums who seek to incorporate community needs into their programming. This examination will compare civically based initiatives from two community organizations and two museums in an effort to demonstrate similarities. The community organizations presented emerge from the social services and community development sector of society, while the museums are from the cultural and historic realm of society. Where these organizations all merge is in their civic endeavors to identify community needs and find the resources to develop solutions to these needs. Through examining each organization within the categories of community need, community partnerships,

educational outreach, collaborative initiatives, creative exhibitions and community-wide events, parallels between the four case studies can clearly be drawn.

### **Case Studies**

The missions of the Holocaust Museum and Study Center (HMSC) and The New Jersey Historical Society (NJHS) are centered on teaching history, specifically the lessons that emerge from the history of the Holocaust and New Jersey, respectively. Yet, while their missions focus on disseminating these histories, both NJHS and HMSC are moving towards the community service sector in their programming, educational initiatives and exhibitions. The New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC) and the Somerset County Cultural Diversity Coalition (SCCDC), both community organizations, were formed with the missions of community development and appreciation. As these two institutions explore the culture, heritage and history of their communities, they are moving into the cultural sector and beginning to resemble cultural institutions in many of their functions. As the post-modern museum finds its civic role, so does the community organization find its cultural potential.

The four case studies presented have each identified their community, recognized specific needs within this constituency and responded to these needs with their individualized assets and expertise. Though the missions of these four organizations are very different, there are many parallels in the approaches they have taken to becoming civically engaged.

NJHS and NJCDC are organizations located in cities that face urban challenges, and both see it as their task to address the needs of underserved, minority populations. Moreover, both institutions are in communities undergoing a period of revitalization and transformation of their neighborhoods, and their participation in this urban revival is essential in understanding their community involvement. In contrast, HMSC and SCCDC are organizations in diverse, suburban localities that endeavor to transform the minds of their communities through promoting respect and understanding for differences. Within communities facing increasing concerns of



bias and divisiveness, HMSC and SCCDC have fostered communication through initiatives that promote an understanding of cultural diversity. All four organizations can be grouped within an expanded category of “community organizations,” as associations that respond to the needs of their communities through collaborative programming, community forums, creative exhibitions, community events and educational outreach. Each is responding to needs within their distinct communities through creative initiatives integrating culture, history and arts into community.

## CHAPTER 2: THE NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*"The New Jersey Historical Society gives New Jersey History an active, powerful voice:*

- to inspire curiosity about the past;*
- to strengthen understanding among the State's diverse communities;*
- to promote pride and civic responsibility;*
- to further our understanding of the New Jersey of today through the ongoing study and presentation of the New Jersey of the past."<sup>28</sup>*

**Mission Statement of The New Jersey Historical Society**

*"Through the history of New Jersey - a quintessentially American place - the Historical Society promotes exploration of our cultures, past and present. As we challenge and inspire people to grow as learners and thinkers, we strive to make a difference in their lives."<sup>29</sup>*

**Vision Statement of The New Jersey Historical Society**

### **Introduction**

The New Jersey Historical Society in Newark, New Jersey, is a leader in innovative programming. Its programs are designed to reach out to the community and community-based organizations in order to make a difference. NJHS has created both informal and formal partnerships that recognize the value of communication and collaboration with community organizations. In discussing NJHS's initiatives in the areas of educational outreach, collaborative programs, creative exhibitions, and community festivals, it will become evident that this organization takes its civic function seriously. NJHS's efforts to become involved with its community have taken it beyond the functions of a traditional museum and into the realm of community institutions.

Founded in 1845, the Society comprises a non-profit Museum, a library, and archives. Aimed at a state-wide audience, it is focused on the exploration of New Jersey history and culture, and holds one of finest, most extensive collections of New Jersey-related historic objects. NJHS's collection includes upwards of 33,000 objects that document the heritage of New Jersey's past and present. The Society uses this extensive collection to educate the public through exhibitions, publications and programming for school children, families and adults. Given these functions, NJHS is civically involved with its community through family events, adult

programming, school programs, lunchtime discussions, community exhibitions, guided walking tours, work with the disabled, community festivals and workshops. NJHS makes the connection between its collections, programs and audience in asserting, “As we challenge and inspire people to grow as learners and thinkers, we strive to make a difference in their lives.”<sup>30</sup>

This case study focuses on the programming, collaborative exhibitions and community initiatives of NJHS that are intended to engage and connect with the community. The selections below highlight those initiatives that particularly exemplify NJHS’s efforts at civic engagement and collaboration over the past several years.

### **Community Needs**

As a historical museum and library devoted to the culture and history of New Jersey, the Society serves the entire state. But located in the heart of Newark’s historic district, its primary community is comprised of Newark residents. Newark is the largest city in New Jersey and also one of its poorest. The city has a rich history as an industrial giant in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After reaching its manufacturing and commercial peak in the early twentieth century, Newark began on a downward spiral despite efforts mid-century at revitalization. The urban center was overwhelmed with substandard housing, racial discrimination, increased crime, rioting, and the loss of jobs. Newark is again embarking on a “Renaissance” with recent success; however the ills of poverty persist.<sup>31</sup> Newark has the third highest rate of poverty in the state. According to a recent study by the Association for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), one out of three children in Newark live in poverty. Newark Public School students, who represent a cross section of the ethnic composition of the city, are 59.1% black, 31.7% Hispanic and 8.2% Caucasian. Newark is an urban center, often characterized by outsiders as unsafe, black and poor.<sup>32</sup>

As leader in the research and dissemination of New Jersey history and culture, NJHS examines its local community of Newark, and larger New Jersey community, and seeks out

ways to make a difference in the lives of its residents.<sup>33</sup> Through collaboration with area community organizations, including educational institutions, social service agencies and other cultural sites, NJHS has gained insight into its community. With this insight, the Society has made the inclusion of its entire community a major part of its efforts. NJHS focuses on involving the local Newark population in their programming, while they endeavor to incorporate the larger statewide community through collecting projects and exhibitions, in addition to programming. The Society utilizes its expertise in culture and history to serve as a resource and partner in community building, particularly within Newark, a city in need of education, renewal and unity.

### **NJHS as a Community Partner**

Notwithstanding statistics that highlight the high crime and poverty rates in Newark, the community has made considerable gains, particularly over the past decade. The city's image is beginning to change, as the community undergoes massive transformation. The crime rate has dropped 51% since 1995, and race relations, which were strained since the turbulent 1976 race riots in Newark, have improved.<sup>34</sup> More businesses are moving downtown, and cultural life is being revitalized. People report feeling safer while participating in social and cultural events in Newark.<sup>35</sup> The city has worked and continues to work at changing its image with the opening of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), return of the Newark Bears to a newly built Riverfront Stadium, and the development of housing, restaurants and businesses. The community is beginning to see a difference through a revival of interest and pride in the city of Newark. As a community partner in Newark's revitalization efforts, NJHS has collaborated with outside organizations and taken on its own programming initiatives to address community needs. Newark's city-wide renewal is reflected in smaller community sites like NJHS.

Despite its handsome collection, NJHS, like the city of Newark, was in serious decline around the beginning of the 1990's. Its future was in question due to its rundown state, financial weakness and low number of visitors. Trustees debated whether they should move the Society

outside of Newark, where it had been for a century and a half.<sup>36</sup> In the end, leadership determined that NJHS would persevere in Newark. The Society moved its headquarters to a new space at 52 Park Place. At the new site, NJHS has more room for exhibitions and space to grow. The increase in visitors reflects revitalization; visitor numbers increased from 3,000 in 1992 to 16,000 in 1999.<sup>37</sup> The Society's increasing success is reflective of the renewal of cultural life in Newark. According to NJHS, in a 2003 Press Release: "The Historical Society has become an active community partner in the city's renaissance."<sup>38</sup> The resurgence of NJHS can be attributed to the new site, innovative programming and collaborative exhibitions. With these efforts, the Society is partnering both with the immediate population of Newark and the larger New Jersey community.

NJHS's increasing success, and its commitment to both Newark and New Jersey as community partners, is exemplified by the 2005 partnership between NJHS and Rutgers University-Newark. An informal relationship between the two institutions has existed since the 1950's. University students acted as interns and used the library and archives of the Society. Rutgers faculty were consulted on exhibitions, served as board members and submitted pieces for NJHS's publication "New Jersey History." But in 2005, Rutgers-Newark and NJHS formally entered into a "precedent-setting collaboration that will support the highest levels of education and research in the humanities." This initiative partnered two community institutions with long histories as educational, cultural and service organizations. Plans for the partnership are extensive. NJHS and Rutgers Newark intend to expand history education and advanced technology programs throughout the state. For example, they are planning a project with the Newark Public Schools to develop a history high school, with a four year enhanced curriculum focusing on American History. With only 56% of high school students from the Newark Public schools completing graduation in four years in the 2002-2003 school year, the need for alternative high schools and higher education partnerships is apparent.<sup>39</sup> The partnership additionally will work with other community organizations, particularly within Newark, in the

areas of community services, education and social services. Rutgers-Newark is planning to include internships and training in museum topics and primary source research in its coursework for undergraduate and post-graduate students. The formalization of this relationship illustrates an institutional commitment on the part of both organizations. Rutgers University President Richard McCormick noted the effect of the partnership on the state, asserting that it, “will benefit both institutions and through them all the citizens of New Jersey.”<sup>40</sup>

The partnership increases awareness of both organizations within the state and links them with their local communities through planned collaborative projects. Both institutions recognize the importance of taking advantage of community resources to meet mutual goals and community needs. Their alliance furthers the Society’s efforts to civically engage the local community of Newark, and the larger community of New Jersey, by merging the assets of Rutgers-Newark with its own in creative collaborative endeavors.

NJHS engages the larger New Jersey community through partnerships, such as that with Rutgers University, and with community collecting and exhibition projects, as will be shown. The Society also has become a community partner within Newark as it reflects and furthers the city’s renewed cultural efforts with its programming initiatives, which will be discussed in detail within this case study. NJHS asserts its institutional commitment to engaging its community as it “strives to meet the needs of its diverse community through thought-provoking adult forums, family-centered activities, educational programs for school groups and customized programs for those with special needs.”<sup>41</sup> Several of these efforts that particularly demonstrate the Museum’s collaboration with community organizations and its population will now be discussed.

### **Educational Outreach**

NJHS participates in both in-school and after-school educational programming. In 2003, 5,328 Newark students participated in interactive, hands-on education at NJHS.<sup>42</sup> Educational programs at NJHS support New Jersey’s Core Curriculum Content Standards and are adapted

to the ages and levels of students. Educational outreach to schools is a very traditional form of a museum's involvement with their community, and, therefore, does not receive major emphasis in this examination. It is useful, however, to mention the Adopt-a-School program, as an example of a collaborative program between NJHS and Newark schools, which represents sustained involvement through multiple visits. With the Adopt-a-School program, school groups make multiple trips to NJHS with the final goal of creating projects based on their museum experience. Since its inception in 1996, Adopt-a-School has involved over nine hundred students from second grade to high school. Students are guided in exploring exhibits through activities that encourage critical thinking about history and community. They learn how to use primary sources and how exhibits are assembled. Students are then challenged to create their own "exhibit" piece, based on New Jersey history, to be showcased at an annual Student Exhibition at NJHS. Past displays have included photographs of community workers and collages about Newark neighborhoods. Students are learning about the Museum, history and their community as they complete their project. This multiple-visit program creates a relationship between NJHS, school teachers, and, most importantly, youth, who are engaged as active participants in the Museum.<sup>43</sup>

Within its Education Department, the Museum additionally offers teacher workshops throughout the year. NJHS is a Registered Professional Development Provider with the New Jersey State Department of Education. The Museum educates teachers on how to teach students about New Jersey history and their community, specifically through the use of primary sources and exploration. An innovative teacher workshop titled, "Positive Lessons from Difficult History," held for the first time in 2004, was unique in its intention to encourage civic involvement among teachers and, in turn, among students. NJHS's Education Department's stated goals for the workshop were to, "explore how to use various sources to teach difficult subjects, find meaning in the past, and encourage positive civic engagement by your students." NJHS additionally collaborates with William Paterson University and The Newark Museum in

sponsoring an eight-day course for teachers on the topic of exploring identity in yourself, community, history, culture and the arts. The yearly course offers teachers the opportunity to gain graduate credits or Development Credits, as they participate in gallery work, lectures, discussion and interactive sessions led by museum educators, teachers and specialists. Course participants will ideally gain knowledge that they will utilize in their classrooms to impact student learning.<sup>44</sup>

The Museum's educational programming goes beyond school and teacher-focused programs. The Education Department works with community organizations such as Kids Corps, Youth Consultation Service, camp groups and girls scouts in order to involve the community through sustained relationships. Their regular Saturday programs reach out to the community, particularly local residents. Saturday Family Programs are free to all. The agenda differs each week and can consist of self guided exploration, hands-on activities, family community festivals, performances and additional forms of experiential programming. The program complements the Museum's current exhibitions through interactive components. Often, families will visit exhibitions together and then take part in activities set up for that day and facilitated by Museum staff. Activities range from music and art to crafts and games, generally focused on themes of New Jersey history, community or resources. One of the family activities offered regularly is *DUET! A Family Collaborative – Una Colaboración familiar*. Its aim is for families to visit the exhibits together and participate in self-guided activities. *DUET* stands for "Discover, Uncover, Explore, Together!"<sup>45</sup>

NJHS incorporates its community into programming by celebrating its diversity. The city of Newark is 56% black and 32% Hispanic.<sup>46</sup> NJHS attempts to create a welcoming atmosphere and connect with its community by including English and Spanish in their brochures and offering program materials in both languages. The Society also reaches out to diverse cultures in celebrating African American History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month through its programming and exhibitions. Oftentimes, programs will celebrate diverse cultures and



incorporate current exhibitions into program activities. For example, Kwanzaa is celebrated with special activities that discover the creativity of individuals, as creativity is one of the principles of Kwanzaa. In 2005, Kwanzaa activities complemented the current exhibition, *Resourceful New Jersey*, by having families explore the exhibition and then create cards, necklaces and tie-dye handkerchiefs to explore personal creativity. NJHS demonstrates an institutional commitment to the culture of Newark residents through the adaptation of its programming to meet the needs, interests and cultures of its community.<sup>47</sup>

NJHS's Family Programs are also focused on strengthening family and community. Activities encourage parents to learn together with their children. This is important for enhancing the children's learning and promoting positive family interactions, particularly in a community where family interactions and youth education are of particular concern. The effect is ideally that youth and their parents will become more interested in Museums, see them as welcoming places, and make museum visits part of their leisure lives. By encouraging regular participation, the Museum becomes more like a "community center," a place for regular recreation and learning for families.

### **Collaborative Initiatives**

The Society exemplifies an institutional commitment to addressing needs within the community and promoting civic engagement through collaborative efforts. Sally Yerkovich, NJHS Executive Director, confirms this pledge to public service: "NJHS has a strong record of service to Newark residents and is committed to addressing community needs with our partners." Through community partnerships, the Society has been able to encourage participation of local residents, particularly among populations that may not typically visit a museum otherwise. This is particularly evident in their work with teenage parents and "grandfamilies," grandparents raising their grandchildren, both non-traditional families and atypical museum-goers.

As NJHS began looking outward, they identified teenagers as a population group that was not taking advantage of Museum resources. In looking to work with teens, NJHS realized that Newark has a large population of teen parents. Indeed, the number of teen parents in Newark is astonishing. Nearly 69% of Newark births were to unmarried mothers in 2002, compared to 29% statewide.<sup>48</sup> Many of these unwed mothers are under the age of nineteen. In 1998, NJHS began working with the Barringer High School Infant Toddler Center in Newark to learn more about teen parents. NJHS soon learned that Barringer was lacking a cultural component in its programming. Museum staff realized that there was a chance to form a partnership that met the needs of both organizations, as well as those of teen parents and their children. With an identified common goal, NJHS and Barringer together created a mutual vision and designed the program, *Partners in Learning: Teens and their Children at Museums*.<sup>49</sup>

Teen parents provided input in planning this innovative collaborative program. They noted feeling uncomfortable and not knowing how to act in museums, particularly when they were with their children. In shaping the program, Museum staff identified specific purposes, including increasing parents' self-esteem, teaching parents about appropriate parent-child interactions, exposing parents and children to cultural environments, promoting bonding between parents and their children and inspiring lifelong alternative learning experiences.<sup>50</sup> The program was piloted in 1998 and soon became a success. Other teen parent programs, including Gateway Academy, Young Fathers Program at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and Essex County Technical Careers Center SMART Start, joined *Partners in Learning*. This collaborative program endeavors to provide low-income, adolescent parents with non-traditional educational and cultural services. It is an eight visit program, in which teenagers are introduced to the cultural and educational resources in their community and taught how to use these resources with their children. In the course of the program, teenagers learn about child development, discover how to interact with their children in

educational settings and learn how to locate sites and plan trips to other cultural and educational institutions.

