

Mercy Center

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ADDRESS BLOCK

We are on the web:
www.MercyCenterBronx.org

Save the Date!

Mercy Center's 5th Annual Cocktail Gala and Auction

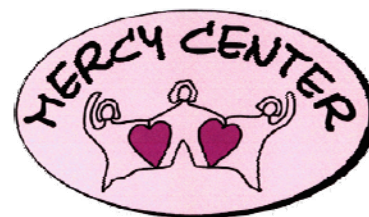
Wednesday, April 22, 2009
Tavern on the Green

We are now accepting donations of prizes

Restaurant Gift Certificates · Time Shares · Tickets to Sports Events · Hotel Stays · Wine
· Spa Packages · Newspaper Subscriptions · Tickets to Broadway Shows · Jewelry ·
Cruise Vacations · Museum Memberships · Electronics · A Cooking Class
Please call **Silvia Gonzalez** or visit www.MercyCenterBronx.org for a donation form.

New! Underwriting Opportunities

Interested? Contact Joe Dirr or Margo Golos at (718) 993-2789



Mercy Moments

A Publication of Mercy Center Bronx, NY

Greetings!

We hope this newsletter finds you well. Mercy Center has been busy with activity, as always, but we want to take a moment to update you on some recent happenings. We enjoyed a very exciting and successful fall semester. You can read about some of the highlights on the next page. Over **1,000** women, men and children are currently enrolled in Mercy Center's winter programs, seeking new opportunities for themselves and their families. We are excited about the new year, and the wonderful achievements we know it will bring to our participants.

Of course, we would not witness these achievements without our generous supporters. We thank everyone who has contributed to our Annual Appeal. Even in these uncertain times and against all odds, this year's Appeal has once again been the most successful in Mercy Center's history. We are humbled by your commitment and generosity.

Planning has begun in earnest for our 5th Annual Cocktail Gala and Auction on April 22nd, thanks to the dedicated members of our Auction Committee. We look forward to seeing many of you at Tavern on the Green that night to celebrate another year of Mercy here in the South Bronx!

Sincerely,

Joe Dirr

Mary Galeone, RSM

Mercy Center goes to Broadway!!

On January 13th, **twenty-seven Mercy Center children** participating in dance classes were treated to a **pizza party, free tickets** to the Broadway musical, *In the Heights*, and a **special opportunity to meet the cast before the show**, thanks to our new and flourishing partnership with



Jhamari enjoys his pizza!

R.Evolución Latina. This dynamic group of Latino Broadway performers aims to strengthen the Latino community through its work in the arts. They invited our kids to write an essay explaining their dreams for the future and how they will get there. Every child who wrote an essay received an invitation to this special evening. Luis Salgado, cofounder of R.Evolución Latina and teacher of Mercy Center children, and Michael Balderrama, another of the wonderful dance teachers that works with our kids, both performed in the show, making it an even more special experience. An inspiring



story about the Latino community in the Washington Heights area of New York City, *In the Heights* really captured our kids' imaginations and offered characters they could relate to. Roberto, one of the lucky attendees, even declared: "This is better than video games!" There is no higher praise from a 10 year old boy!!

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Touching Hearts and Changing Families

Mercy Center participants are enjoying a wonderfully rich year of **growth and transformation**. Moms and dads are learning to better communicate with their families, recent immigrants are developing their English skills, women are gaining employable skills, and youth are exploring new opportunities. Through these programs, participants have also found a community of support. Citizenship student Estebana recently exclaimed: **"Mercy Center is my family!"**

Family skills classes transform lives

Participants in our **Parenting Skills** classes are learning new ways to discipline and relate to their children. On average, participants **increased their score by 10%** over the course of a semester on a test of parenting knowledge. One mom also shared that she realized she had never told her children that she loved them. Her son now cherishes a note she wrote to him, carrying it in his pocket daily.



Brittany and Lianna proudly display their certificates from our Teen Parenting Course

ESL students are committed to learning

Students in our **ESL** classes are driven to develop their English skills to more fully integrate into their community. They know that to learn, they have to come to class and practice at home. We were thrilled and **humbled by their commitment** this semester. Thanks to the efforts of our **volunteer teachers** and our program coordinators, **220 students** took advantage of classes this past semester. A remarkable **81% of these students** stuck with the program and took the end-of-semester exam.



