

Social Capital 2011



HCA

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2011 IN THIS ISSUE:

Issue 02

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Special thanks to Tamara Leigh Photography, Phoenix Imagery and Sammy Amanatullah

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DRIVING TOWARDS A BETTER TOMORROW- RAMBLINGS FROM THE ROAD

It wasn't until half way through my interviews that I really began to see the big picture. Thrust from my outsider's cocoon, I was finally able to gain a much broader sense of not only the magnitude of HCA and its elite group of partners, but also the inevitable potential that exists, as hokey as it sounds—to change the world.

Shortly after my colleague Michael and I wrapped the Talking Heads sculpture program at the Arbor at Palmdale and Village Pointe, Corey and Nicole approached me about working on this year's issue. I, of course, agreed. Why not? Without sculpture prep and classes, I had a lot of free time on my hands and the project itself sounded pretty cool. Travel a bit. Talk to some people. Besides, these HCA folk seemed nice enough and I was intrigued to see what sort of life HCA led outside of the Antelope Valley. So I set off in my car to brave the roads of Southern California.

After a few months of journeying across the Southland, traversing more freeways and traffic than I care to recount, I began to piece together the tales of the acquaintances and friends I had made along the way. Parallels between properties and similarities in stories all brought me to an interesting conclusion. Despite all of the different places I had been, there was something vaguely familiar about each of them. From Palmdale to Brentwood, Hollywood to Carson, downtown to Whittier, a common thread somehow unified each individual, property and organization.

Perhaps it's a case of great minds thinking alike. Perhaps it's that like-minded individuals tend to collaborate. Whatever the reason, I found the propensity to work towards a greater good in everyone that I interviewed and that their work together, is nothing short of amazing. Selflessness, compassion and empathy are traits so often associated with the non-profit sector. I had received a small dose of these through my involvement with Talking Heads, but I couldn't see their full force—volunteers, executives, students, managers, artists and teachers all working in synchronicity to provide others with the opportunity to not just live, but to thrive.

Only now that I approach the completion of Social Capital do I realize how fortunate I am to be part of such a project. And despite the countless miles of fatigued driving and wrong turns (thanks Google Maps), I would do it all again. In fact, I wish it were possible for everyone to share in the same journey. My only hope is that this issue of Social Capital conveys to you what I was lucky enough to experience firsthand: an odyssey that just barely grazes the surface of a unique sampling of individuals who individually and collectively strive to benefit those around them.

It's also now that I realize it is not me who wrote this issue, but rather all of you. You wrote it with your dedication, your years of hard work and your unwavering belief in the possibility of a better and more just tomorrow. Here's to you!

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

A

former UCLA basketball player of the John Wooden era, Don Seidel was like a character straight off the Turner Classic Movie Channel. He had the best of time gone by – dapper attire, neatly trimmed hair and a deliberate savory way with words.

In addition to being an active resident volunteer at Arbor Court, the independent senior living community in Lancaster, Don was the unofficial liaison between residents and the powers-that-be. He called to discuss programs, to represent neighbors with rent troubles and to make sure the library remodel supported by his HCA Scholarship was progressing. While the nonprofit or management response wasn't always to his liking, Don was as respectful a listener as he was a communicator. He shared information with residents and would inevitably call a few weeks later with another idea.