Success can be measured in the program outcomes. NJHS indicates that, “The participants themselves attest to the fact that these visits contribute to both their own enrichment and their interactions with their families.”<sup>51</sup> One participant, Angela, confirmed that, “It [*Partners in Learning*] helped me have a better communication with my child.”<sup>52</sup> Outcome-based evaluation has shown that 67% of participants have visited other cultural institutions since participating in the program, and 100% of participants talk more with their children.<sup>53</sup> Based on the program’s success, *Partners in Learning* won the 1999 “Museum Leadership Award” from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, which subsequently helped to support the program financially.<sup>54</sup> In 2002, *Partners in Learning* was honored with an “Excellence in Programming” Award from AAM’s Education Committee. The program was praised for its creativity and innovation in museum education. It was branded a “model collaborative community initiative.”<sup>55</sup> Newspapers touted the success of the new program. For instance, the *Star Ledger* spoke of NJHS’s position in the community with respect to *Partners in Learning* stating: “These days, institutional walls that once have seemed like barriers to community involvement have come tumbling down.”<sup>56</sup>

The *Partners in Learning* program represents a civically engaged museum initiative, as the impact has potential to go beyond awards and publicity. Through the publication of *First Steps: A Scrapbook and Guide for Young Parents, Museums, and Community Partners*, other cultural institutions are provided the steps to developing similar programs. NJHS outlines the essential components of successful collaborations with community organizations. The publication also serves as a scrapbook for participants to remember their experience. Ideally, the memory book will remind teens of educational and cultural activities in which they can participate in with their children, particularly as NJHS’s long-term goal is for teens to continue to expose their children to non-traditional educational sites in the community. A broader vision

identified by NJHS is, “to provide parents and their children with a fun, unique and worthwhile learning experience that would have lifelong benefits and might help them cope better with logistical, social and economic issues.”<sup>57</sup> In articulating the larger potential impact of *Partners in Learning*, NJHS is recognizing that it is addressing a public need through this program.

Civic engagement is also the driving force of NJHS’s “Grandfamilies” program. “Grandfamilies” are families where grandparents are the primary caretakers of their grandchildren. NJHS has partnered with the Salvation Army to provide support, education, cultural experiences and a place to meet for grandfamilies in Newark. The program was initiated in 2002, when NJHS identified grandfamilies as a group in their community who had the potential to become a larger Museum audience. In New Jersey, 5.5% of children live with relatives, the majority of which are grandparents. Grandparents are often in need of support services to raise their grandchildren in positive, healthy environments, particularly as many of these children have experienced the trauma of being separated from their parents. The Salvation Army identified this group as one in need of support, and, in 1996, they developed the Salvation Army’s Grandfamilies program. The program was designed to provide grandparents with peer support, counseling and education.<sup>58</sup> The Grandfamilies program meets twice monthly at Salvation Army Community Centers. The Salvation Army offers participants summer respite camp, an information help-line and an annual Grandfamilies Conference. The program serves 105 Grandfamilies with 280 children in Essex County.<sup>59</sup>

In the initial stages of NJHS’s collaboration with the Salvation Army, Maribel Jusino-Iturralde, NJHS Community Programs Coordinator, brought the Museum to participants. She traveled to meetings at Salvation Army Community Centers, spoke about the resources of NJHS and brought hands-on projects for families to complete together. Subsequently, NJHS and the Salvation Army determined that the galleries and space of NJHS would be an ideal location for monthly meetings. NJHS offered to stay open later for meetings, and the program evolved from outreach to an official partnership. During the monthly Grandfamilies program, ten

to fifteen grandparents and children take part in a gallery activity, which is typically an existing Family Program adapted for this group. Following the activity, the children complete a project with NJHS staff, while the grandparents hold their support meetings. The collaborative program offers grandparents a community space to share perspectives and offer support, while at the same time providing youth with positive learning experiences. The Grandfamilies program also exposes the family to the offerings of NJHS in hopes that they will attend other family programs. For NJHS, the program allows the Museum to promote their family programs and engage an underserved community group in an unexpected partnership.<sup>60</sup>

NJHS has recognized the importance of building relationships with other community organizations, particularly social service agencies, schools and educational institutions, in order to attract community members to the Society. By creating connections, pre-existing community groups are brought to the Museum. Rather than advertising a new program blindly, NJHS is incorporating the needs of grandfamilies and teen parents into its programming and providing these groups with a safe, didactic environment to gather and learn. NJHS exemplifies civic engagement through its community collaborations, which create a true, sustained connection between community members, outside organizations and the Society. This connection has the potential to make a lasting impact on the community.

### **Creative Exhibitions**

Through “community collection” projects, NJHS has partnered informally with its community to gain personal insight in designing public exhibitions. The Museum attempts to establish a connection with New Jersey residents as they create community collection projects that evolve into Museum exhibitions. Claudia Ocello, Director for Programs and Exhibitions, explained that in NJHS’s exhibitions, the people’s voice and not the Society’s is most important. NJHS interviews community members, solicits community commentary in local newspapers, collects oral histories, and requests objects and materials related to exhibition projects. By

including community input and materials in exhibitions, the Museum has found valuable information, often in the form of personal anecdotes, that would be impossible to uncover through traditional research. They have incorporated a personalized, community slant to exhibitions. In examining the Museum's community collecting projects, two exhibitions, *Changed Lives: New Jersey Remembers September 11, 2001* and *Dining In, Dining Out*, particularly exemplify community involvement, as both topics embrace and affect a large number of people in New Jersey.

Following September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, NJHS sought to honor and remember New Jersey residents, and to educate present and future residents, about the effect of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Nearly seven hundred New Jersey residents died on September 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>61</sup> NJHS honored their memory, and the impact of this devastating event on New Jersey residents, through collaborating in a statewide community collecting project, *Changed Lives: Understanding New Jersey in the Aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>*. The project was initiated to record and preserve New Jersey's response to this tragic event. The NJHS's collecting project was part of larger initiative between NJHS, the New Jersey Historical Commission, NJN Public Television and Radio to examine the impact of the attacks on New Jersey life. The statewide collaborative venture records the unique stories of New Jersey families who lost loved ones and emergency personnel who participated in the rescue effort. NJHS sought evidence of organized and personal responses in the form of photographs, printed materials, personal stories and memorial objects. The commentary provided by community members was priceless. Only through reaching out and listening to the community did NJHS design this personalized community collection.

Beyond their community collection and plans for an exhibition, NJHS was involved in community forums to discuss and record individual experiences related to September 11<sup>th</sup>. The public forums, "September 11<sup>th</sup>: Perspectives From a Community," were conducted as a series of meetings to provide community support, draw together ideas for the future of the metro area

and gather recollections for the statewide oral history project, a component of *Changed Lives*. The forums were coordinated by NJHS, the Historical Society of Elizabeth, the city of Elizabeth and Municipal Art Society of New York. Meetings were held in community centers and at locations of participating organizations, including NJHS. Residents were invited to discuss their experiences on September 11<sup>th</sup> and concepts for the future of the World Trade Center. Firefighters, police officers and hospital employees attended these meetings alongside local residents. Attendees were able to understand the experiences, emotions and responses of fellow community members, and NJHS, along with participating institutions, was able to preserve these memories through its collecting project. As a participant in the forum, NJHS showed a commitment to a statewide community of support, beyond the Museum's own efforts.<sup>62</sup>

To commemorate the first anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>, NJHS designed an exhibition based on their newly gathered collection. The NJHS opened their exhibition, *Changed Lives: New Jersey Remembers September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001*, to the public and encouraged community members to experience the stories of fellow residents. The *Changed Lives* collection, and subsequent exhibition at NJHS, included children's artwork, music composed about the event, photographs of memorials and other mementos.<sup>63</sup> Crayon drawings, oral histories, incredible personal stories, recorded messages and personal objects represent the voices and images of the New Jersey community and their reaction to September 11<sup>th</sup>. The project additionally had an oral history component that was integrated into the exhibition. First responders, political officials and residents of New Jersey spoke about the impact of September 11<sup>th</sup> on their lives and the community. Newark school children became involved in the collecting project by donating poetry and artwork that illustrates their feelings about the attacks. These pieces were all incorporated into the exhibition. Visitors could participate in and relate to the exhibition through "soundsticks" of people sharing stories, video documentary by NJN Public television, and "talkback" books to incorporate visitors' comments.<sup>64</sup> By connecting with the experiences of

others, visitors were able to gain a greater understanding of the impact of September 11<sup>th</sup> on New Jersey. NJHS's exhibition was able to build community through remembrance, mutual understanding and experience sharing.

The *Changed Lives* collection did not end after the exhibition closed. It is a continued collecting effort, and donations are still accepted. On the second anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>, a memorial display was presented at NJHS with commemorative paintings, recent newspaper coverage, and memorial artifacts from the past year, all collected after the previous year's exhibition.<sup>65</sup> The collection has been inventoried on-line, where New Jersey residents and beyond can access a research guide of the community collection. Visitors to the site can view a finding guide, inventory lists and background information on the attacks. Following the *Changed Lives* exhibition, the NJHS was awarded a "Certificate of Commendation" from the Association for State and Local History (AASLH). NJHS was recognized as a leader in the community in interpreting the meaning and impact of history through the *Changed Lives* project and exhibition. The NJHS's extensive efforts at memorializing September 11<sup>th</sup> incorporate residents of New Jersey into the Museum in an intimate manner through the presentation of their personal stories.

NJHS had previously been awarded a "Certificate of Commendation" from AASLH for another community exhibition, *Dining In, Dining Out*, which was mounted at the Museum in 1999.<sup>66</sup> *Dining In, Dining Out* incorporated similar techniques of community collecting as it explored the ways that community gathers around food. Through examining local food customs and the culture of dining, the exhibition went beyond food to an exploration of ethnic trends, town gatherings and eating out. The exhibition was designed by NJHS Curator Ellen Snyder Grenier over the course of a few years. During the planning and collecting stages, the Museum reached out to the community and requested that anyone with relevant materials involve themselves in the collection project. They sent out flyers and posted advertisements in New Jersey newspapers requesting photographs, recollections and objects from residents. NJHS



invited the community to participate, stating in one flier, “We need your help...we are hungry to hear from you!”<sup>67</sup> The Society confirmed its commitment to working with the community: “Because we want to represent the diverse experiences of New Jerseyans, we are asking people state-wide to donate or lend items for display in this show and to share their memories.”<sup>68</sup> Snyder Grenier also made visits through the community visiting diners, attending food functions and involving herself in the culture of dining in an effort to present the diverse nature of how people gather around food. *Dining In, Dining Out* reached out to the community and *into* the community in gathering stories and objects to display. The community was a true partner in creating this exhibition.

*Dining In, Dining Out* explored food traditions in New Jersey in three sections: “Come to the Table,” “We Gather Together,” and “Home Away from Home.” These sections presented the family dinner, food and community life and eating in transit respectively. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, NJHS presented, as articulated by Sally Yerkovich, “the bigger story about how New Jersey’s dining trends have knitted its communities together.”<sup>69</sup> Visitors experienced New Jersey dining through vignettes of ethnic kitchens, small town taverns and diners. They moved through the history of dining through multi-sensory displays, where they could smell, touch, hear and view New Jersey dining through the centuries. Visitors entered into multi-cultural kitchens, where they opened cabinet drawers and explored ethnically diverse families through photographs, objects, utensils, recipes and a variety of items that reflect local families. Within the exhibition, they discovered Passover Sedar with the Schmur family, the Elm Volunteer Fire Company’s ravioli dinner, the Patel family’s Diwali celebration and the Shiloh Seventh Day Baptist Church chicken pot-pie dinner.<sup>70</sup> Visitors were presented with contrasting views of how New Jersey dining trends have brought people and community together.<sup>71</sup>

Aimed at families and youth, the interactive components of the exhibition included games, recipes, stories and hands-on activities. Visitors listened to the voices of people reminiscing, watched video clips, wrote grocery lists, added their favorite diner to a magnetic

state map and recorded commentary for a memory bowl. *Dining In, Dining Out* had a broad audience appeal, as it presented the stories of how different ethnic communities approach dining, and how these cultures have adapted and defined themselves through food interactions and traditions. Rather than being elitist, NJHS attempted to incorporate the stories of as many groups in New Jersey as they could. The exhibition sought to, “encourage visitors to deeply discover how New Jersey adapted their ethnic traditions and have arrived at their own sense of community.”<sup>72</sup>

The informal, interactive and fun nature of *Dining In, Dining Out* appealed to a broad community audience. As Sally Yerkovich confirmed, the Museum was able to, “attract people who don’t know they’re interested in history.”<sup>73</sup> Snyder Grenier expressed hope that visitors would be affected beyond just entertainment and learning. She wanted to remind visitors that history is relevant to the present. Snyder Grenier idealized that through exposing visitors to different gatherings and traditions, there was a potential for them to be inspired to become more involved in family and community, perhaps through changing their dinner structure, volunteering or becoming involved in community.<sup>74</sup> In this manner, the exhibition incorporates community and could potentially change it for the better.

The New Jersey Historical Commission recognized the success of NJHS’s community collecting exhibitions with the Richard J. Hughes Award. This award is the commission’s highest honor for exceptional work in New Jersey History. The commission noted that NJHS presents New Jersey history to diverse audiences with their community collection exhibitions. Sally Yerkovich confirmed that community connections were promoted in NJHS’s exhibitions: “Our exhibitions, collections and programming are designed to bring people together to reflect, learn and share their experiences.”<sup>75</sup> By affecting visitors, incorporating individual and collective histories and involving a larger segment of NJHS’s community, community collecting efforts promote the involvement of community in all aspects of programming, even the planning

process. NJHS opens itself up to the community in an appealing and welcoming manner through community projects.

### **Community-wide Events**

Creative community-centered events often accompany new exhibitions at NJHS. One of the most exciting aspects of family programming at NJHS is their “community family festivals,” which take place throughout the year. The festivals are a part of NJHS’s regular Saturday Family Programs and are free to the public. These events celebrate the Museum’s exhibitions, history and community. They draw in the community by attracting a large audience of local residents.

NJHS offers an annual Halloween Community Family Festival. Started in 1994, the Halloween Festival is a favorite activity for families in Newark.<sup>76</sup> The primary audience for the festival is families, as most of the activities are geared towards youth. The festival takes place in the Museum’s galleries and spreads outside into Military Park, which is across the street from NJHS. Participants learn about New Jersey history as they take part in hands-on activities including storytelling, craft activities, gallery games, pumpkin decorating and exciting performances. In 2005, the Halloween Festival honored the Society’s 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with art activities, historical dress-up costumes, goody bags and interactive gallery experiences. Previous years’ celebrations have incorporated current exhibitions, such as “It’s a Puerto Rican Halloween” and “Positively Negatives! A Halloween Community Family Festival in Black and White.” Culture and history are celebrated with these holiday festivals. The NJHS is able to draw in non-traditional Museum audiences with the Halloween community event, which attracts families looking for an enjoyable afternoon, as well as local residents drawn in by the festivities they see in the park.

Similarly, NJHS offers an “Annual Community Family Festival” in the spring and an “African American Heritage Month Community Family Festival” in February. Activities

complement themes directly related to the Museum's exhibitions. The 2001 Annual Community Family Festival allowed residents to celebrate community through painting watercolor postcards, exploring exhibits with a Family Gallery Guide and creating sun prints and 3D still-life dioramas of New Jersey.<sup>77</sup> The activities accompanied the current Museum exhibitions, *Still Life: Picture New Jersey*, *Resourceful New Jersey*, and *Dining In, Dining Out*. The 2000 African American Festival embodied the theme, "Heritage and Horizons: The African-American Legacy and the Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."<sup>78</sup> It facilitated learning about the role of African Americans in New Jersey history through a song and dance performance, "Quilts for Seven Sisters," hands-on art activities and exploration of the Museum's exhibition, *Newark's National League Negro Baseball Team: The Newark Eagles*. NJHS's community family festivals are creative, fun and welcoming annual events that incorporate community into the Museum's programming.

NJHS has also taken part in city-wide celebrations, demonstrating its position within the Newark cultural and arts community. Founded in 1985, The Newark Festival of People was initiated as a celebration of the city, residents, community and traditions. The city of Newark and the Newark Downtown District joined together to commence this city-wide tradition. It is funded by partnerships, including schools, corporations, cultural institutions, community based organizations and city government. The NJHS, along with the Newark Museum, is an active partner in the festival, offering free programs for families and children. Through a health and education fair, free cultural and educational programs, and an international festival, the event rejoices in the revival of the city and the diversity of the community. All residents and neighborhoods of Newark are celebrated with music, picnics, games and crafts activities. Many additional programs, including a parade, concerts and ethnic shows are offered free to the public, to promote the city's cultural offerings. Through its participation in the Newark Festival of People, the NJHS is an active community partner in celebrating the diversity and revitalization of its city.<sup>79</sup>

In 2001, the Newark Cultural Arts District began coordinating an annual Community Arts Day. The event was built as a collaborative effort between NJHS, The Newark Museum, NJPAC, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, WBGO Jazz 88.3 FM-Newark Public Radio, the Newark Public Library and the City of Newark Division of Recreation and Cultural Affairs. The mission of this celebration of the arts, sciences and history is to introduce the larger community of New Jersey to Newark's cultural life and resources. Each community organization hosts events, which exemplify the organization's position in the cultural life of Newark. Most of the events are within walking distance of one another, making them accessible to visitors and residents. In 2002, the second year of the celebration, NJHS hosted "Hats Off to Community Arts," a drop-in program, where visitors could explore the exhibitions, travel behind the scenes to see the library and special collections, and participate in organized neighborhood walking tours. The NJHS's interactive offerings and activities introduced the community to the Museum's wealth of resources. Linwood Oglesby, Executive Director of the Newark Arts Council, commented that, "Events like Community Arts Day show just how vital the arts are to our daily lives."<sup>80</sup>

Community celebrations are a unique way for NJHS to collaborate with outside community organizations, the city and local and statewide community members. They forge bonds in creating partnerships with outside organizations, such as the orchestra or public radio, that are very different in function and purpose. These community organizations come together with the common goal of celebrating community and introducing New Jersey to the richly diverse and renewed city of Newark. The celebrations additionally have the potential to introduce new visitors to the NJHS. These persons come in for a one-day event, and can be further attracted by the Museum's programming and exhibitions.