ESL students in class with volunteer teacher Joan

New Admin Assistant Course Opens Doors

This fall we piloted a **new Administrative Assistant Training** course to prepare women for more sophisticated positions with a career trajectory. This course was developed by our **dedicated volunteers**—Wil Roman, Sean Adcroft, and Anique Halliday—and program coordinators—Sr. Suzanne Elliott and Carmen Houston. In December, we **celebrated the graduation** of the first six women participants from this exciting new program. The graduation ceremony was inspiring as women demonstrated their new skills through professional group presentations using PowerPoint software. The women clearly learned to multi-task, research, and work as a team. Graduate Tatiana is particularly grateful for the direction she found through the program: "Now I know where I want to go and that I can get there. **Thank you Mercy Center!**"



Volunteer Sean helps Amahra with her assignment

Canisius College Hosts 8th Annual Winter Camp

Fifteen students from **Canisius College** in Buffalo gave up one week of their winter break to host a Day Camp for 57 Mercy Center children in early January. Like in years past, the students provided **homework help** and enriching arts and crafts activities for children in the afternoons. Often, Winter Camp sees the beginning of **mentoring relationships** between the college students and Mercy Center children. The week culminated with a talent show performed by all of the participants and a special treat—a dance performance by the Canisius College camp counselors! John Bucki, SJ, Campus Minister at Canisius, prepared his specialty—Baked Ziti—for the participants and their families.



Jack and Jhoni pal around at Winter Camp

Councilmember's Support Leads to NYLAG Partnership

For the past year, Mercy Center has partnered with the Immigrant Protection Unit of the **New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)** to provide legal representation to our participants in immigration proceedings. With funding from the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative of the City Council, secured by our Councilmember, Maria del Carmen Arroyo, NYLAG Attorney **Meeta Patel** visits Mercy Center monthly to meet potential clients who receive representation free of charge. And NYLAG attorney Roxanna Garcia recently hosted a workshop on the citizenship process for Mercy Center participants. NYLAG's services and workshops supplement the efforts of our volunteer attorneys, who welcome the support of experienced immigration attorneys in these often complex cases. "The partnership with NYLAG is great," says **volunteer attorney Gene Sullivan**. "Meeta's knowledge of immigration law really instills confidence and trust in the participants." We **thank Councilmember Arroyo and NYLAG** for joining in our work!



Roxanna Garcia of NYLAG explains the citizenship process to Marianela

Volunteer Spotlight: Chris Bacon and Liz Cassino

Inspired by the strength of our participants and their ability to succeed despite daunting challenges, Chris Bacon and Liz Cassino, both employees of Morgan Stanley, have graciously dedicated their free time to helping the women of Mercy Center for six years now! Chris teaches computer and office skills courses and Liz teaches ESL classes on Saturday mornings. Both Liz and Chris are also members of Mercy Center's Board of Advisors. When asked about their experiences at Mercy Center, Chris said: "When you meet the women who go to Mercy Center, it's quite powerful. They are so humble, and grateful that someone cares



Chris Bacon, second from left, and Liz Cassino, second from right, help Mayra and Cheryl

about them. And they are so very eager to do more, and be more in their lives". For Liz, volunteering at Mercy Center meant helping those who "have so many things going

against them yet...give up their Saturday mornings (most participants' only free time) to learn the English language so they can improve their lives as well as the lives of their family. I am amazed by their courage and dedication." In honor of their efforts, Mercy Center receives a grant from Morgan Stanley, this year for \$5,000. In these uncertain times, it is the devotion of our volunteers and our supporters that keeps us going strong! Thank you to all those who make our center so special!!

Donors Made the Holidays Special



Students from Mount St. Michael's Academy gathered holiday gifts for our participants. From left to right: Andrew Calderon, John Hayes, Steven Cesareo, and John Brookhouse

Thanks to the generosity of many schools and churches (listed to the right) and private donors, we were able to distribute **Christmas gifts to 517 kids!!** These gifts helped to make the holidays special for these families and relieved the parents' stress during this hectic season. We were also blessed by a **visit from Santa** at our community Christmas party!! The children were very excited to get an extra gift from our special visitor and everyone enjoyed **singing holiday songs** together. It was a truly joyous and vibrant event complete with door prizes and a gift exchange for our adult participants.

Thanks to our Donors!
Annunciation Parish • Horace Mann School • Maria Regina High School • Mount St. Michael's Academy • Our Lady of Victory Academy • Sacred Heart Parish • St. Catharine Academy • St. Vincent DePaul

Kevin is excited to see Santa, who made a special visit to Mercy Center!

