



*International Institute of Connecticut Newsletter September 2008*  
Editor: Charlotte Caseb Dzujna



A United Way Member Agency

## CELEBRATING **90** YEARS OF SERVICE TO NEW AMERICANS!

### **35 YEARS OF COMMITMENT & DEDICATION: *Honoring Myra Oliver***

*"It is a founding principle of our great nation that immigrants have the chance to realize the American Dream that brought my grandparents, wife, and so many others here in search of opportunity. For so many of Connecticut's immigrants the tireless work of Myra Oliver and the International Institute of Connecticut provide crucial components for reaching that goal."*

Joseph Lieberman, 2004.



With great sadness, the International Institute of Connecticut, Inc. said good-bye to long time Executive Director, Myra M. Oliver. Mrs. Oliver served as the Executive Director of the Institute from 1974 until July, when she passed away after a long battle with cancer. Under her leadership, the Institute grew to become a statewide agency, with offices in Bridgeport, Hartford, and Stamford, providing a variety of services to almost 7000 immigrants and refugees each year.

The courage, spirit and hard work of so many of her clients were always an inspiration to Mrs. Oliver. She felt that her work gave her a deeper understanding and appreciation for the freedoms and privileges that are available to so many Americans. Mrs. Oliver will be remembered not only for her strong convictions, but also for building the International Institute into the premier voice for immigrants and refugees in Connecticut.

This year, IIC will dedicate our annual Auction Dinner to Myra Oliver and will honor her in a commemorative journal, to be distributed at the October 25<sup>th</sup> event. For more information about honoring Mrs. Oliver, please contact Donna Santos at (203) 336 0141.

**OPEN HOUSE SCHEDULED:  
IIC Celebrates 90 Years of Service**

From 12pm-3pm on Friday September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008 IIC will welcome back clients, public officials, and fellow community members for a fall open house.

Guests will be invited to take tours of the Central Office on Clinton Avenue in Bridgeport to meet staff and view displays of our various programs & services.

Refreshments will be served. No RSVP necessary – casual attire. For more information, call (203) 336 0141.



**NATURALIZATION CEREMONY:  
Welcoming New Americans**

Our annual naturalization ceremony for over 300 New Americans will be held Thursday September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at 3pm at the Quick Center for the Arts, Fairfield University.

This is a cooperative effort between the IIC and US Citizenship and Immigration Services of Hartford, Connecticut.

The Honorable Magistrate Judge Holly Fitzsimmons will preside.

Contact John Weiss at (860) 692 3085 for more information.



**CITIZENSHIP TRAINING & NEW CITIZENSHIP LOAN PROJECT**

Beginning Saturday September 5<sup>th</sup>, the International Institute of Connecticut will be offering a weekly citizenship training class to prepare eligible residents for the naturalization process. Classes will run on Saturdays from 10:30pm-12pm and will help students study for the written and oral exams. Registration is at 9am on Saturday September 5<sup>th</sup> at the Bridgeport Office. A new onsite babysitting service is available for those students with children.

In addition, IIC was recently granted funding through the Fairfield County Foundation to provide qualified individuals monetary loans to help cover the Citizenship filing fee. Qualified applicants must meet the minimum income of 125% above poverty guidelines.

For more information, please contact Linda Murray at (203) 336 0141.

## **PRO BONO COURT REPRESENTATION PROJECT**

Nettie Parker, Esq., Coordinator of the Court Representation Project, whose office is located at the IIC Hartford Office, reports on the continued growth and recent successes of the project:

- ❖ IIC pro bono attorney Pam Lewis successfully obtained a green card for a Guatemalan woman, even though the cards were stacked against her in the case. It seems years ago, the woman was taken advantage of by a notario – who took her money and failed to timely file for her under a special law about to expire. Attorney Lewis prepared a new argument using the sparse evidence available.
- ❖ IIC pro bono attorney Charlene Lynton successfully obtained political asylum for a Congolese woman before the Hartford Immigration Judge. The woman fled persecution from the Congo after her father, a government employee, was murdered. Attorney Lynton went the extra mile in demonstrating the woman's plight despite the difficulty in obtaining evidence from the Congo (DRC).

## **PROJECT RESCUE: *IIC's Anti Human Trafficking Program***

In June, Project Rescue was pleased to welcome Anne Marie Hillman as a case manager. Annie is a recent graduate of Yale University who interned in the refugee department last summer. She joins a department that has been hard at work providing services to members of an extended Ecuadorian family who were subjected to deplorable working conditions in a New Haven business. The individuals are being assisted in cooperation with Immigration Customs & Enforcement and New Haven Legal Services.

Project Director Jane Rodas was invited to serve as the facilitator for a 2 ½ day training of other professionals about the fundamentals of human trafficking. Participants from other agencies were then certified, themselves, as trainers on the subject of human trafficking. The program was sponsored through the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and the Connecticut Office of Victim Services, pursuant to recent state legislation.

## **IIC SEEKS VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR**

Would you like to assist the IIC in its volunteer work? We are currently seeking a volunteer coordinator to oversee our dedicated group of volunteers and to assist with various projects, including the recently launched babysitting room. Interested applicants should email their resume and cover letter to IIC at [admin@iiconn.org](mailto:admin@iiconn.org).

## **MYRA OLIVER EDUCATION FUND**

The Myra Oliver Education Fund for Children and Families of the International Institute has assisted several immigrant and refugee students in pursuing their education. Funds can be used for tuition assistance, books, computers, GED programs, SAT prep courses, tutoring and for registration fees at education-based conferences.

The fund also provides an opportunity for donor gifts that will continue to benefit future citizens. For a scholarship application or to make a donation, stop by one of our offices or contact IIC at (203) 336 0141.