## **Conclusion**

NJHS has been recognized for its community involvement efforts. The Society was awarded a National Award for Museum Service in 1998 in recognition of pioneering programming for families and children. The award, “honors museums that demonstrate institutional commitment to public service with innovative programs that address educational, social, economic or environmental issues.”<sup>61</sup> NJHS was honored for both its in-school and after-school student and family programming and its partnerships with outside community organizations, particularly social services agencies. The Society’s role as a community resource for families in Newark was acknowledged by the prestigious national award. The following year, the Institute of Museum and Library Services honored NJHS with the National Award for Museum Service. The Society was cited as having, “a remarkable transformation from an ‘antiquarian’ organization to an ‘open’ institution.”<sup>62</sup> NJHS’s increasing efforts towards becoming a community organization, which reaches out and embraces its population, were celebrated with this distinction.

NJHS is participating in the revitalization of Newark by becoming involved in community endeavors, including celebrations, collaborative programming, community exhibitions and educational endeavors. In the past decade, the Society has developed community partnerships and innovative programming to address the needs of its population. NJHS has become a more civically engaged institution as it has begun to look outward, beyond its walls and into the community. For many in the local community, NJHS has become a “community center”—a place to go for education, culture, enjoyment and support. As such, many of NJHS’s functions complement those of traditional community-based organizations, particularly through partnerships with outside organizations and community groups. NJHS can be considered to have evolved into a community organization seeking to address particular needs within its community while promoting an understanding of the history and culture of New Jersey.

## CHAPTER 3: NEW JERSEY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

*“To serve as a vibrant and pioneering force in revitalizing New Jersey’s urban areas through the creation of jobs, affordable housing, educational initiatives, and vital support services for people in need.”* **Mission Statement of the New Jersey Community Development Corporation<sup>83</sup>**

### **Introduction**

As illustrated in the last chapter, history is the natural focus of NJHS, a Society composed of a Museum, library and archive. Though less obvious, history has also been a constant theme in the development of the New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC), which is not a museum but a community-based organization. NJCDC is a non-profit community development and social service agency in Paterson, New Jersey. NJCDC is defined as a community organization, as it offers a wide range of programming, including education, youth development, housing, programs for the developmentally disabled, restoration of Paterson’s historic district, and community economic development. The civic role of NJCDC was a central component at its foundation. The organization was founded in 1994 through an AmeriCorps national service grant. In the course of a decade, NJCDC has grown from operating a single AmeriCorps National Service Program to running a large number of community-based programs. The organization serves eight hundred to one thousand clients throughout Paterson each year.<sup>84</sup> The extensive services of NJCDC fall into various realms of community building. For the purpose of this examination, the focus will be on those aspects of NJCDC’s efforts that incorporate culture, art and history into community partnerships, educational outreach, creative presentations and community celebrations.

NJCDC has embraced the history and culture of Paterson to change the lives of residents through educational outreach and the arts. The mission, goals and daily operations of NJCDC clearly differ from those of a museum. However, the initiatives and programming they have developed to highlight the history and culture of their community parallel the recent initiatives of many museums that are hoping to become civically involved. As a community

organization that incorporates culture, history and the arts in addressing local needs, several of NJCDC's initiatives are comparable to those of a civically engaged museum.

### **Community Needs**

Located in the Great Falls Historic District of Paterson, NJCDC uses the history of Paterson as an educational and cultural tool in reaching out to its community. NJCDC has recognized the possibilities of this declining city and strives to develop and educate the local community in an effort to revitalize Paterson. The historical significance of Paterson comes from its rich industrial past. Paterson was once the center of the nation's commerce and industry. When the economy moved away from industry in the later part of the twentieth century, Paterson suffered economic decline.<sup>85</sup> With this economic decline came typical inner city social problems, including poverty, discrimination, crime, and declining standards of education.

As a community organization, NJCDC has a deep knowledge of its people and experience with community building. NJCDC serves youth and adults in Paterson who are in need of community services. Paterson is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse cities in the state of New Jersey. Over fifty percent of the city is Hispanic, and there is a large and growing Muslim population. Within the Paterson Public school system, fifty-seven languages are spoken. Four out of five students within the public schools live at or below the poverty level, and less than fifty percent of students entering high school make it to the twelfth grade. The local unemployment rate is more than double that of the state average. Robbery, assault and serious crimes far exceed the state average. In a city where gang-related activity is at an all time high and where no recreation centers are available to youth, NJCDC affirms the apparent conclusion that, "the demand for safe, structured, and developmentally appropriate...programs far exceeds what is available."<sup>86</sup> The sum of all of these social problems is a perilous inner-city environment with a diverse, struggling population. Despite this bleak picture, NJCDC envisions



a bright future for the city of Paterson. Remembering the rich history of Paterson, it incorporates Paterson into its programming and initiatives. As an organization, NJCDC has initiated resourceful solutions to contemporary urban predicaments in an effort to restore and develop community.

### **NJCDC as a Community Partner**

NJCDC's efforts to restore buildings and community-life in Paterson are the first steps towards community collaboration in the areas of history, culture and the arts. While the community of NJCDC is generally defined as the city of Paterson, the organization is increasingly looking to revitalize and create an awareness of its immediate neighborhood, the "Greater Spruce Street Neighborhood." This neighborhood is central to The Great Falls Historic District, which is designated a priority one threatened National Historic Landmark.<sup>87</sup>

NJCDC has committed itself to the belief that the future of Paterson is linked with its past. In an effort to preserve this past and create opportunity for its community, NJCDC has completed two "adaptive reuse" projects of their main buildings, the Transportation Opportunity Center (TOC) and Independence House, which house programs and services to meet the needs of Paterson residents. The ten million dollar rehabilitation of these historic buildings preserved their historical integrity, while integrating them into the community life of the Great Falls National Landmark Historic District.<sup>88</sup> In their application for funding to the New Jersey Historic Trust, NJCDC proposed, "a comprehensive adaptive reuse of the building [TOC] that will bring it back to life as a centerpiece of the community."<sup>89</sup> Creighton Drury, NJCDC Vice-President, notes that the adaptive reuse project has been the organization's largest contribution to the community. Drury explained that NJCDC will, "use this building as a catalyst to restore and revitalize the community."<sup>90</sup> The historic preservation project assists in renewing the city of Paterson by providing residents access to community resources, including employment, transportation, education, culture, and recreation. It also contributes to the community by

increasing access to Paterson's historic resources. NJCDC was recognized for its accomplishments in converting the TOC and Independence Hall buildings, and linking the physical and social redevelopment of Paterson, with a "Smart Growth Award" from New Jersey Future in 2005. New Jersey Future is a non-profit statewide organization that supports and recognizes, "sustainable economic, environmental and social progress." NJCDC received the Smart Growth Award, "for converting vacant locomotive mills in Paterson's Historic District into a community center offering education, housing, access to transportation and economic development opportunities."<sup>91</sup>

Adaptive reuse has linked Paterson's heritage with its community's future. NJCDC's website affirms this notion: "Once the frame-fitting shop for the Roger's Locomotive Works, the rehabilitated TOC stands as a symbol of where Paterson is headed."<sup>92</sup> In revitalizing a piece of the Paterson landscape to meet contemporary community needs, NJCDC is preserving history, illustrating a cultural commitment and furthering its civic engagement. Paterson Mayor, Jose Torres, affirms the adaptive reuse project as part of a larger plan to revitalize the Great Falls and Paterson: "This facility will have wide-ranging community benefits, and is in keeping with our objective of revitalizing the entire Great Falls Historic District."<sup>93</sup> NJCDC is positioned in the center of the Great Falls National Landmark Historic District. This places them in an ideal position to assist in the revitalization of the neighborhood in order to address the deep-rooted urban difficulties.

NJCDC has taken a lead role in restoring healthy neighborhood life through the development of, "The Greater Spruce Street Neighborhood Revitalization." (GSSN) It has partnered with local business owners, city officials, neighborhood residents, county officials, stakeholders and interested parties to help create a revitalization plan, presented as "The Greater Spruce Street Neighborhood Strategic Revitalization Plan." The group created a planning committee, which meets regularly at the TOC building to research, assess, discuss and present information regarding the revival of the neighborhood. The preserved mill provides

a unique setting and adds symbolic importance to the meetings, encouraging community renewal within a revitalized site. After examining the needs of the neighborhood, and other pioneering projects across the country, GSSN determined four main focus areas to be: quality of life, beautification and recreation, the Waterfront and Riverviews, and historic preservation.

They then created a vision:

“The Greater Spruce Street Neighborhood Vision incorporates both historic preservation and waterfront development by expanding opportunities for restaurants, green space and parking with an emphasis on taking advantage of the Great Falls and ATP site. It also highlights quality of life (clean, safe, enjoyable and vibrant) as the most important elements in a beautiful environment with recreational facilities and parks.”

NJCDC is the lead organization in the GSSN revitalization plans. They host all meetings and play an active role in the planning process. As a leader, NJCDC has implemented the Community Economic Development Initiative (CEDI), a program that funds GSSN efforts with monies from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. CEDI is defined as a, “local, targeted initiative of NJCDC designed to facilitate community-driven strategic planning which promotes healthy community interaction and participation, accurately assesses and clearly articulates community conditions, and identify economic development opportunities within these neighborhoods that will contribute to their overall revitalization.” This community driven initiative has involved stakeholders in planning for the future of their neighborhood. CEDI and GSSN strive to enhance the relationship between NJCDC and the community, improve the quality of life in targeted neighborhoods and boost the local economy. The initiative addresses areas such as business development, surveying residents on neighborhood conditions, community leadership, mural projects, festivals, and fostering local artists. The focus for this examination will be the latter three areas, which relate to community revitalization through culture, history and the arts.<sup>94</sup>

Historic preservation projects are just the beginning of plans to redevelop Paterson's GSSN neighborhood. Clean-up projects and the restoration of abandoned buildings into

housing and recreation centers are a part of the strategic plan, which looks to obtain funding for historic preservation of existing structures.<sup>95</sup> The development of parks, cleaning of the famous Paterson Raceways, landscaping projects and signage for the historic district are all long term goals for the GSSN Planning Committee.<sup>96</sup> The plans go beyond development to the sponsorship of festivals and programs to complement an increasingly beautiful neighborhood. The GSSN Planning Committee intends to increase art and cultural activities in the district; they have identified future events to include free neighborhood concerts and festivals.<sup>97</sup> Their goal is, "to create a clean, safe, enjoyable and vibrant environment where individuals want to live, work, raise a family and visit."<sup>98</sup> Through neighborhood events, residents will be given an opportunity to get to know one another, appreciate their neighborhood, engage themselves in a lively community and understand the significance of their surroundings.

Paterson has a strong presence of culturally diverse local artists who are seeking to become involved with NJCDC and the GSSN initiative. Local artists from the Paterson area organized the Ivanhoe Wheelhouse Artists Association in an effort to develop an appreciation and presence of the arts in Paterson. Their main initiatives are to develop studio space for artists, increase awareness of their presence and involve youth through workshops, events and gallery exhibits. The Artists Association contacted NJCDC for a potential partnership in creating recreational opportunities for youth and furthering their presence in the community. GSSN has proposed events for 2006 in which the Artists Association will participate. These include a local art exhibit at the Paterson Museum, annual arts festival, mentoring program, artists studio tours, local festivals and markets, young adult seminars and involvement with NJCDC's mural project.

Beyond these projects, GSSN has planned several other programs to integrate the arts and culture into community life. The annual "Taste of Paterson" festival will be initiated in 2006 to feature the cooking and customs of neighborhood residents and restaurants. NJCDC and partners have designed neighborhood clean-ups, business forums, barbeques, bingo, tree planting and community internships that are all included in the GSSN strategic plan.<sup>99</sup>

The GSSN plan is a long term institutional commitment led by NJCDC that will be recognized in January 2006, when the plan is unveiled in a formal presentation and celebration amongst all of the partners at the TOC building. The projected outcome of the GSSN vision is a clean, safe neighborhood, where children can play and visitors want to come, learn, enjoy and relax. The goal is to create programs and cultural activities that embrace residents and attract outside visitors. Ideally, the beauty of the area will be appreciated and recognized and quality businesses and commerce will emerge. Through a strong commitment and increased connections between residents, visitors, businesses and the city, NJCDC and partners hope that this vision will become a reality. In its efforts to rejuvenate the neighborhood through heritage appreciation and the arts, NJCDC, as a community organization, is looking more and more like a cultural institution in its means to achieve community revitalization.<sup>100</sup>

There is no doubt that this extensive initiative represents civic engagement. As a community organization, NJCDC is civically engaged through most of its efforts; however, the GSSN revitalization project represents an attempt to promote heritage, culture and the arts through community involvement. NJCDC has identified needs within its community and gone to great lengths, within the realm of culture, history and the arts, to create solutions. Through an examination of NJCDC's collaborative initiatives, some involved in the GSSN revitalization project, NJCDC begins to look much like a museum in its work with arts, culture, and history.

### **Educational Programming**

NJCDC transforms history into opportunity through educational outreach and programming. As a community leader, NJCDC operates numerous programs collaboratively with the Paterson Public School District. Amongst these programs are two major collaborations, Garrett Morgan Academy and the Family Friendly Center, which integrate the arts, culture and history into programming.

AmeriCorps members facilitate much of the educational programming at NJCDC. They work with high school students, elementary students, at-risk foster teens and homeless children through after-school programming, field trips and arts competitions.<sup>101</sup> Twenty to thirty AmeriCorps members join NJCDC yearly. Prior to their work with youth programs, they undergo extensive training, including a day at the Paterson Museum learning of the history of Paterson. AmeriCorps members are taught to appreciate the Paterson community, and its culture and heritage, in order to gain a greater appreciation for Paterson history that they can impart on youth. In their work with disadvantaged youth, AmeriCorps members focus on community issues and lessons. They often incorporate these lessons with exposure to heritage and the arts within non-school programming such as the PAYD mural projects, Martin Luther King service day, community service projects and after-school programming, all to be discussed in detail throughout this case study.

NJCDC's innovative high school, Garrett A. Morgan Transportation and Technology Academy (GMA), is a unique national example of an educational partnership.<sup>102</sup> GMA represents a partnership between NJCDC and the Paterson Public Schools. It is an alternative high school that serves 120 student each year, all of whom possess a special interest in occupations in transportation. According to NJCDC's literature on GMA, "This partnership offers students a chance to share in the vast resources and programming of a large non-profit agency while at the same time gaining the benefits provided by the public school system."<sup>103</sup> At GMA, students are encouraged to explore personal creativity through culture and the arts. Each year, students take part in several "Community Service Days." These programs take place on MLK day, Make a Difference Day in the fall, and National Youth Service Day in the spring. Student volunteers take part in community service projects on these days. In the past, they have created community gardens, participated in neighborhood clean-up projects and facilitated cultural discussions and presentations. GMA students are also involved as community leaders through coordinating events to honor Hispanic heritage and African American history. In

October, a Hispanic heritage celebration is held to honor Founders Day, and, in February, students take part in a celebration of black history month. For both events, an assembly is held for community members and families. GMA students create music, dance and visual presentations to celebrate the different cultures present in the Paterson community. The students donate their time outside of school hours to learning and sharing diversity through cultural expressions. GMA students are additionally provided the opportunity to participate in gallery shows at the Paterson Museum and have even hosted their own gallery opening at TOC. Through community service and artistic presentations, GMA students are able to showcase their talent to the public.

The high school is housed in the TOC building. According to Creighton Drury, NJCDC Vice President, Garrett Morgan connects youth with Paterson's rich industrial history and prepares them for a brighter future.<sup>104</sup> Students learn within the walls of a historic building, and Drury confirms that the "living history" impacts students every day. It is difficult to judge the success of GMA, as their first graduating seniors have only been out of school for two years, but Principal Michael Gowdy stated that GMA has a one hundred percent graduation rate and that close to one hundred percent of graduating seniors in 2005 moved on to higher education.<sup>105</sup> This is a considerable success as compared to the noted fact that fewer than fifty percent of youth in Paterson public schools make it to the twelfth grade.

GMA is a similar model to the history high school proposed by NJHS and Rutgers-Newark, as a part of the partnership between the two institutions discussed in detail previously. Alternative public high schools reach a need in the community in a very concrete manner. They provide specialized education and individualized curriculum to meet the needs and interests of students, allowing these students to succeed. This is particularly important in inner-cities, such as Paterson and Newark, where the average number of high school students graduating in four years falls 23% and 25% below the state average respectively.<sup>106</sup> The success of innovative academies, such as GMA, in meeting community needs for education, is apparent in the perfect

graduation rate and plans for higher education. Alternative public high schools represent a civic endeavor through successfully engaging enrolled students in specialized and interest-oriented education.

