

IN A WE ACT MINUTE

The News Bulletin of

West Harlem Environmental ACTION, Inc.

April 2005

Volume 1, Issue 1

Developing A Greener Tomorrow: An Earth Day Celebration in Harlem

On Friday, April 22nd, 2005 WE ACT celebrated the 35th anniversary of Earth Day with a breakfast at Synod House, Cathedral of St. John the Divine in Harlem. With several local and national figures in attendance, including Congressman Charles B. Rangel (Honorary Chair of WE ACT's Capital Campaign Committee) and Councilman Bill Perkins, WE ACT's breakfast event entitled Developing A Greener Tomorrow: An Earth Day Celebration in Harlem was organized to honor the recipients of the **WE ACT for Environmental Justice Award**, and publicly present projections of the soon to be completed WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York. The WE ACT for Environmental Justice Award was given to individuals

who have made substantial inroads to preserving the natural and built environment and have championed environmental health and justice causes in communities of color. The six honorees were Alphonse Fletcher, Jr., of Fletcher Asset Management for his work in urban restoration and preservation; Joseph H. Graziano, Ph. D., of Columbia University for his research into childhood lead poisoning; Rafael Lantigua, M.D., also of Columbia University for promoting medical awareness in communities of color; Lucille McEwen, Esq., of Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement for her work involving low-income community housing and education; Kenneth Olden, Ph. D., of the National Institute of Environmental

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Community Leaders Gather for 5th Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training

WE ACT recently continued one of its most successful public education programs with the launching of its 5th Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training (EHJLT) at the Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. State Office in Central Harlem. The training consists of 3-hour sessions spread out over a 5-week period beginning April 14th, 2005 and concluding May



Community leaders meet to discuss the environment.

12th, 2005. Over 200 community leaders have graduated from our previous sessions, which are designed to help them improve their capacity to fight for environmental health and justice in their neighborhoods. During the training, participants learn the science and health basics of environmental issues affecting communities of color, with a focus on

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An Earth Day Celebration in Harlem (Cont'd)

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Health Sciences (NIEHS) for over three decades of cancer research; and Full Spectrum of NY, LLC - a development and construction company - for designing and building 1400 on Fifth, the country's first and only affordable green condominium. The six honorees are pioneers of environmental improvement in their communities, and WE ACT was proud to recognize them for their great achievements.

The Earth Day breakfast also gave WE ACT the opportunity to unveil its plans for transforming a 4-story brownstone on 140th Street in West Harlem into a state-of-the-art green building – the WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York. Scheduled to open its doors in January 2007, the Center will serve as WE ACT's new headquarters, providing space for gathering, organizing and training to advance the work of community residents and

Peggy Shepard Receives Award from SUNY-ESF

The SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) presented WE ACT's Executive Director Peggy Shepard with the **2005 Sol Feinstone Environmental Award** at a banquet held on Friday, April 1st, 2005 at the Country Club in Syracuse, New York. The award is given annually to recognize leaders who care for the environment, encourage volunteerism and add to society's understanding of social issues and their solutions. In addition to directing WE ACT's work on the renovation of the Harlem waterfront, Ms. Shepard was awarded for her "ability to create and sustain critical partnerships with diverse interests, which has led to positive and continuing changes in northern Manhattan," said George R. Stafford, Director of the New York Division of Coastal Resources. "Ms. Shepard has helped the community find a voice, act on its convictions, and achieve results," he added.

WE ACT's Director of Programs, Cecil Corbin-Mark, accepted the award on Ms. Shepard's behalf. "While WE ACT and Ms. Shepard are grateful for this recognition," he told the audience, "the real honor goes to the hundreds of residents that we've worked with over the years to protect the environment and plan for a sustainable future in this place we call Harlem."

environmental justice advocates throughout the world. Architect Anthony Crusor of AQ Crusor Architects of Harlem, who has partnered with the international engineering firm ARUP for this project, presented the audience with a virtual tour of the new building, highlighting its energy efficient environmental technologies and sustainable construction practices.

For more information on the WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York, please contact Ursula N. Embola via e-mail at Ursula@weact.org.



WE ACT Honors Alphonse Fletcher, Jr.

WE ACT Receives Children's Environmental Health Excellence Award

On April 21st, 2005, WE ACT for Environmental Justice was recognized for its commitment to protecting children from environmental health hazards. WE ACT was one of only 15 individuals and organizations across the country to receive the **2005 Children's Environmental Health Excellence Award** from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). A special ceremony was held in honor of all the awardees at the Army and Navy Club in Washington, D.C.