## **NEW AGENCY BROCHURE AVAILABLE**

As one of her final visions for IIC, the late Executive Director Myra Oliver requested a revamped and updated brochure to promote the various services and programs available to New Americans and their families. As such, Board Member Viviana Atienzar coordinated with her employer, Underdog Partners of Wilton, to redesign the brochure. The new brochure has a contemporary look and describes the IIC's mission and services in a new and innovative manner. Contact IIC at (203) 336 0141 to request copies.

## **IIC SEEKING HUMAN INTEREST STORIES**

We are looking for successful immigrant and/or refugee stories for a new series planned to launch in early 2009. If you or your family have benefited from IIC's services throughout its 90 year history, we'd like to hear from you! Anyone interested in telling his or her story, please contact IIC at [admin@iiconn.org](mailto:admin@iiconn.org).

## **ANNUAL AUCTION FUNDRAISER: SATURDAY OCTOBER 25<sup>th</sup> 2008**

This year, IIC will celebrate our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary at our Annual Auction, scheduled for 7pm on Saturday October 25<sup>th</sup> at Amaraté's Sea Cliff in New Haven. Our Circle of Achievement Awards will go to past presidents of the IIC Board of Directors, as well as to two community leaders who have gone above and beyond to assist IIC clients and their families.

Our International Auction will feature gift items from around the world. "All the board members are planning baskets with an international flair," says Board President Sharon Kish. "We already have baskets from Hungary, Poland, Sweden and several other countries. This is what makes our auction unique. We are also looking for volunteers to serve on the auction committee." This year, board members John La Cava, Esq. and Robert Maresca, Esq. are the Auction Co-Chairs.

***Please help us to continue our important work by supporting our auction. You can purchase space in our 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Journal dedicated to Myra Oliver and/or donate a gift for the auction. Forms are included in this newsletter. Tickets to the dinner/auction may also be purchased at \$100 per ticket; corporate tables are available as well. For more info contact IIC (203) 336 0141.***

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION UPDATE

In 2005, we told the story of Evelyne Mukasonga and her brother, Daniel Umuhire Ndamwizeye. During the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, while Evelyne was at the university, her parents and sisters were murdered. She thought her four-year-old brother Daniel had been killed, too. She fled Rwanda and eventually came to the US in 2000, where she was helped by IIC.

Five years later, she heard a priest from Zambia speak at a church in Newtown about refugees from many places. When he mentioned her brother's name, she knew he was still alive. The men who killed her family had spared Daniel. After he learned that Evelyne was alive and had married, he went to live with her husband's family who treated him poorly.

Through the assistance of IIC, Evelyne and Daniel were finally reunited. At that time, Daniel was 16 years old and began attending Bassick High School in Bridgeport. He quickly became first in his class in mathematics and played on the school volleyball team.

"My senior year I took trigonometry and I played volleyball for four years. I was captain my senior year, MVP this year, and made Honorable Mention I the ALL FCIAC," says Daniel, now 19. I also bowled and ran cross country for three years. I was also in the National Honor Society."

He was recently awarded a \$25,000 scholarship for the next four years of his education from the Stewardship Foundation. He will attend Southern Connecticut State University in the fall and plans to major in business.

"I chose this area of study because I want to do business such as having my own clothing line, having clothing stores around the world, and it may help me to manage my money carefully."

Daniel, who works weekends at Old Navy, Trumbull as a sales associate and cashier, likes to visit and eat with friends as well as go to the movies and work out.

Daniel has his mother's pictures and can still recount the story of what happened to his family in Rwanda when he was just four years old. "I was watching when they killed my mother," he recalls, "God really helped me a lot and the love,

forgiveness helped me overcome the trauma that I went through when I was a child."

He credits the IIC with helping him to reunite with his sister and become assimilated at the time of his arrival to the US. IIC continues to assist Daniel and his family.

"The International Institute has helped me in so many ways. They helped me get my green card and I got a scholarship from them. Mrs. Oliver showed me lots of love. They even provided me with a job in 2005 when I just arrived, which helped me a lot. Mrs. O is even the one that connected me to the Stewardship Foundation, so they have really done a lot for me and I really appreciate it with all my heart."

Daniel lives with his sister, Evelyne and her family in their Bridgeport home. Evelyne is in her third year at the University of New Haven working toward her degree in Dental Hygiene.

"Daniel is our first recipient as a first year college student," says Marcia Scanlon, Program Director of the Stewardship Foundation. "Somebody like Daniel who has surmounted a lot of hardship, has huge potential, a good academic record and is a good citizen within the school – he exemplifies what the Foundation is looking for. Daniel has a beautiful inner character and has achieved so much. The scholarship gives him an opportunity to expand or pursue his potential."

"As long as he maintains good grades and good character, he is good for college for the four years. We will also give him a certain amount of money for living expenses."

The Stewardship Foundation provides financial and social support to orphaned and foster care adolescents who desire a college education. The Foundation was founded two years ago by Marlon Quan, a businessman in Greenwich and now Executive Director. Mr. Quan was adopted at age three in 1959 from an orphanage in Hong Kong by an American immigrant couple, who later put him and his sister, also adopted, through college. He values education and appreciates high integrity and character in a person – somebody like Daniel.

The International Institute of Connecticut serves 7,500 people yearly. Please consider making a contribution to assist us in continuing the services we've provided to refugees and immigrants during the past 90 years. Your contribution is important and will help us provide:

- Assistance to refugees fleeing oppression and persecution
- Affordable immigration/citizenship counseling/immigration court representation
- Job placement for newcomers
- ESL/citizenship instruction/vocational training
- Translation/interpreter services in more than 40 languages
- Learning opportunities for bilingual youth

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