NJCDC has further addressed the needs of Paterson youth by operating after-school programming since 1998. The Family Friendly Center is a free, structured after-school program serving two hundred elementary school students at Paterson's School No. 2.<sup>107</sup> At a time when test scores are low and thousands of youth are out on the streets at 3PM each day, there is a great need in Paterson for comprehensive, after-school programs. According to NJCDC in their application for funding from New Jersey After 3, "In a community like Paterson, New Jersey After 3 resources would offer significant hope to students and parents who now have no or very limited options." The goals of the Family Friendly Center collaborative program are to complement classroom curriculum, provide youth with a safe place to go after school, and develop and appreciation for Paterson's diverse cultural community. The Family Friendly Center grant requires that arts and culture be incorporated into programming. In addition to academics, social skills, emotional development and physical health, youth participate in structured lessons and activities in the areas of "Arts and Culture," "Character Education" and "Tolerance and My Community." Students participate in lessons and community service projects that teach them to respect and appreciate the diversity of their community. In order to learn about Paterson's different cultures, students take part in hands-on, interactive programming. They dress up in ethnic clothing, participate in ethnic food tastings and learn how to access community cultural and educational resources. Through a variety of arts, crafts, dance and music activities, the Family Friendly Center strives to reach youth in order to, "help them become caring, responsible, and tolerant citizens [who] enjoy and appreciate artistic self-expression."<sup>108</sup>

Julie MacLeod, Director of the Family Friendly Center, is developing a plan for the program that will focus on the multi-cultural nature of Paterson. She envisions a structure



where students will explore a different cultural group monthly and, each week, the program will introduce a new project to learn about that month's group. MacLeod's goal is for students to learn about cultural diversity in order to create understanding and respect. She explained that when students begin to enjoy aspects of another culture, they develop appreciation. MacLeod recognizes that ignorance breeds mistrust, and strives to implement a more organized program, which promotes respect for the differences of cultures. Diversity, respect and tolerance are all fundamental themes in the programming activities of the Family Friendly Center.<sup>109</sup>

NJCDC's programming in the realm of education strives to reach Paterson's youth, as they realize that the youth are the future. The community organization also has a pre-school, Saturday youth program, School-Based Youth Services Program and GED instruction training. Through long-term educational partnerships with the Paterson Public Schools and Paterson families, NJCDC has placed itself at the center of the Paterson community. Their involvement in education has been in the form of innovative programming, similar to that of museums and cultural institutions. Instead of traditional education, these organizations often embark upon educational endeavors through unique, collaborative programs. NJCDC has done this through its academy, after-school programming and community initiatives.

### **Collaborative Initiatives**

Most of the programs at NJCDC are the result of collaborative efforts with other local non-profit organizations, as well as the public school system. In 1997, NJCDC played a leading role in organizing the creation of the Paterson Alliance, a collaboration of over thirty Paterson non-profit organizations that meet to plan partnerships and share ideas.<sup>110</sup> This alliance has fostered community collaborations, including linking NJCDC with Habitat for Humanity, Eva's Village homeless shelter and United Way of Passaic County. Executive Director, Robert Guarasci, confirmed NJCDC's role as a partner within the community when he stated, "Over its

ten years of existence, NJCDC has developed a wide array of relationships within the City of Paterson that enrich our ability to deliver high quality service to city residents.”<sup>111</sup>

NJCDC’s Martin Luther King Junior (MLK) celebration exemplifies an annual educational outreach program that relies on community partnerships for success. It is a day to unite Paterson residents and explore cultural diversity through exhibits and activities. The program has been held by NJCDC on the MLK holiday since 1995. It utilizes the resources of outside organizations, public schools and community volunteers. Over a dozen diverse educational, faith and community partnerships are now employed by NJCDC in this “multi-partnered” holiday celebration. Partners for the MLK program include St. Paul’s Community Development Corporation, Paterson Public Schools, At-Risk Youth Mentoring Program, the Paterson Housing Authority, YMWCA, Hope Worldwide, Passaic County Legal Aid and Father English Community Service Center.<sup>112</sup>

The MLK program was significantly enlarged following September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. As one of the third largest cities in New Jersey, and one of the poorest and most diverse, Paterson was in need of a plan to promote unity amongst its residents following this tragic event. Paterson has a significant Muslim population, including residents from many different Arab-speaking nations. Following September 11<sup>th</sup>, rumors spread that Muslims in Paterson were holding street celebrations. Though unsubstantiated, television and radio reports recounted these rumors, causing a sense of uncertainty and mistrust amongst Paterson residents. In planning for the 2002 – 2003 MLK celebration, NJCDC devised an extensive program that spanned four months, from September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2002 to the MLK Holiday. The program applied the lessons and teachings of Dr. King to the events and aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> in order to address a community need for harmony and understanding in a diverse city.<sup>113</sup>

The new 2002 – 2003 MLK service day, “Respecting and Celebrating our DIVERSE CommUNITY,” built on and expanded past programs. In 2002, the program drew one hundred twenty children to the main site, the Paterson YMWCA. In their funding application for 2002 -

2003, NJCDC projected that they would bring together twelve hundred children in a citywide day of service and education. Programs were mainly directed at youth, but they also involved adult Paterson residents. Five goals were identified for this expanded program, including educating students about different countries and cultures, involving persons from different backgrounds, educating about MLK's legacy, recruiting over one hundred volunteers and offering locations for safe and educational activities on this school holiday.<sup>114</sup>

NJCDC's AmeriCorps members coordinate the MLK Day of Service. The 2002 expanded program began on September 11<sup>th</sup>. AmeriCorps members held interactive workshops for students and community members. Using PowerPoint presentations, they explored different cultures, geography, language, economy and religions. Following the September 11<sup>th</sup> program, AmeriCorps members reached out to participating schools and teachers to encourage the discussion of different cultures in the classroom. In addition, local students prepared essays, plays, artwork, speeches and displays in honor of the teachings of Dr. King. The projects were based on themes of diversity and were shared at program sites on the MLK holiday. On the MLK holiday, partners hosted city-wide events and activities as a part of NJCDC's "Day On Not a Day Off." NJCDC expressed within its funding request a commitment to the outcome of this expansive program: "Our belief is that by uniting efforts to achieve a common goal, people can learn to understand, work with, and appreciate different cultures."<sup>115</sup>

Beginning in 2003, a minimum of ten sites held activities for up to 1200 children. Program sites include Garret Morgan Academy and the Paterson YMWCA. Students and AmeriCorps members facilitated displays, workshops and discussions. Speeches, poems, art and exhibits about history and diverse cultures were presented in stations at each of the sites. During the program, attendees, mostly youth, rotated through the stations, which were divided into three main sections. Section one introduced the MLK holiday with projects pertaining to the life and work of Dr. King. This section transitioned into presentations of student artwork related

to Dr. King, civil rights, diversity and culture. The final segment was the “World Culture Room,” where volunteers taught about their own backgrounds with creative and interactive displays related to music, food, religion, and culture.<sup>116</sup>

NJCDC encourages its community to unite through participation in the MLK program. Students come to these events voluntarily with their families. This large community-wide program creates a chemistry and rapport between residents and reaches a significant number of community members. The MLK program has expanded significantly from a small program, initiated by NJCDC and the YMWCA, to a community-wide event involving a range of partners and stakeholders, most importantly, Paterson youth. Volunteers, student participants and organizers provide an apparent service during this event, but it cannot be overlooked that program attendees are also uniting in service. Their participation is their service. By their presence alongside other residents of different faiths, races and ethnicities, Paterson residents are fulfilling NJCDC’s mission in the MLK Day of Service: “Unite the diverse ethnic communities of Paterson.”<sup>117</sup>

### **Creative Exhibitions**

Arts and culture are featured in the Paterson community through a unique NJCDC program called Promote Artistic Youth Development (PAYD). Artists partner with disadvantaged youth to research, develop and implement large-scale murals that reflect cultural and historic elements of the community. NJCDC’s mural projects have provided a splash of color to Paterson neighborhoods since 1999. PAYD presents public art to the Paterson community in an effort to, “inspire creativity, cultivate value for arts and history, and impart a sense of community pride, teamwork, and individual self-esteem to program participants and the Paterson community at-large.”<sup>118</sup> Planning for future murals is included in GSSN’s neighborhood revitalization plans, as the creation of murals makes Paterson a brighter and more welcoming city.

PAYD is a multi-disciplinary program that incorporates history, culture and the arts throughout the planning, design and production of the mural.<sup>119</sup> The program is funded by the Passaic County Cultural and Heritage Council. It brings art and history to a key segment of the community, at-risk teenagers. Teen participants come from varied backgrounds. They live in Paterson and lack productive, educational after-school, weekend and summer programs. Many are NJCDC clients through Independence House, NJCDC's after-school programs or Garret Morgan Academy. Rather than being out on the busy streets of Paterson, the teens involved with PAYD are engaged in a productive program that, according to NJCDC, "promotes independence, pride and self-esteem in its participants and the Paterson community."<sup>120</sup>

NJCDC's AmeriCorps program and staff are involved in facilitating the yearly summer program. The PAYD program begins with the determination of a community location for the mural. Past murals have been painted along different community entranceways, within the TOC, at Eva's kitchen shelter and soup kitchen, Roberto Clemente Park, Paterson public schools and at Riverside Terrace Public Housing Development.<sup>121</sup> AmeriCorps staff recruit participants with information sessions and fliers. A local artist is then chosen to assist with the project. Once all of these pieces are in place, program participants, AmeriCorps members and the artist meet for several sessions over the course of three weeks to brainstorm their concepts, learn about the history of Paterson, explore murals and graffiti as public art, complete research on their topic and create their mural.<sup>122</sup> In their 2005 regrant application to the Passaic County Cultural and Heritage Council NJCDC explained the significance of the class sessions: "The classes and their content are vital to teach Paterson's teens about the city's importance in history in an effort to instill pride and respect for their surroundings."<sup>123</sup> The PAYD program is not merely the painting of a mural; it is a multi-disciplinary experience that educates youth and provides them with a sense of heritage appreciation that is expressed in their artwork.

The murals have overwhelmingly represented what the youth involved envision as the future of their city. As suggested by the Urban Institute, "Arts and cultural expression—music,

songs, *murals*, sculpture, stories—often embody the history, hopes, frustrations, and aspirations of a community.”<sup>124</sup> Participants are able to express their ideals for their community’s future through art. The murals inspire discussions amongst community members and give the youth of Paterson a voice. For instance, the 2004 PAYD mural shows the images of young people who want to make a change in their communities. One young man in the mural is destroying the past by smashing a liquor store with a hammer, while on the other side of the mural, the future is depicted by the Paterson skyline. Between the past and future are images of youth who strive to change their community. The message above these images is “We are One” and is reinforced by two hands holding the world.<sup>125</sup> Other murals incorporate similar themes of community ideals for the future through historical concepts. The mural in the TOC building represents youth holding train tracks leading a train through Paterson’s past, present and future. A separate mural incorporates cultural diversity through the presentation of flags representing different ethnicities in the Paterson community. The mural at Roberto Clemente Park pictures Clemente himself, a famous Patersonian baseball player, who symbolizes hope and a prosperous future.<sup>126</sup>

The benefits of the PAYD project are far-reaching. Program participants create their own public display. They learn to appreciate their community, gain an understanding of Paterson history, develop the skills and understanding to create public art and develop pride in their efforts. Visitors and local residents are able to view a more beautiful landscape in Paterson. Observers are challenged to discover the hopes and dreams of the teenage population, as it relates to local history and culture. The PAYD program adds to the art programming in the historic district. It additionally promotes further collaboration with the arts community and their development work in Paterson. Lasting relationships and partnerships are formed between local artists, teens, AmeriCorps members and community residents through this initiative. PAYD has proven to be a successful collaborative initiative with clear goals, institutional support and strong partnerships that continue each year.

The PAYD project possesses many of the qualities of civically engaged museum programs for youth. The program explores the creativity of participants, while providing a safe place for youth to express themselves. The experience allows participants to develop meaningful relationships with their communities. It has a positive impact on all involved. PAYD additionally connects youth with history and the arts in an interactive manner that creates interest and engages them with the organization, NJCDC. An appreciation for the arts in daily life is cultivated by program activities. All of these factors add up to create a successful program that resembles community engaged exhibit planning and youth programming at museums.<sup>127</sup>

### **Community-wide Events**

As part of the GSSN initiative of NJCDC, The Paterson Youth Arts Festival is planned for the Summer 2006 as a one-day community event. The festival is planned in conjunction with the Paterson Annual Great Falls Festival. The city of Paterson annually holds the Great Falls Festival as a three-day citywide event over Labor Day weekend. The festival attracts thirty thousand people each year and includes a parade, vendors, food, rides, music and various other forms of entertainment. The festival in 2006 will include a GSSN coordinated Children's Arts Festival to make it a family oriented event. NJCDC will collaborate with local artists and Paterson's Division of Multicultural and Community Affairs in an effort to enhance the festival with artistic and cultural activities. The goal is to for the Paterson Annual Great Falls Festival to serve a broader community throughout the city. NJCDC's objective is to interact with the local population, as well as to create a larger community contact base for future programming. The Paterson Youth Arts Festival will support the annual festival in creating a greater appreciation and respect for the Great Falls Historic District.<sup>128</sup>

As an additional part of the GSSN initiative, during the 2006 festival, Paterson artists and collectors will exhibit their artwork, take part in performances and display their art collections.

This component to the festival will foster an artistic environment in Paterson, while developing community awareness of local artwork. The inclusion of local artists will broaden the audience and enhance the festival, in much the same way as the Youth Festival will. The incorporation of the arts into the Great Falls district will bring the community closer as they share in activities.<sup>129</sup>

NJCDC has researched findings offered by the National Endowment for the Arts on the effect of increased art and cultural activities within communities. They have utilized this research to support their initiatives, particularly within strategic plans and grants, claiming, “According to the National Endowment for the Arts, arts can channel energy into positive quests for better education, stronger family life, and rich community.” NJCDC shows an institutional commitment to the incorporation of arts into the community by using this research in their official plans. They further state that, “There is a belief that culture is shared and that the expression and appreciation of arts and culture must have a place in the community.”<sup>130</sup> The terms culture, arts, heritage and history can often sound like empty terms; however, when accompanied by NJCDC’s programming and initiatives, these terms take on a concrete meaning for those persons who are benefiting through involvement.

## **Conclusion**

NJCDC has established a base of clients and partners in the human and social services sectors of Paterson. Their social services programs are recognized as making a difference in an urban community in desperate need of transformation. NJCDC is now expanding into the cultural sector of life to add depth and excitement to their community, improve the quality of life for residents and better the outside perception of Paterson. NJCDC has moved beyond the social services sector to areas of education, the arts and historical appreciation. They have done so through educational initiatives, community collaborations, creative programs and neighborhood celebrations, which seek to create change within the community. Nestled in the heart of a deteriorating historic district, NJCDC has continuous opportunities to make a



difference in the realm of culture, arts and history. Through establishing a place within the cultural sector of community life, the programming efforts of NJCDC in many ways begin to look similar to those of outward looking museums, as both organizations seek to create change in their communities. Furthermore, as a community-based organization, NJCDC has succeeded in beginning to integrate itself into the realm of cultural organizations at a time when these cultural organizations, including museums, are seeking closer relationships with community institutions.

## CHAPTER 4: HOLOCAUST MUSEUM AND STUDY CENTER

*“The Holocaust Museum and Study Center (HMSC) is dedicated to the goals of education and commemoration. Its mission is to educate, examine and explore the history of the Holocaust with authenticity, dignity, and compassion. This mission is accomplished through educational programs, lectures, exhibitions, teacher training seminars and commemoration ceremonies to ensure that the profound lessons of the Holocaust will not be forgotten or repeated. Within the context of this mission, the lessons of cultural diversity, mutual respect and understanding of the other are emphasized.”*

**Mission Statement of the Holocaust Museum and Study Center**

### **Introduction**

The Holocaust Museum and Study Center in Spring Valley, New York, is a leader in promoting a vision of racial harmony in its region. Through supporting anti-bias measures and community dialogues in its programming and initiatives, HMSC has become a responsive and connected Museum within the Lower Hudson Valley. It is a unique model of a museum that combines the functions of a museum with those of a cultural and educational resource center. Utilizing its resources in the creation of community dialogues, educational outreach, collaborative programs and creative exhibitions, HMSC has embraced civic engagement through promoting mutual respect in the community. The Museum has become a central community-based organization in a larger effort to combat bias and unite the community through the lessons of the Holocaust.

HMSC was established to commemorate the deaths of six million Jews at the hand of the Nazis and to educate the community, particularly youth, about the reality of the Holocaust and the lessons it holds for their future. The main points that the Museum focuses on in its initiatives are race relations, respect, cultural diversity and responsibility towards others. The Museum presents a permanent collection and temporary exhibitions, while at the same time maintaining a library and a resource center, and preparing and sending out traveling exhibits. HMSC maintains a central position in promoting respect for diversity in Rockland County and the Lower Hudson Valley region through its educational outreach and community programming. A key constituency of the Museum is, and has always been, the Holocaust survivors and

liberators who initiated the Museum. These persons participate in programming and share a piece of themselves, as community members, in order to educate for the future.