According to William H. Sanders III - Acting Director of the Office of Children's Health Protection at EPA - the Children's Environmental Health Excellence Awards program recognizes individuals, communities and organizations that are leaders in making the environment healthier for children. "This year's winners exemplify what it means to have a strong commitment to children's environmental health, and EPA is proud to be honoring them for their efforts," said Mr. Sanders.

WE ACT was recognized for its 17 years of working to reduce health hazards and improve the living conditions of Northern Manhattan's children. More specifically, the award focused on WE ACT's efforts to fashion a better

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Children's Environmental Health Excellence Award (Cont'd)

Lead poisoning prevention law in New York City. WE ACT's work on this issue began in 1998 when we joined with several other advocates to file a lawsuit filed against City Council Speaker Peter Valone for passing Local Law 38, which did not sufficiently address the health needs of lead poisoned children. Local Law 38 was voided in 2000 and WE ACT, along with other community-based organizations, initiated the drafting of a stricter alternative – Intro 101A.

Intro 101A contained a broader definition of lead hazards, shifted the burden of reporting these lead hazards from the parents to landlords, held landlords responsible for inspection and eradication of lead hazards, and raised the age of concern from 6 to 7. To generate support for Intro 101A, WE ACT trained parents to testify at council meetings, met with council members, and participated in negotiating sessions and media briefings. Due in large part to these efforts, the legislation was later passed as Local Law 1 of 2004.

“We are proud of the hard work and dedication of

our staff, volunteers and community residents which has led to the achievement of this outstanding recognition,” said Peggy Shepard, Executive Director of WE ACT. “To be recognized by EPA is an honor and a privilege for us. Our accomplishments provide tangible proof that hard work and dedication can make a difference in children's lives.”

This is the first year the Office of Children's Health Protection (OCHP) has given out Children's Environmental Health Excellence Awards. EPA established the Office of Children's Health Protection in May 1997 to make the protection of children's health a fundamental goal of public health and environmental protection in the United States. OCHP supports Agency efforts to protect children's health from environmental threats. The awards program recognizes both individuals and organizations for their activities in outreach, education, and intervention that protect children from environmental health risks.



2005

Children's Environmental Health
Excellence Award

Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training (Cont'd)

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healthy housing. Pollutants - external (bus depots and sewage treatment plants) and internal (cockroaches, mold, pesticides) - were discussed at length, with researchers from the Columbia Mailman School of Public Health on hand to present their recent research findings regarding the adverse effects of these hazards on the human body.

The Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Trainings are designed to educate concerned citizens and equip them to use information and take action, both on a personal and community level, to improve environmental health in their communities. In addition to demonstrations of ways to protect their homes, participants are trained to initiate change for the entire community. Through a participatory, experienced-based approach, audience members explore and build upon their own ability to educate and organize their neighbors and representatives to take action in creating and sustaining healthier homes and community environments.

Although previous graduates have gone on to challenge unfair laws and successfully introduce improved legislation, much more remains to be done. While audience members shared their stories of newborns weighing less than 2 pounds, degenerative asthma in their children, and “luxury” apartments with over 60 outstanding health code violations, the reactions among listeners were never those of shock but of empathetic, unsurprised, agreement. WE ACT will be continuing the Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training as long as pollution continues to affect the health of New York City. For information on the next session please contact Kathryn Alcantar via e-mail at Kathryn@weact.org.



Local residents discuss neighborhood pollution.



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We're on the Web!
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Planning Begins for the Harlem Center for the Urban Environment

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has awarded WE ACT a \$25,000 Hudson River Estuary grant to aid in the planning and development of the Harlem Center for the Urban Environment.



The Waterfront Bike Path

WE ACT is currently working with New York City Community Board 9 and other government and non-profit entities on the revitalization of the Harlem Piers through the building and programming of the Harlem Waterfront Park, which will increase access for local residents to the waterfront as well as invigorate one of Northern Manhattan's neglected

neighborhoods. As part of the overall restoration of this area, WE ACT will create an independent non-profit environmental education and research center-the Harlem Center for the Urban Environment-that will educate Northern Manhattan and New York City Residents on the urban environment and how it relates to the Hudson River, as well as provide a local hub for research and the exchange of best practices on community engagement with urban waterways.

WE ACT will create an independent, non-profit environmental education and research center.

Once established, the Harlem Center for the Urban Environment will greatly enhance public understanding and stewardship of the Hudson River.