The idea for HMSC originated with the Rockland County Holocaust Commission, a group appointed in 1979 by the Rockland County Legislature.<sup>131</sup> The commission was created in response to pressure from Rockland County survivors of the Holocaust, who were, “pursuing the aim of providing educational and social situations involving all citizens of Rockland concerning the meaning and lessons to be learned from the Holocaust.”<sup>132</sup> In February of 1981, the “Rockland Center for Holocaust Studies” was granted a charter and a Board of Trustees was established. Groundbreaking for the new Museum, to be built adjacent to the Finkelstein Memorial Library and on their property, began in 1984 and, in 1988, the Museum opened its doors to the public.<sup>133</sup> The first event organized by the HMSC, then known as the Rockland Center for Holocaust Studies (RCHS), was a County Holocaust Commemoration Ceremony on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1980, intended to commemorate the Holocaust, but also to involve, “all citizens of Rockland concerning the meaning and lessons to be learned from the Holocaust.”<sup>134</sup> This primary initiative of the Museum was open to community residents and established an initial commitment to involving the community in its efforts.

The HMSC established a permanent exhibit to chronicle the history of the Holocaust through photographs, text, video testimony and other film footage. Collections and educational material were assembled, a Speakers’ Bureau of Holocaust survivors and liberators was established, and regular programming was initiated. Over the years, the exhibits, projects and programs have evolved immensely as the Museum, and its board, staff and volunteers, have become committed to expansion and growth.

In 2001, the Center was reincorporated by the state as a museum, “The Holocaust Museum and Study Center.”<sup>135</sup> Though the mission of the Museum remained constant, the name and status of the Museum was formally changed to reflect to the public that the Center was in fact a museum and had been operating as such. One of the purposes of HMSC, outlined

in its by-laws, is to sponsor programming “for the benefit of the general community.”<sup>136</sup> In asserting this as a main point of the organization, the Board of Directors committed that the Museum will be civically engaged in order to achieve its mission.

### **Community Need**

HMSC is a model of how an organization examines the lessons of history and connects these lessons to current issues. The Museum presents quality and innovative programming that utilizes the lessons of the past to combat racism and bias today. In order to make this connection, the Museum integrates its community into its initiatives and programming. Over 6,500 persons within the community were reached through programming and visits in the 2004 – 2005 school year.<sup>137</sup> This is an increase of 1,500 persons from the previous year.<sup>138</sup> The immediate community of HMSC is the Lower Hudson Valley; however, due to its unique nature, visitors regularly come from across the tri-state area and beyond. Over eighty percent of community members reached by the Museum in the 2004 – 2005 school year were ages twelve to eighteen.<sup>139</sup> These persons come from diverse ethnic, racial, cultural and economic backgrounds.

While many of the programs held at HMSC are specifically appealing to a Jewish population, the Museum invites a diverse group to participate in all programming. HMSC is able to make great strides in bridging the Jewish community with the rest of the community through a common thread of mutual respect and harmony.<sup>140</sup> The community is a vital element in the Museum’s programming and initiatives. The word ‘community’ appears in almost every statement of mission, goals and purpose for HMSC. In order to make a concrete difference and educate the public about diversity and mutual respect, the Museum has developed a relationship with its community. Without a clear connection to its population, the HMSC would be making an empty promise in professing, “Never Again, Never Forget.”<sup>141</sup>

Hate crimes in the Lower Hudson Valley have increased over the past several years, including the distribution of hate literature and the vandalism of property. With an increasingly diverse population in Rockland County, and particularly Spring Valley, racial tensions have increased. Based on the 2000 U.S. Census, 19% of Rockland county residents were foreign born; one third of these immigrated to the United States between 1990 and 2000, mostly from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines and India. With 30% of Rockland County residents speaking a language other than English at home, the area represents the most diverse county in New York State outside of New York City.<sup>142</sup>

HMSC's efforts have focused on addressing hostilities, particularly those directed at the Jewish population within Rockland County. Combating the "longest running hatred in human history," anti-Semitism, is a key element in the efforts of HMSC.<sup>143</sup> Anti-Semitism, hate and bias led to the Holocaust, and with the recent resurgence of racism and acts of bias in Rockland County and worldwide, HMSC has seen an even greater need for their outreach into the community.<sup>144</sup> In November 2004, just prior to the Museum's Kristallnacht ceremony, anti-Semitic fliers were thrown on the lawns and driveways of the Rockland County towns of Orangeburg and Blauvent. These fliers contained racial stereotypes and endorsed Hitler's plan, calling Jews, "children of the Devil and human murderers."<sup>145</sup> The fliers additionally contained excerpts from a children's book written in 1938, *The Poisonous Mushroom*. This book compares Jews to poisonous mushrooms and was utilized by Hitler as anti-Semitic propaganda. Within a few days of the distribution of the fliers, a Swastika was spray-painted on the garage of an Orangeburg home.<sup>146</sup> In December 2004, a public Menorah was vandalized and anti-Semitic symbols, including a swastika, were spray-painted on homes and a car in Orangetown.<sup>147</sup> In 2003, similar hate incidents had occurred in local towns of Monsey, Congers and Pearl River, where hate messages and swastikas were painted on property.<sup>148</sup> By the end of 2004, Assemblyman Ryan Karben of Rockland County formed a task force to promote respect, in response to the surge of bias incidents. Karben stated, "We cannot dismiss these incidents—

which are now becoming fairly regular—as isolated. They are damaging to the fabric of our community.”<sup>149</sup> The need for measures to promote diversity and racial harmony became greater after each bias incident the Rockland County community faced.

The HMSC took a strong stand against these acts of bias within their community. In response to the increasing number of race-related incidents, HMSC has taken strides to increase public awareness of the Museum, connect with its community, collaborate with local community organizations, expand educational offerings and directly influence those who commit hate crimes. Through the inter-community dialogues and educational programs discussed later in this paper, the Museum became the central voice within Rockland County in combating hate and bias. The collaborative efforts, creative programming and educational outreach of HMSC respond to acts of bias by educating the community of the consequences of such acts, as well as promoting harmony and mutual respect. Rabbi Gisser called for the community as a whole to reject hate as he asserted, “Yes, it’s against the Jews, but it’s against everybody else too. It might be against us today, but it’ll be about somebody else tomorrow.”<sup>150</sup>

The increase in intolerance in the Lower Hudson Valley and beyond has forced HMSC to think about its civic function. The Museum has the resources needed to address recent concerns of bias in the area. It can utilize its pool of first-hand speakers and its collections to illustrate the severity of seemingly innocent acts. The Holocaust was the culmination of a systematic process that began with misconceptions and ended with hate and murder. HMSC highlights this process in emphasizing that small acts of bias can escalate into larger incidents of intolerance and hatred. As Jeff Weinberger, HMSC Board President professes, “The Holocaust began with the first stone thrown through a glass window. We must do our utmost to make sure these stones are not thrown—NEVER AGAIN.”<sup>151</sup> In connecting with the community, the Museum focuses on the notion of “never again” as a way of reaching the public. It teaches the public what this message means and what people can do to make sure that these words are more than just a cliché. HMSC has capitalized on its resources to provide community

leadership in the promotion of understanding and respect for different cultures. The civic need to create a more tolerant and respectful community is not a new notion; however, the recent resurgence of hate crimes within the Rockland County area clearly illustrates the purpose that this Museum serves within its diverse community.

### **HMSC as a Community Partner**

In response to the resurgence of racial incidents in Rockland County over the past several years, the HMSC took part in a community partnership effort. They joined with the Jewish Federation of Rockland and various faith groups in the community to initiate the “Interfaith Committee” in 2003. The committee was representative of diverse faith groups that shared a history of facing discrimination and suffering. A major goal was to outreach to diverse faith communities and demonstrate the commonalities among these groups.<sup>152</sup> The Interfaith Committee held brainstorming sessions to address recent occurrences of bias and develop solutions for hate-crimes in the community. The committee’s efforts resulted in a lecture series, beginning with a lecture by Daniel Pipes, Director of the “Middle East Forum” about the threat of militant Islam and worldwide terrorism. The lecture series was held at Rockland Community College Cultural Arts Theater, which is the location for many HMSC community programs. Barbara Grau, the Executive Director of HMSC at the time, described the efforts of the Interfaith Committee as follows: “Assuming that no one can understand either the pain or the accomplishments of the other without knowing something about them, the purpose of this series of lectures is to bring these communities together.”<sup>153</sup> The Museum and community organizations involved in this partnership united in addressing a shared and understood goal of combating racial bias in Rockland County. The Interfaith Committee stands today as the “Community Coalition Against Bias,” in partnership with the Catholic Community Services and the Jewish Federation of Rockland. The community partnership is a collaborative effort that was initiated by the Museum and grew into a community alliance.

In 2005, the “Inter-Community Coalition of Rockland” brought together diverse community leaders to raise awareness about incidents of bias in Rockland County and to develop solutions in combating hate. Over fifty community leaders, including representatives from the Human Rights Commission, Reformed Church, Haitian American Leadership, school districts and local government, participated in an inaugural meeting on February 11, 2005 sponsored by HMSC, Catholic Community Services of Rockland and the Jewish Federation of Rockland County. Jennifer Goldberg of the Anti-Defamation League spoke about the concept of a coalition and how it should function within the community.<sup>154</sup> Leaders from diverse racial, religious, ethnic and political backgrounds joined as one in this coalition. They committed to working together collectively to address community needs. HMSC’s participation and leadership in this coalition illustrates a long-range commitment to partnering with organizations for the betterment of community. HMSC has recognized that there is a need in their area for a unified front in combating bias. The Museum has shown that it values civic engagement through recognizing a need, making local connections, and organizing civically minded solutions to address anti-Semitism and intolerance within their community.<sup>155</sup>

In order to serve a civic function, a museum must be known to its intended community. HMSC is constantly looking for greater exposure in order to make itself a more effective and active force. Towards the close of 2004, with a new Director, Rabbi Michael Gisser, and Board President, Jeff Weinberger, the Board and staff of HMSC embraced an institutional commitment to increase public awareness of the Museum and its mission.<sup>156</sup> Rabbi Gisser confirms this commitment in the first Newsletter of 2005: “We have made a strong case to the community to not only acknowledge us, but for them to seek us out to be a leader in teaching and promoting harmony and respect.”<sup>157</sup> From a new logo and colorful brochure to recent notoriety in local papers, including *The Journal News*, *Jewish Week* and *Jewish Reporter*, the Museum has become a more evident force in the community. According to the Board of Directors, “The Community is beginning to realize that the Museum is the representative body that fights anti-



Semitism, bias and racism.”<sup>158</sup> To be sustainable and authentic, community involvement must be a part of the entire institution, from the Board of Directors to each staff member.<sup>159</sup> The Board of HMSC has illustrated a commitment to the local community through their efforts at making the public aware of the many civically involved programs and initiatives offered by the Museum.

HMSC was recognized for its potential in affecting the community when it was granted a free public service announcement on Cablevision in 2004.<sup>160</sup> The annual Public Service Announcement Day recognizes non-profit organizations with messages that facilitate community building. This award affirmed the Museum’s efforts within the community, while also helping to publicize HMSC. Through photographs of survivors, images of school visits and powerful words, this broadcast tells how the Museum teaches the lessons of the Holocaust today. The recent recognition awarded to the Museum, exemplifies the institutional commitment to raise awareness of the HMSC and its assets. In raising awareness, the Museum will reach a larger audience and further its mission of ensuring that the Holocaust and its lessons are not forgotten.

Rabbi Michael Gisser, the current Executive Director of HMSC, maintains HMSC’s dedication to combating various types of hatred. Rabbi Gisser asserts that,

“We must be the leader in educating and fighting racism in Rockland. It is our ability as a Center that effectively teaches the lessons of the Holocaust to all ages that has made us the lead organization in combating prejudice and hatred. The community is looking for our expertise to guide them, build bridges and develop a deeper understanding of the problems that we face.”<sup>161</sup>

Through the programming and educational efforts of the Museum, and as a participant, collaborator and leader in community forums, HMSC has illustrated an institution-wide commitment to its community.

### **Educational Outreach**

The Museum strives to combat bias in all forms through informing, sensitizing and educating its diverse geographic community. Its major strategy is to reach out to educators and

school groups. This is not a large focus of this examination, as educational programming is a traditional method of museum outreach, and this paper strives to emphasize innovative collaborative community initiatives. However, the educational programs and teacher training provided by HMSC are worth noting because they represent a significant part of the Museum's efforts.

The primary visitors to HMSC are school groups, ranging from grade six through graduate university students. Though these students represent both affluent areas and the inner city, the majority come from minority communities.<sup>162</sup> HMSC works closely with schools by making the Center available for group visits, providing a Holocaust curriculum to schools, offering a Teacher Resource Center within its library, lending a Learning Trunk of educational materials, books, activities and videos out to middle schools, organizing school lectures and hosting Professional Development Workshops for teachers. As a resource center in addition to a museum, HMSC is committed and connected to academic institutions, including schools and universities. Its resources are educational by nature, including curricula, artifacts, original documents, photographs, newspaper articles, books and periodicals.

Community schools are involved in various aspects of HMSC's programming. Each academic year, three to five thousand students are reached through school visits.<sup>163</sup> Groups visit the Museum to hear survivor testimony, tour exhibits and participate in discussions. For instance, in 2005, North Rockland High School hosted several survivor lectures, displayed the Hidden Children exhibit in their library and visited the Museum for an interactive workshop and lecture with a survivor.<sup>164</sup> Survivors act as docents at the Museum and directly speak with school groups. Students are given the opportunity to learn first-hand about the Holocaust and make connections through this emotional encounter. Teachers often express the impact that the Museum experience had on their students. Two teachers from a local Catholic school noted of their students, "They were totally engaged and many were to deeply moved...they could not

stop expressing their feelings and response to what they had seen and heard at the Museum. We have all been changed by the experience.”<sup>165</sup>

Learning Trunks and guest speakers are available for groups that are unable to come to the Museum. The trunks bring the Museum to the classroom with a curriculum guide, books, videos, lesson plans and activity sheets assembled by HMSC. Additionally, professional development seminars are offered to area educators in an effort to raise the standards for teaching about the Holocaust. During these sessions, educators meet with renowned scholars, model effective lessons, and learn how to implement Holocaust curriculum in the classroom.<sup>166</sup>

The need for educational outreach at the school level is clear, particularly considering that many of the recent hate crimes in the Lower Hudson Valley were committed by teenagers. As many schools are only teaching the minimum requirements of Holocaust Education, the Museum can act as an exciting, real-life supplement to the regular curriculum. In addition, HMSC has directly educated local teenagers through a unique initiative, whereby students who have committed hate crimes are assigned to the Museum for volunteer work. In 2004, an Orangeburg student had been convicted of a bias crime, and subsequently completed volunteer work, met with Café Europa survivors and presented a report on his experience.<sup>167</sup>

Reaching out to youth within the community through educational initiatives is a major focal point for HMSC. As Rabbi Gisser stresses,

“They [youth] will be the leaders of our communities through the Lower Hudson Valley and beyond in the not too distant future. It is a future that no longer possesses Holocaust survivors to teach the horrors of hate first hand. They are the last generation to bear witness to these survivors. Every school aged child today must meet and talk to survivors. We make that happen almost every day.”

Youth who visit the Museum today have a special opportunity to learn first-hand from survivors of the Holocaust. As schools groups continue to visit the Museum, the lessons of HMSC expand into the community. Educational outreach offers youth the information and tools to become productive and respectful citizens, promoting harmony and mutual understanding of others.

## **Collaborative Programs**

The Museum ventured into a new collaborative effort in January of 2001 with the creation of the Martin Luther King Day Program, “Confronting Racism.” This was a joint venture between the Museum, the Martin Luther King Multi-Purpose Center in Spring Valley and the Rockland Coalition for Undoing Racism. These organizations co-created this new program, “Confronting Racism,” in an effort to bring together their joint knowledge and assets in demonstrating the ills of racial intolerance. The program was open to the public and began at the Martin Luther King Center with the film, “From Swastika to Jim Crow.” The film presentation was accompanied by a discussion session on the overall theme of combating racism. Following lunch, the program moved on to the Museum for a workshop in the format of a roundtable discussion on the topic of undoing racism. The group then toured the museum and viewed the video “Hate.com.” The day culminated in a presentation of the African-Caribbean-American experience in the United States at the Museum.<sup>168</sup>

The Martin Luther King Day program represented an innovative approach to collaboration between two different communities that faced similar obstacles of discrimination and hate. The goal was to, “address, confront and effectively plan to move forward to deny racism in all its forms [through] a forum and voice in our community.”<sup>169</sup> Presenters included representatives from the Museum, Martin Luther King Center, Gun Hill Neighborhood Center of the Bronx and Coalition for Undoing Racism. Presenters facilitated enlightened discussions that included thoughts on uniting the groups and building bridges within the community to combat racism. Moses Weintraub, a participant in the program, noted that, “The day ended on a high note that it was worthwhile and instructive for both communities to understand each other’s backgrounds and problems.”<sup>170</sup>

The Martin Luther King Day Program later evolved into a candlelight vigil held as a partnership between HMSC and the Martin Luther King Center. This moving experience

impacted community participants through educational speakers and an emotional ceremony. In January of 2003, attorney and political activist, Charles King, spoke about “Pluralism in Today’s Society” at the Finkelstein Memorial Library prior to the commemorative vigil. Though the Museum did not hold the program in 2005, Rabbi Gisser expressed hope of reinitiating the partnership with the Martin Luther King Center in coming years.<sup>171</sup> The partnership was beneficial to the Museum in promoting its message, as well as in engaging a new population of visitors. Participants who may not have typically come to HMSC, but were interested or involved with the Martin Luther King Center or Coalition for Undoing Racism, were exposed to the Museum. In creating an awareness of the dangers of discrimination through intimate and poignant learning opportunities, HMSC makes change in the community one group at a time.

HMSC’s Café Europa and Euro Café are programs that also seek to make a difference by affecting community groups with personal learning experiences. These innovative programs are designed to address the needs of a specific segment of HMSC’s community. Café Europa and Euro Cafe incorporate Holocaust survivors and local teenagers into the Museum’s programming through collaborations with community groups. Café Europa is a forum for Holocaust survivors and liberators, while Euro Café is an extension of this program, where HMSC’s Café Europa participants partner with teens from local community groups.

Café Europa was founded as an attempt to reach out to survivors, who are approaching old age and possible seclusion.<sup>172</sup> The program is held monthly at HMSC. It is funded by a United Way “Vision Grant” and is led by a professional facilitator. At Café Europa, participants learn about services available for them as seniors, discuss issues pertinent to their lives and participate in therapeutic sessions, including art therapy and music. They are provided with information support, opportunities for socialization and help in maintaining their mental health.<sup>173</sup> It is reminiscent of the earlier case study of NJHS, where “Grandfamilies” were offered an appealing location to meet with peers experiencing many of the same, difficult life circumstances as they are. Though both Café Europa and Grandfamilies programs address

small groups, they are significant efforts as they reach out to better the quality of life for a particular segment of the community experiencing a need.

In designing the Café Europa program, HMSC identified a distinct group within the community that had a need for support and friendship. There are several hundred Holocaust survivors in Rockland County, and many more in surrounding areas.<sup>174</sup> Participants come to Café Europa from Rockland County, the Lower Hudson Valley Area and into New Jersey. They include Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, as well as soldiers who liberated the concentration camps at the end of World War II, known as “liberators.” The survivors who attended a recent meeting of Café Europa were born throughout Europe, in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Germany and Holland. All immigrated to the United States years ago, and many are the sole survivors from their families. Participants have different pasts as hidden children, concentration camp survivors or liberators, but they share the common bond of experiencing the inhumanity of the Holocaust, an experience that they can never forget. The monthly event fills a social void for Holocaust survivors and liberators, offering them an opportunity to socialize, share experiences and address personal issues that they face. Ideally, Café Europa also inspires participants to share their stories in order to enlighten and educate others. Many Café Europa participants have become active at HMSC as docents, volunteers and regular Museum supporters, forming an invaluable partnership between the Museum and this community group. Participants repeatedly stress the importance of keeping the memory of the Holocaust and the lessons this event teaches alive through youth. Alan Moskin shared with the group his reasons for now working with youth. He stated, “I didn’t speak for over fifty years about what I experienced as a teenager,” but he now speaks to youth in an effort to ensure that young people never forget the events of the Holocaust and their implications today.<sup>175</sup>

Moskin and other Café Europa participants are given the opportunity to make a difference and influence teenagers through a creative intergenerational program designed by HMSC. This program, Euro Café, connects teenagers and survivors to provide them with a

unique opportunity to share experiences. The teens, liberators and survivors exchange stories, share ideas and discuss topics relevant in their lives, including combating intolerance, the importance of Holocaust remembrance and the Jewish faith. Euro Café is a collaboration between the JCC-Y of Rockland and HMSC that began in 2004. The program runs monthly throughout the school year and connects survivors with teenage students involved with the JCC-Y of Rockland and local Hebrew schools. The JCC-Y and HMSC co-sponsor Euro Café and take turns hosting this innovative partnership.<sup>176</sup>

Rabbi Gisser described the Euro Café as a life-altering experience for teen participants. He specifically recalls a recent session of Euro Café, where the teen participants asked survivors to tell them about their families. This was an emotional encounter for both the survivors, who were recalling painful memories, and the teenagers, who were able to connect to survivors that were about their age when they were torn from their families.<sup>177</sup>

Euro Café represents a partnership between HMSC and a community organization, the JCC-Y, as well as a partnership between two separate groups within the Museum's community. HMSC has repeatedly emphasized its goal to educate "youth of today...about the history and reality of the Holocaust."<sup>178</sup> In creating this program, HMSC identified that they, as the museum partner, possessed the educational resources and pool of first-hand survivors, to fulfill the civic mission of enlightening youth. The JCC-Y, as the community organization, has knowledge of the community and the involvement of youth, which are the population that this collaboration strives to inspire. HMSC and the JCC-Y communicated a shared vision for the future in educating teenagers, who represent the future of the community of both organizations.

### **Creative Exhibitions**

Holocaust survivors and liberators are an exceptional force in impacting the community. HMSC supports these individuals through the services of Café Europa and appreciates how survivors can make a difference in people's minds and lives. The Museum holds that, "the most

effective way to have the most meaningful exposure to the lessons of the Holocaust is to listen to a survivor or a liberator speak about his or her experiences.”<sup>179</sup> Survivors and liberators share their stories with the Museum’s community through speaking with groups and offering their personal testimony in various presentations, projects and publications. Survivors and liberators are a vital component in HMSC’s efforts to make an impact on the community.

The Museum includes survivors in its exhibition work. HMSC asserts that, “These are the true stories of triumph and survival against overwhelming odds by Survivors who chose the Lower Hudson Valley as their home after witnessing and surviving the horrors of the Holocaust.”<sup>180</sup> “The Hidden Children” is an award winning, traveling exhibit designed by HMSC. The exhibit is rented out to schools, galleries, museums and organizations across the country. It tells the true stories of seventeen former hidden children. Through text, photographs and original commentary, this exhibit speaks of survivors’ lives in hiding, loved ones who did not survive and the rescuers who kept them alive. The former hidden children presented within this exhibit represent members of the Museum’s community. The stories of Rockland County survivors have reached a large and diversified audience through this traveling exhibit.

Within the Museum’s permanent exhibit is a “Survivor’s Theater,” which offers video testimony of Holocaust survivors. HMSC is embarking on a new piece to the Survivor’s Theater, to include personal photographs and objects from local survivors. Rabbi Gisser has asked survivors to bring in pre- and post-war photographs to be a part of a photo mural. A display will be made and placed in the Survivor’s Theater. Local survivors will be given the opportunity to share a piece of themselves and participate in creating this exhibit. As Rabbi Gisser stated to participants at Café Europa, this project will create, “a connection between you and the museum.” The goal of this exhibit is to honor the memory of survivors, illustrate that they had a life outside of the Holocaust and create a tangible connection between visitors and survivors. The integration of community members in planning this exhibit will bring a new life to the Museum through recognizing and presenting the legacy of local Holocaust survivors.<sup>181</sup>



HMSC's creative exhibits integrate its community and make connections with Museum visitors. HMSC proves its commitment to working with community through encouraging the participation of community members and reflecting their voices in the Museum's presentations.

### **Community-wide Events**

Each year, HMSC hosts two main commemorative ceremonies for Kristallnacht in the Fall and Yom Hashoah in the Spring. These events draw in the Jewish community of the Museum, but also reach out to the entire community to educate them about the Holocaust, its history and lessons, and Jewish culture. HMSC's commemorative ceremonies have the potential to bring more people into the Museum community, as they draw attention to HMSC and the powerful programs and experiences that the Museum provides.

Yom Hashoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day, was established in 1951 to honor of Holocaust victims and survivors; it has become the highlight of "Holocaust Remembrance Week," which is marked by millions around the world.<sup>182</sup> Since its inception, HMSC has annually hosted a Holocaust Remembrance Day Commemoration, typically a program consisting of musical and theatrical performances, speakers, survivor recognition and a candle-lighting ceremony. The Museum is committed institution-wide to this annual event, stating within the by-laws the purpose, "To conduct an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony as a reminder to all citizens of the need to maintain vigilance and dedication to democracy and liberty to prevent a Holocaust from ever reoccurring."<sup>183</sup> The Board of Trustees has maintained this event annually, keeping true to this civic goal which was formed as a piece of the Museum's foundation.

As 2005 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Nazi concentration camps, many events were planned community-wide throughout the week. HMSC publicized community programming, highlighting their Yom Hashoah event, to encourage community participation and support. Partners in Holocaust Remembrance Week include the Jewish Federation of

Rockland, Rockland County Community College, Young Israel of Wesley Hills, and township Jewish Centers.<sup>184</sup> These organizations hosted various discussions, lectures and events county-wide. HMSC's Yom Hashoah event consisted of a play, *Snow People*, choral performance by the Reuban Gittleman Hebrew Day School Choir and a communal candle-lighting ceremony.<sup>185</sup> Rabbi Gisser urged community members to participate in at least one of the planned events, particularly in light of recent bias acts in the area. He welcomed all area residents publicly: "The wider community should be present...It's not just something for the Jewish community."<sup>186</sup>

The annual Kristallnacht program has a similar purpose within the community. This event is sponsored by HMSC annually to commemorate the November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1939 attack on German Jews. Kristallnacht, or "Night of Broken Glass," represents one of the defining moments of the Holocaust. The event has become a community-wide vigil for HMSC, consisting of addresses by survivors, local community religious and political leaders and youth, to be followed by candle lighting. In previous years, the event also included discussions, speakers and lectures. Rabbi Gisser publicly articulated the civic relevance of the vigil in combating recent hate crimes, "Because of those events [of recent bias], the wider Rockland community should attend the vigil to demonstrate its unity and reject hate."<sup>187</sup> In 2005, the Kristallnacht vigil was co-sponsored by the Human Rights Commission of Rockland County and included the participation of local officials. The event was moved from HMSC to the steps of the County Courthouse in New City, truly bringing the vigil to the heart of the community. The vigil has become a county remembrance event, where participants can commit to unity within their community.

Both of these community events are free and open to the community. Residents are encouraged to attend and commemorate victims of past racism in an attempt to prevent future bigotry. HMSC's commemorative programs promote a commitment to respect and tolerance within the greater community. Additional programming, including a Tisha B'Av Program and

60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Auschwitz Liberation Commemoration, also commemorate the history of the Holocaust, while at the same time educating the greater community about Jewish culture in an attempt to promote respect for diversity.

## **Conclusion**

The programming, exhibits, outreach, and collaborative initiatives of HMSC exemplify efforts to work with the community and bridge the gaps between the Museum, the Jewish community and the general community. Through efforts such as the Inter-Community Coalition, community commemorations and Euro Café, HMSC strives to collaborate with different groups and institutions. The Museum additionally engages its community through Café Europa, educational outreach and creative exhibitions. While HMSC has been involved in various collaborative efforts, many are short-term. The opportunity exists for the Museum to create long-term, sustained collaborations with community organizations.

Despite the potential for further community inclusion, HMSC has become a central voice in its community in promoting civic causes, particularly those related to combating hatred and promoting respect. In today's society, as evident through HMSC's community, these lessons are needed more and more to promote healthy interactions and an appreciation for all persons. Though based in historical lessons and education, the fundamental message of HMSC is what makes the Museum central to community life. Historical lessons have been translated into the promotion of respect for others at HMSC, which is a relevant issue for community development. HMSC has participated in developing their community, and mirrored the functions of more traditional community organizations, through community-wide events, educational initiatives, intimate support groups and connecting visitors with personal stories. As such, HMSC can be recognized as a community organization, which develops the community, not through buildings or tangible results, but through expanding people's minds and helping their audience to realize the dangers of intolerance. As HMSC continues to engage and broaden its community, the civic

impact of the Museum's mission to promote diversity, respect and understanding will ideally continue to spread.

## CHAPTER 5: SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL DIVERSITY COALITION

*"To strive for greater awareness and respect for all people in community."<sup>188</sup>*

Mission Statement of the Somerset County Cultural Diversity Coalition

*"Somerset County Cultural Diversity Coalition continues its work of promoting diversity and intercultural understanding in our changing community. Through its many activities geared to bring together the diverse groups in our community. The SCCDC aims to stimulate dialogue among all diverse groups to foster understanding and acceptance and to embrace the great cultural differences of our communities."<sup>189</sup>*

Somerset County Cultural Diversity Coalition

### Introduction

The Somerset County Cultural Diversity Coalition (SCCDC) is an excellent example of the merging of community, cultural institutions and community organizations. SCCDC is a community organization in Somerset County, New Jersey that strives to unite its diverse community through cultural appreciation. As an organization, SCCDC embraces many themes that are similar to those embraced by HMSC, particularly the advancement of diversity, understanding, and cultural respect. Formed in 1995 as a non-profit organization, SCCDC is, "a human relations organization dedicated to fighting bias, prejudice and bigotry in our county."<sup>190</sup> SCCDC originally operated under the auspices of the United Way of Somerset County in response to friction caused by increased racial diversity and the influx of new ethnic communities within the county. With the support of local government and leadership from diverse community groups, SCCDC was formed as a grassroots community organization. Volunteers from the public and private sectors of the communities of Somerset County, and surrounding counties, came together with the belief that they would be more effective as a group than as individual organizations.<sup>191</sup>

SCCDC collaborates with non-profit agencies, religious institutions, leaders within the community, residents, corporations, media and educational institutions in its various community efforts. Through these partnerships, the Coalition represents a diverse group of adults and youth from various ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. These persons embrace their own

culture, while also respecting and understanding other cultures through participation in SCCDC's initiatives and programming. SCCDC unites diverse voices within the community in its civically engaged endeavors created to promote, "not only tolerance but acceptance, inclusion and celebration."<sup>192</sup> Centered on a tradition of diversity, SCCDC acts as a unifying force by providing community organizations and individuals with opportunities for networking, cultural learning, educational exploration and diversity training. Programming consists of ethnic festivals, interfaith celebrations, diversity conferences, open forums, educational resources and community initiatives. While very different in form from a museum, SCCDC's efforts to develop multicultural understanding within its community are often reminiscent of those of museums that are striving to enhance community involvement and partnerships. Parallels can be drawn between SCCDC and previous case studies, particularly HMSC, in considering the means each community organization uses to address community needs. SCCDC will be examined as a community organization based on its need-based efforts, which include partnerships with community organizations, educational outreach, creative exhibitions and cultural celebrations.

### **Community Needs**

In an effort to promote respect within its community, SCCDC strives to educate about cultural differences and commonalities. There is a particular need for this type of community-based organization in Somerset County, which is described by Dr. Tulsi Maharjan, Chair of the Executive Committee of SCCDC, as a "microcosm of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."<sup>193</sup> Located in New Jersey, one of the most culturally and economically diverse states in the United States, Somerset County is the wealthiest county in the nation. It is also a county that is populated by a mixture of established families and immigrants. Approximately 10% of Somerset County residents are new immigrants from areas such as India, Asia and South America. Within the public schools, approximately 106 languages are spoken. Racial diversity within the Somerset County community has increased, particularly in the last decade.<sup>194</sup> As a consequence,

residents have become divided due to a lack of understanding of differences. Conflict has arisen between the established community and new residents. The Coalition came together at a time of critical need in Somerset County, when racial tensions were heightening. SCCDC was formed to bring the community together by helping residents understand the cultures of their neighbors. For instance, the Hispanic population in the town of Bound Brook is growing rapidly. The established population here is upset by the influx of immigrants, which is causing conflicts within community and the schools. The Bound Brook Community festival, established by SCCDC in 2005, sought to bring together the whole community in celebration, while the October Hispanic Heritage Festival provided an understanding and respect for Hispanic cultures. The goal of these initiatives, and many others, is to promote better understanding between the old and new communities in Somerset County.<sup>195</sup>

Opposition to the expansion of minorities in the Somerset County community has become evident in the area of religion. Sites of worship are rapidly growing in number and size as diverse groups seek to retain their cultures. Non-mainline faiths have sought to expand their facilities within the communities, and have confronted considerable resistance in doing so. Dr. Maharjan remembers community opposition to a Muslim Mosque in Somerset based on concerns that bells would ring loudly during early morning prayers.<sup>196</sup> This was a false fear, and in this case, ignorance had bred mistrust. Through education and awareness, these misconceptions were clarified. Similar concerns arose in Bridgewater when the Sri Venkateswara Temple sought a considerable expansion. The intention of Temple officials was to create a community center, to serve their multilingual and multicultural community with culture and religion. Bridgewater residents voiced strong opposition to the proposed expansion, which, due to community resistance, has yet to be completed.<sup>197</sup>

Just as HMSC attempts to dispel false impressions about the Jewish community, SCCDC attempts to clarify misconceptions about the various ethnicities present in Somerset County. Both organizations are located in diverse suburban areas with increasing populations

of immigrants and mounting racial tensions. SCCDC reaches out to its population to promote knowledge and appreciation for the “other” through many of the same strategies HMSC employs as a community-centered museum.

SCCDC addresses a variety of community needs in Somerset County. It is not the sole provider or source of services in most of its efforts. Instead, the Coalition brings together outside community organizations to address community needs. From helping non-English speaking individuals attain community resources to coordinating large community festivals, SCCDC acts as a buffer between the new community and the old. The Immigrant Assistance Program (IAP) is an example of SCCDC's efforts to address community needs. Through volunteer outreach, identification of current service providers, fundraising, publicity and developing programs, IAP involves community leaders in advocating for new immigrants in the county. According to SCCDC's web-site, IAP, “will serve as a centralized resource and referral system that will focus on the needs of Somerset County's growing immigrant and refugee communities.”<sup>198</sup> The Coalition has come forward at a critical time in history to ensure that when a need is there, there are services to fill that need.

The goals and objectives shaped by SCCDC are directly aligned with the needs of its community. In its efforts to offer programming and services for the community, SCCDC determined community needs and interests through a county-wide needs assessment. Its initiatives have been created and implemented on the basis of this assessment. SCCDC endeavors to expand the Coalition by continuing to involve new community members. It also attempts to increase its educational and cultural offerings related to diversity. Its goal is to cultivate community acceptance and create an atmosphere of respect through collaborative efforts with community and educational institutions, as well as corporations, government and media. SCCDC has identified and addressed community needs by acting as a leader in a broad community-wide partnership.<sup>199</sup>



## **SCCDC as a Community Partner**

Various groups and organizations in Somerset County and surrounding areas have joined with SCCDC in an effort to bring together a diverse community. According to Dr. Maharjan, “We have been sponsoring events in our community to promote greater collaboration to strive for greater awareness, understanding and respect for all people in our community.”<sup>200</sup> Diversity and cultural understanding is a hot topic in an increasingly shifting society. SCCDC promotes the involvement of outside community organizations, particularly cultural groups, through ethnic festivals and leadership initiatives. The Coalition works closely with groups, such as the Korean Cultural Service, Hindu Temple and Cultural Society and Bound Brook Hispanic American Coalition, to sponsor events that promote culture and education. SCCDC encourages and advocates the involvement of ethnic community groups in activities of mainstream society. Dr. Maharjan stresses several messages in his work with various interest groups in the community, including stepping out of their comfort zones, having their voices heard and working to understand others.<sup>201</sup> SCCDC offers educational services, networking, cultural events, conferences and training to organizations that choose to partner with the Coalition.<sup>202</sup> They open membership to all individuals and groups within the Somerset County area and surrounding communities. SCCDC urges members and leaders of ethnic and faith-based factions to get involved with outside community groups, run for government council, join boards and involve themselves civically in their areas.

Local government recognizes the lead role that SCCDC plays in the county. Somerset County Freeholder Director, Denise Coyle, confirms this: “Today we have many organizations in Somerset County that promote and celebrate diversity. Our lead agency in this effort is the SCCDC.”<sup>203</sup> Government officials and police are involved with SCCDC as advisors and members. Thus, the Coalition works alongside government officials to promote diversity among, and provide anti-bias training to, police officers and county employees. SCCDC recognizes a government official each year with its Diversity Awards Ceremony, illustrating the

importance of having representatives from all aspects of community involved in their work. Through creating a partnership with local government, SCCDC retains their support and commitment to sustaining the coalition and its initiatives.<sup>204</sup>

The leadership of SCCDC represents the diversity that the organization hopes to promote. The Executive Board of SCCDC consists of individuals from a variety of professional backgrounds, including educators, faith leaders, museum staff and human resources professional. Board members represent different ethnicities and faith traditions, but come together to act as community leaders in the various initiatives of SCCDC. Dr. Maharjan, Board Chair, characterizes the ideals of SCCDC in his life. He came to the United States from Nepal at age sixteen, seeking an American Education. Raised as a Buddhist in a primarily Hindu country, Dr. Maharjan knows personally how it feels to be in the minority, often misunderstood. His response to ignorance is: "Why should I be offended by their lack of knowledge when I can change it?" Dr. Maharjan married an American, but remains committed to educating his children about their Asian heritage. As a pivotal leader in SCCDC, Dr. Maharjan embodies the notion of knowing one's own heritage, but respecting and understanding the diversity of others. He has provided leadership, strength and direction to the Coalition and is well regarded by all involved. Dr. Maharjan believes that, "If we want to survive in this global village, we need to change our mindset. We have to be open to accepting other cultures. We have to broaden our perspective."<sup>205</sup>

In its first few years as a non-profit community organization, SCCDC proved its responsiveness to civic responsibility and its commitment to community leadership with the creation of "Race Relations Dialogue Month." In June of 1997, President Clinton called on the country to take part in a National race dialogue. In response, SCCDC held a race forum in December of 1997. They booked so much success with this effort that they decided to facilitate county-wide discussions to connect people of all races in dialogue. Following extensive efforts by the Coalition, Somerset County Freeholders proclaimed April of 1998 "Race Relations

Dialogue Month” with the theme “Discovering Our Commonalities.” SCCDC defined the purpose of this initiative: “To facilitate countywide forums at the local organizational level to focus on commonalities.” The month-long effort was sponsored by individuals and more than thirty community organizations. Dialogues were held in homes, schools, workplaces, places of worship, libraries and at sites of other community-based organizations. A kick-off event was held at the Freeholder’s office, and the month culminated with SCCDC’s annual International Festival at Raritan Valley Community College. The race dialogues consisted of different themed events, including ethnic food sharing, a cultural fashion show, roundtable race discussion for students and teachers, a youth forum “Is Race Nature or Nurture,” and a political group discussion on inclusion. “Race Relations Dialogue Month” was successful in that it gained visibility and partnerships for SCCDC. The project also demonstrated the Coalition’s position as a community collaborator and their responsive nature to community need.<sup>206</sup>

The largest supporter and partner of SCCDC is Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC). With the incorporation of the resources of Somerset and Hunterdon counties, a professional theater, various cultural learning centers, and Dr. Maharjan as a professor, RVCC is an ideal central location for many of the Coalition’s programs. RVCC’s generous involvement makes it a core partner for SCCDC. Since RVCC as an educational institution promotes active community participation, its goals align closely with those of SCCDC. Throughout the year, SCCDC organizes several ethnic festivals that are hosted by the college. In the past, these festivals were coordinated by RVCC, but when the college could no longer afford the expense, SCCDC took leadership over these events. In a mutually beneficial partnership, RVCC provides the location for the event, and SCCDC funds and coordinates the programs. RVCC also hosts conferences, dinners, leadership seminars and community forums. Every Sunday, Raritan Valley Chinese School holds classes at the college to educate Chinese youth about their cultural background. Because SCCDC sponsored the Chinese School and assisted them in finding space for their classes, the Chinese School has since become an active partner in the

Coalition's programming efforts. Several college employees, including Dr. Maharjan, are involved with SCCDC and many of RVCC's groups, including the International Club, Rotaract Club and Center for Civic Engagement, sponsor SCCDC's programs. The partnership between RVCC and SCCDC is beneficial to both organizations. While the college offers professionalism and legitimacy to SCCDC as a community organization, SCCDC brings community members to the campus for programs and showcases the school. This increases community awareness of RVCC through cultural diversity and brings a diverse population to the school.<sup>207</sup>

SCCDC's Annual Community Leader's Breakfast is held at RVCC and brings together diverse community organizations to discuss issues within the community and create collaborative solutions. In much the same way that HMSC partners with the Inter-Community Coalition of Rockland, RVCC brings together government, religious, educational, business and community leaders to promote unity, tolerance and respect for all people within the community. At the most recent breakfast in April 2005, attendees discussed the importance of creating initiatives to promote diversity. The most significant proposal was the creation of a database to connect individuals interested in serving their community with government, non-profit organizations and community boards. With this intended project, the Coalition can encourage leadership and community involvement from its local residents and draw in further support for its efforts.<sup>208</sup>

SCCDC has been recognized for its position as a partner and leader in Somerset County and throughout surrounding counties. The Coalition received the 2004 "New Jersey Leadership Award" for community service.<sup>209</sup> As an advocate for community involvement and a catalyst for building bridges between distinct segments of its population, SCCDC civically engages its community through a variety of innovative efforts. For comparative purposes, the various initiatives of SCCDC have been examined as part of broad categories of educational outreach, collaborative initiatives, creative exhibitions and community celebrations.

## **Educational Outreach**

SCCDC invites the members of its community to learn about their neighbors. Dr. Maharjan emphasizes the importance of breaking misconceptions, "I keep asking why we can't get along, and it boils down to knowledge. If we know each other we have nothing to fear."<sup>210</sup> Education is a crucial aspect of SCCDC's efforts to reach out to the community. In 2001, owing to the efforts of the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders, SCCDC was awarded a Diversity Education Grant. This Special Legislative Grant was awarded to the Coalition for the creation and promotion of diversity programming within public schools. Principals and teachers in Somerset County were encouraged to apply for \$500 to \$2000 in grant money to create educational projects for a Diversity Program Resource File to be compiled onto a Diversity CD, accessible via the Internet. Schools could apply for the "Disseminators Grant Program," where teachers created and implemented innovative programs on diversity through creative classroom lessons, holding assemblies or having an artist-in-residence program at their school. Eighteen Somerset County Schools participated in the grant program and developed teaching modules for the Diversity CD. The grant program is a continuous effort. Following the first cycle, Somerset County principals and teachers were again given the opportunity to apply for the "Disseminators Grant" or to submit an application for an "Adapter Grant." The new category of "Adapter Grant" was for teachers who resourcefully modified an existing program from the Diversity Program Resource File in their classroom. The Diversity CD project is considered a "teacher-led network," as it allows teachers to share successful programs with educators from around the world via the world-wide web. The Diversity CD is part of a larger "Peace Builders" project. Information on the project will be included on the CD. The "Peace Builders" program will offer the tools to creating community peace building initiatives through interfaith and intercultural communication. Through providing access to training and resources on dialogue and peace-building skills, "Peace Builders" will further advance community, national and global

peace efforts. The Diversity Education Grant and Diversity CD project are fundamental pieces of the initiative because they reach youth within the community.<sup>211</sup>

SCCDC additionally reaches youth with its *Diversity Resource Directory*, which is distributed to schools in Somerset and Hunterdon Counties. The Directory advances cultural awareness of different ethnic, community and religious groups within the state and in a few cases, outside New Jersey. The Directory lists contact information and general information for area community organizations that are committed to the promotion of diversity. It is used by many organizations that want to become more aware of culturally important organizations and events. SCCDC has published three editions of the Directory, the last one in 2004. The Directory illustrates the Coalition's work in collaborating with community-based organizations. It also provides information for residents, students, organizations, corporations and government to find community resources. Freeholder Director Denise Coyle refers to the Directory as a, "handy reference to multicultural resources."<sup>212</sup>

SCCDC's position as a lead partner in the New Jersey State Diversity Conference represents another educational initiative of the organization. This annual state-wide conference is hosted by RVCC, and is a collaboration between SCCDC and outside community organizations, including the Community Diversity Council of Hunterdon County, the Warren County Human Relations Commission and the Beyond Diversity Resource Center. SCCDC acts as a leader through promoting the conference, directing organizational efforts and recruiting many of the seminar facilitators from its own ranks. The 2004 Conference, "How to Face and Win Diversity Challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," was the first conference to be held. Attendees represented non-profit organizations, faith sectors, social service agencies, the business community, government, the general community, human relations commissions, colleges, universities and law enforcement. The day began with an address from keynote speaker, Mr. Victor Lewis, an internationally recognized leader in anti-oppression and diversity work. Eight workshops were offered throughout the day on topics such as "Corporations and

Diversity,” “Changing Communities” and “Dialogue Model for Communities.”<sup>213</sup> Participants discussed the changing American society based on the influx of new ethnicities and their economic and cultural role in the country. Professionals in the fields of diversity, and others interested in the topic, came together for a day of networking, learning and exploration.<sup>214</sup>

The 2005 Conference addressed a more locally specific theme, “What is the State of the State on Diversity?” The goal was to explore the successes and challenges that New Jersey has and will encounter as a state with a diverse populace. Seminar topics included housing for blacks, Latino’s in the state, gay youth, people with disabilities and the challenges of interfaith collaborations. The conference also dealt with the position of white New Jersey residents and their role in fostering more inclusive communities. Pivotal issues related to New Jersey’s culture, community and diversity were explored. The Diversity Conference offered educational opportunities for professionals and area residents interested in learning about the field of diversity and its impact on New Jersey. As a lead partner in the conference, SCCDC furthered its own mission, while collaborating with outside organizations.<sup>215</sup>

SCCDC offers an annual student conference as well. The “Student Leader’s Human Rights Conference,” also referred to as a “Youth Leadership Seminar,” is held at RVCC and sponsored by the District Rotary Club. High school students from Somerset and Hunterdon counties participate in the one-day event. The conference educates youth as they explore issues related to human rights and diversity. Students listen to professionals discuss their commitment to promoting community through justice, unity, economic order, nonviolence and respect.<sup>216</sup> During the conference, students participate in themed programs on diversity, getting along in their community and global peace. Students rotate through one to two hour workshops facilitated by professionals in the field of diversity. The rapid growth of the conference is evidence of its success. Since its inception, it has increased from less than one hundred students to close to four hundred. Its popularity reflects increasing interest in diversity education and SCCDC’s educational efforts.<sup>217</sup>

The *Diversity Resource Directory* extols the success of SCCDC's educational efforts: "The SCCDC is recognized as the State model for the development of cultural awareness and education."<sup>218</sup> When Dr. Maharjan speaks of tensions, it always comes back to the notion that in order to remedy misconceptions, people need to become more aware of differences. Education is key to breaking down barriers. Just as HMSC is compelled to educate about the Holocaust to teach the dangers of discrimination, SCCDC teaches about various cultures and sectors of the community to fight the dangers of ignorance. Youth need to be educated in order to grow as productive and knowledgeable community members, and adults need to be educated to alter any misconceptions they may have about different groups of people. In a diverse community, such as Somerset County, education promotes respect and community building.

### **Collaborative Initiatives**

As previously noted, collaboration is a core strategy of SCCDC. While all of their programs represent some type of community partnership, interfaith programming is particularly illustrative of the union of different community organizations for the purpose of communicating and recognizing the individual qualities of diverse faith groups. The reduction of misconceptions and prejudice was the purpose of new interfaith partnerships fostered by SCCDC.<sup>219</sup> Ray Chimileski, SCCDC Executive Board Member and leader in interfaith programming, explained that the interfaith programs are built on the notion that faith is the number one organizing principle in most people lives.<sup>220</sup> Interfaith dialogues have been an important aspect of SCCDC programming since 1998. In an effort to bring together diverse religions within the area, the dialogues consist of discussion and sharing of faith traditions. SCCDC members, religious leaders and community members come together within sites of worship to learn and promote understanding about the increasing number of faiths in Somerset County. The 2004 Interfaith Dialogue, "Community Interfaith Dialogue: Together Building Peace and Understanding," consisted of a panel discussion, musical performances, interfaith prayer and a candle lighting



service. Faith leaders from Sikh, Hindu, Unitarian Universalist, Buddhist and other traditions spoke of diverse aspects of their religions. It was held at the Somerville United Reformed Church and was hosted by SCCDC in collaboration with The Somerset County Ministerial Association. The SCCDC newsletter, *Diversity Notes*, expresses the goal of interfaith dialogues in stressing, “how crucial it is that we come together to educate our society about one another’s religions, to dispel misconceptions and nurture respect for all, and to build a community where love and peace might flourish.”<sup>221</sup>

These types of programs are most successful after crisis situations. September 11<sup>th</sup> prompted much interfaith activity within the Somerset area. Faith groups came together at RVCC, churches, temples and in private homes to pray and hold discussions about their feelings, beliefs and needs. When there is not an active crisis in the minds of community members, these events dwindle; however, the network and leadership stay connected to mobilize others in time of crisis. After the 2004 Tsunami in Asia, the interfaith communities came together immediately to respond. They held collections and received generous donations. The tremendous collaborative potential of the interfaith communities within Somerset County is realized by SCCDC’s interfaith efforts.<sup>222</sup>

As noted, leaders in Somerset County saw a greater need for religious understanding following September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Interfaith events were held to raise awareness of the dangers of bias and importance of intercultural understanding. On Thursday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001, RVCC partnered with SCCDC in organizing an “Interfaith Community Dialogue and Stop the Hate Vigil.” Over 150 local residents listened as community religious leaders, representing Bahaii, Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other faiths, spoke of religious traditions. Community members listened as the Sikh Children’s Choir and Olympias Daughters performed music. Small group discussions were held to speak about the importance of interfaith dialogue. They spoke of what can be done in the community in light of September 11<sup>th</sup> and how different faiths can combat fear and hatred. This open forum provided a voice to various segments of the population. It

allowed for residents to be civically engaged through discussing how they can come together to make a difference in their community.

Also in response to September 11<sup>th</sup>, SCCDC began to hold an annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Dinner and Diversity Award Celebration. The first dinner was held two months after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. The initiative was a direct response to increasing racial tensions and bias incidents as a result of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Participants came together from various community faith groups, dressed in business suits, head scarves, turbans and ethnic clothing. Over two hundred participants from Somerset County and beyond came to RVCC for an evening of prayer, communication and celebration. The Somerset County United Way was a major partner in the Interfaith event. Allen Reese, president of the United Way, spoke of the meaning of the dinner and awards: "We wanted to make a strong statement—that we are a single community of many different stripes and colors, and that diversity makes us stronger."<sup>223</sup>

The 2005 dinner was the fourth annual celebration. The evening began with an Interfaith prayer led by youth, and culminated with a Diversity Awards Ceremony honoring outstanding individuals. Community residents from different faiths came together to celebrate unity and express thanks. They gathered around the large room, seated at tables decorated by national flags from around the world. The participation of youth was encouraged to provide them with a sense of cultural pride and confidence, despite their differences. Children led the prayer program by reciting prayers from diverse faiths in different languages. Presentations included Baha'i, Christian in Spanish, Sikh and Hindu in Urdu prayers. At the culmination of the prayers, the children came together in unity to light candles.<sup>224</sup>

Following the thanksgiving dinner and musical performances, Diversity Awards were presented by SCCDC leaders to community members who have played a role in the advancement of their communities in the area of diversity. Awards were given in the categories of education, government, faith community, volunteerism, youth leadership, media and business. Various community organizations, such as The Raritan Valley Chinese School and

the Bound Brook High School Interact Club, were recognized for volunteerism and community leadership, respectively. As a volunteer organization, The Chinese School educates youth in order to pass on their culture to future generations. They actively participate in the larger SCCDC community events and are an involved community organization. The Interact Club is a youth leadership and community services program at Bound Brook High School. Club members help with SCCDC events, particularly the Bound Brook Community Festival. Students dedicate a great deal of time to making a difference in their community. The SCCDC honors its award recipients because they represent the Coalition's mission of civic engagement within their community contributions. Through first expressing thanks with interfaith prayer, and then conveying appreciation to community members and groups with Diversity Awards, the Interfaith Dinner builds bridges between faith communities. Unitarian Universalist Reverend Craig Hirshberg, a speaker at the dinner, explained its significance, "This celebration is special because it is an expression of not just thanks but of our interfaith community."<sup>225</sup>

Interfaith celebrations create new partnerships within the community and also attract new community organizations and individuals to SCCDC. Groups such as the Chinese School and Sikh faith community have become active partners in SCCDC based on initial contact through interfaith programs. As mentioned in previous case studies, one of the most beneficial aspects of partnerships is the active involvement of new community members.

### **Creative Exhibitions**

Community members are drawn to creative community festivals that exhibit different cultures through music, dance, food and displays of art. SCCDC's cultural festivals draw a large crowd due to their celebratory nature. They create informal partnerships with individuals and formal partnerships with community cultural organizations. These programs can be compared to exhibitions, as they showcase tangible aspects of diverse cultures, while at the same time demonstrating heritage through the arts. Three such events held by SCCDC are the

International Fashion Show, Korean Culture Night and Asian American Heritage Festival. The International Fashion Show, which began in 1998, incorporates performance with a Humanitarian Awards dinner. Co-sponsored by The Rotaract Club and hosted by RVCC, the event exhibits the world's cultures through international food, cultural heritage and fashion. Beautiful and colorful ethnic costumes from around the world are put on view for the community. Individual culture is expressed through dress. Youth perform dances from their cultures while spectators enjoy a dinner of various ethnic cuisines. Following intercultural presentations, an awards ceremony is held to recognize organizations and individuals dedicated to the ideals of diversity and humanitarianism. According to SCCDC, the Rotaract Humanitarian Awards are presented to community leaders, "for their tireless dedication and commitment in promoting human value and humanitarian concern in our community and around the world." Through donations and a small dinner fee, the International Fashion Show and Humanitarian Awards Dinner is able to support humanitarian efforts, including a Rotary International Project for polio eradication and a program to help needy students in Afghanistan. The Rotaract Club partners with SCCDC to facilitate the event, and also to further support charitable projects.<sup>226</sup>

The Coalition works with a different type of community partner in presenting their annual Korean Culture Night. The ethnically geared organizations, Korean Culture Service and Praise Korean Culture Community Center, join with SCCDC each year to offer, "A bit of Korea in a corner of New Jersey."<sup>227</sup> The RVCC hosts this event in their professional theater. The Korean Culture Night exemplifies the Coalition's efforts to promote a better understanding of the changing local community. Within Somerset County, specifically Franklin Township, there is a small community of Koreans.<sup>228</sup> The SCCDC raised money to bring in a dance troupe from Korea as the highlight performance of the evening. This unique opportunity to view authentic Korean performers was complimented by elaborate costume, enlightening presentations, beautiful dance, music and Korean delicacies. With an evening of artistic display and Korean customs, participants gained insight into the Korean culture, and ideally an appreciation for it.

SCCDC's Asian American Heritage Festival possesses the same core mission and goals as the Korean event. Through showcasing and celebrating Asian culture, the festival hopes to facilitate understanding of cultural differences. As such, both the Asian Festival and Korean event fulfill SCCDC's goal for, "respect for individual and cultural differences, including people of every nationality and background."<sup>229</sup> Asian cultures represented in Somerset county include Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Filipino, Korean and Vietnamese. According to the 2000 census, the Asian population in Somerset County has increased 128% since 1990.<sup>230</sup> As the Asian community has increasingly enlarged in Somerset, they have become an integral part of society. SCCDC recognizes this as they partner with Asian community organizations to promote cultural understanding. In May 2003, Asian-American community organizations joined with the SCCDC and Freeholders to celebrate "Somerset County Asian-American Heritage Month" with an Asian American Heritage Festival. The goal of the festival was to promote cultural understanding and racial harmony through education. SCCDC was also hoping to increase collaborative efforts between Asian groups and the community by establishing a network of respect within the community.

The celebration has been held at RVCC since 2003. Performances display Asian culture and dance on stage. At the same time, art exhibits, cultural displays and information centers promote Asian heritage. Group demonstrations combine with ethnic cuisine to provide an evening of entertainment and education for community members. The increase in attendance is illustrative of the positive response of the community to the event. In the first year, 200 guests were expected, and by the third year, 2005, over 700 participants attended.<sup>231</sup> The coalition attempts to draw a large crowd in order to cultivate learning and intercultural respect within the community. Former Freeholder Director Peter S. Palmer spoke of the Asian Festival:

"Somerset County is proud of its increasingly diverse population and welcomes the opportunity to have various cultures share their foods, artwork, music and so much more at special events such as this one. Such events present a unique

opportunity for our residents to mingle and enjoy each other. Through this interaction, they often realize that there are more similarities than difference among people.<sup>232</sup>

With an enticing mix of the arts, festivals bring in community members who may have otherwise shied away from cultural programming. Through jovial music, dance and ethnic food, people learn about each other and forge connections. Diversity is promoted through knowledge, and, in turn, racial relations are improved. Connections are forged within the community between individuals, the Coalition and local community groups.

### **Community-wide Events**

In much the same way that creative exhibitions showcase diverse cultures to promote appreciation, community-wide events incorporate local residents to unite them as one community. The Bound Brook Community Festival was developed in 2004 to promote a better understanding between residents. With an increasing Hispanic population, Bound Brook has been a town of heightening racial tension. The lively festival is held in downtown Bound Brook during October, Hispanic Heritage Month. The goal of the festival is to encourage residents to get to know and appreciate one another.<sup>233</sup> In a celebration of community, SCCDC made extensive partnerships in organizing the festival. Public schools, the Chamber of Commerce, police, Rotary Club, Bound Brook Hispanic American Coalition and many others collaborated to present to the community a day of entertainment, activity, culture and food. Main Street in Bound Brook was bustling with 3,000 to 4,000 attendees.<sup>234</sup> Local residents and visitors from area communities came for a day of fun. Ethnic musical presentations embraced variety with Irish, Polish, Latino, Mariachi, Rock and Roll and other bands playing for crowds. Activities and performances comprised of martial arts demos, dance groups, clowns, face painting and a wide variety of ethnic cuisine. SCCDC hoped to promote a better understanding of community through celebrating the culture of the traditional residents of Bound Brook in conjunction with the culture of recent immigrants.

Community-wide festivals are appealing events to bring the entire family to. While seeking entertainment, families are also provided with a sense of community belonging. Ideally, participants will feel as if they are a part of a united community, rather than a divided segment of the community. This is what SCCDC strives to accomplish in its programming efforts. The annual International Festival sponsored by SCCDC and RVCC represents another family celebration that incorporates learning with entertainment. The Coalition holds this expansive festival in order to increase awareness throughout the community of the variety of cultures present in the state of New Jersey. The festival celebrates multiculturalism with international performing artists, art exhibits, crafts, cultural dance performance, music, storytelling, Chinese puppets and international cuisine. Community organizations collaborate in bringing different cultural experiences to the event. The event is truly intercultural with persons representing Poland, India, Korea, China, Nepal and Israel, among other countries. SCCDC asserts the importance of sharing this “festival of cultural beauty” with the community.

These community-wide events are celebratory in nature in order to promote open communication and respect between people of differing backgrounds. Diverse community organizations join together under SCCDC’s direction to facilitate the programming. These organizations are committed to involving participants in programming in order to promote the mission of SCCDC. Community organizations and members unite with SCCDC to develop tolerance and understanding for the “other.” Through its programming, SCCDC has made the “other” a more inviting, fascinating concept.

## **Conclusion**

The Beyond Diversity Resource Center declares that, “embracing diversity is more than assessing the mixture of people around you; it requires a commitment to build quality cross-cultural relationships...”<sup>235</sup> SCCDC embodies this notion with its motto: “Many faces, one family.”<sup>236</sup> As a community organization, the Coalition develops innovative programming and

organizational efforts to address the needs of its varied population. Through forums, festivals, publications, resources and events, SCCDC facilitates its community in developing the promotion of respect and dignity for all persons in society through understanding. The Coalition's initiatives incorporate culture and the arts into its community through the promotion of individual ethnicities and faiths. By showcasing the uniqueness of cultures, SCCDC advances communication and unites its community of Somerset County and surrounding areas.

SCCDC is an ideal summative example of the merging of culture, the arts, history and community within institutions. Its foundation and functioning are based on community partnerships with diverse organizations. Partnerships are the strength of the Coalition. SCCDC exemplifies best practice in civic engagement as it identifies community needs and joins with various community organizations to develop creative solutions to address these needs.



## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION: PARTNERSHIPS AS A TOOL FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

In comparing museums that have committed themselves to civic engagement and traditional community-based organizations, it is noteworthy that both types of organizations use similar strategies to help transform their communities by addressing community needs. The similarities between the museums and community organizations discussed were clearly outlined by comparing the strategies employed by NJHS and HMSC with those of NJCDC and SCCDC. Each organization has found ways to meet community needs by acting as partners with their communities and developing collaborative initiatives, creative exhibitions and community-wide events. All of these organizations have embraced civic engagement and are progressively becoming a part of the broadened category of community-based organizations.

A relationship is built and sustained between a community organization and its community through a modern, outward looking model where museums, community organizations and the population share goals and resources. In order to create a real commitment from the community to the organization, and vice versa, it is necessary to establish more sustained efforts. Since the methods of community inclusion in the case studies explored are very similar in form, a general conclusion can be made that partnerships are excellent methods of addressing community needs. While NJCDC and SCCDC were founded on the basis of partnerships, NJHS and HMSC are in the beginning stages of establishing sustained collaborative relationships with community members and outside organizations. In order to grow as central players within their communities, it would be advisable for museums to take the lead of NJCDC, SCCDC and other traditional community organizations and continue to expand collaborations as a means to accomplishing goals and meeting community needs.

David Thelan, historian and author, speaks of the relationship between museums and communities and emphasizes collaborative efforts in the creation of a “civic museum:”

“What is needed to deepen community and museum collaboration is a format that can encourage both community and museum people to reflect about the strengths and weaknesses, the surprising discoveries that accompany their

attempts to move beyond networking and “buy-ins” to build sustained collaborations, to co-create, to empower each other, even to envision how such collaborations provide glimpses of a greater civic purpose within a museum.”<sup>237</sup>

Thelan’s civic museum can be defined as a community organization in much the same way that NJHS and HMSC can be as they move towards more sustained collaborative efforts. Through increasing contributions to their defined communities, NJHS and HMSC have become active players in their communities, forging links and creating partnerships with community members and outside organizations. Both museums have begun to take on AAM’s challenge for museums to become more civically engaged institutions.

Based on their work with the AAM Museums and Community initiative, Kim Igoe and Alexandria Marmion Roosa concluded that the benefits of civic engagement are worth the struggle. They affirmed that, “The process of mastering civic engagement is not easy to accomplish, but it may make the difference between placing one’s institution at the heart of the community or on the margins of community life.”<sup>238</sup> This notion is exemplified in the case studies presented. For example, HMSC has recently realized that in order to be relevant to its community, it must move outside the comfort zone of traditional museum tours and exhibits to make the Museum known as a leader in teaching and promoting harmony and respect. HMSC has recognized that it must take steps towards facilitating community partnerships, promoting its programming and expanding current initiatives in order to become central to the community. Similarly, NJCDC has realized that if the organization wants to become relevant to the larger Paterson community, it must move outside the realms of social services, housing, education and employment. With their GSSN, “Greater Spruce Street Neighborhood Revitalization,” initiative, NJCDC is expanding as a community organization by collaborating with local artists and community groups to become involved in the realm of the arts and culture. In an effort to develop Paterson economically, with an emphasis on the historic, cultural and artistic past and present of the city, NJCDC is taking the necessary steps to becoming central to its community outside the traditional fields of a community organization. NJCDC and HMSC could have

remained in their traditional roles, appealing mainly to a limited population. But, both organizations chose to become more relevant to an expanded community through extensive efforts towards engaging and bettering their communities.

In order to move towards the center of community life, museums and community organizations must be relevant to the people, form meaningful relationships and have assets that benefit the public.<sup>239</sup> Writing for AAM's "Mastering Civic Engagement" report, Ellen Hirzy, "Museum and Communities" consulting writer, asserts that museums should be valued institutions within the community and suggests that a 'multidimensional' collaboration initiated by diverse institutions and persons can be an innovative solution to complex economic and social problems.<sup>240</sup> Collaborations between museums and their communities can be attained through first effectively identifying a need or problem within a community and then collaborating with outside groups and organizations. Each organization will come to the table with different assets that will uniquely help in addressing the topic at hand. Collaborations between museums and community organizations are ideal as community organizations often have the tools, experience and knowledge to help museums capitalize on their assets of history and culture.

As museums begin to gain civic functions, and community organizations develop cultural and arts programming, partnerships between the two become more appealing. As these organizations move into each others' fields of expertise, both community organizations and museums must realize that they are treading in unknown water. In other words, if a museum were to take on a social services function without the assistance of a social services agency, they would most likely be unprepared and risk ineffectiveness. When NJHS decided to work with teenage parents, they enlisted the assistance of teen parent programs in the community to develop the program. NJHS possesses the cultural assets to educate about historic exhibitions, facilitate museum learning and teach about community resources; however, NJHS educators are not parenting experts. The Museum recognized that they required guidance on parent-child interactions from the teen parent programs. Thus, a sustained partnership was formed. In the

same sense, when SCCDC hosts a cultural program, for instance their Korean Culture night, they join with ethnically-based community groups to coordinate programming. The Korean Culture Service and Praise Korean Culture Community Center partnered with SCCDC to offer their expertise and represent their culture appropriately. The Coalition employed its experience coordinating community groups, attaining a diverse audience and managing the logistics of the event, rather than asserting authority on the actual cultural performance. Neither SCCDC nor NJHS stepped out of their realm of expertise; instead, both organizations maintained their expertise and partnered with community groups who held the knowledge necessary to create a successful program.

There are risks inherent in partnerships. Without commitment from all involved partners, the program or initiative could quickly be halted. In the case of HMSC's partnership with the MLK Center, for example, a beneficial collaborative program was halted after the community partner decided not to maintain the program beyond the first few years. The hope is to regenerate the partnership, but this cannot be realized without efforts from all involved parties. Would it be advisable for HMSC to now create its own Martin Luther King celebration without the MLK Center? Or, would it be easier for NJHS to research parenting skills and incorporate their findings into programming, rather than take a risk, and make the effort to meet and work with community partners? This may be a possibility, but it would inevitably be an ineffective solution. It would be difficult to generate a community audience for programming, as collaborations often naturally bring in a pre-existing community group. But, more importantly, a museum that moves beyond its scope of expertise will spend precious time coordinating efforts that will fall short of collaborations with experienced community organizations.

Similarly, community organizations that attempt to become experts in the area of culture would very likely be ineffective in presenting history and the arts without experts in the field. NJCDC was careful to employ the assistance of local artists and community groups in creating community murals and in their plans for an increased artist presence in Paterson. As the

organization has moved beyond its natural boundaries as a community development corporation and into the arts and cultural realm of the city, NJCDC has partnered with outside organizations and community groups to create effective programming. In the case of SCCDC, this community organization can be considered a model in creating community partnerships to unite groups with diverse areas of expertise. The Coalition draws on each group's knowledge to produce successful initiatives. Without experienced community partners, NJCDC and SCCDC would not be able to effectively incorporate culture and the arts into their initiatives. Rather than exceeding their areas of expertise, both SCCDC and NJCDC have recognized the value of community partnerships in venturing into programming more traditionally typical of a cultural organization.

As museums become more involved in community life, and community organizations become more involved in culture and the arts, the strategies they employ to address community needs begin to look strikingly similar. The natural solution would be for these organizations to join as partners to avoid doing a disservice to their communities by moving into fields within which they have little experience or knowledge. Collaborative efforts bring together people and organizations with different skills, resources and specialties to design creative solutions to community needs. Rather than taking on one another's community roles, museums and community organizations that offer similar initiatives can become more significant and valued by their communities if they realize the potential of community partnerships in employing civic engagement strategies.

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