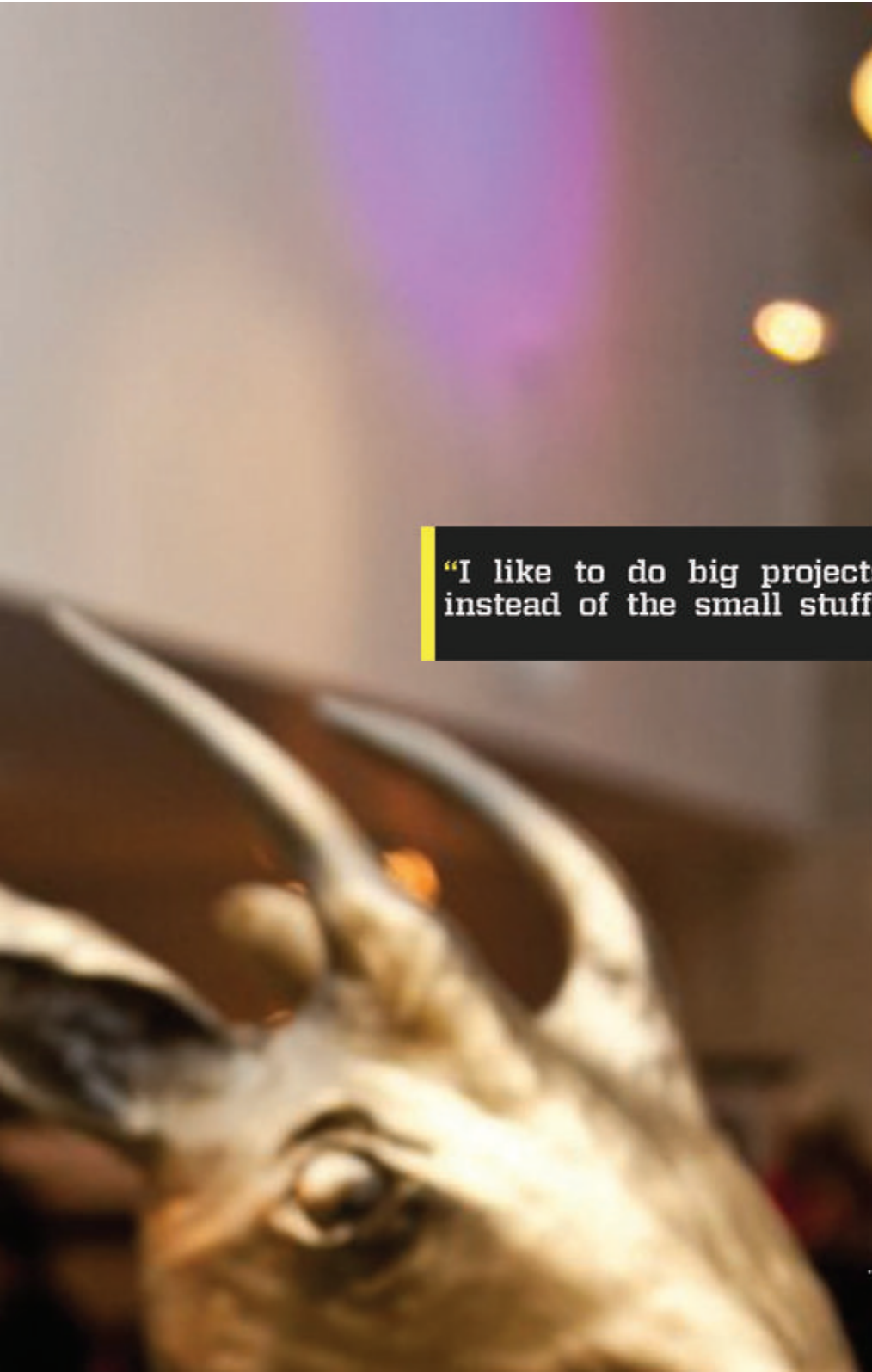
We are reminded of Don as we write this introduction, because people like him propel us forward. Any nonprofit will tell you that numbers count. Funders use them as a base of judgment for their generosity. And as much as we at HCA have to fall in line to ensure our own endurance, the real spark behind our progress can be lit by a single success story. The Don Seidels, the Mireya Vigils, the Nuri Amanatullahs – all those people who have singularly overcome, inspired and achieved beyond the seed of our programs. No matter how much importance quantity may have from a funder's perspective, one may be the most powerful number yet.

Welcome to the second edition of Social Capital.



COREY AND NICOLE AT THE VILLA RAMONA PHOTOGRAPHY ART SHOW





“I like to do big projects instead of the small stuff”

TALKING HEADS

Sculpting the Youth of Today into the Artists of Tomorrow

Like a stoic guru, ever-balanced and even-keeled, he states matter-of-factly, “I started teaching art in an elementary school in Colorado. I had 500 booger-eating kids. I was the only art teacher there for K-5. I was twenty-four years old.”

That’s how Michael Davis, visionary and lead instructor of HCA’s groundbreaking sculpture program “Talking Heads,” describes his first job in art education. Traveler, teacher and eternal student, Michael’s professional calling formed at a young age.

“I had good teachers growing up and always felt like they left such a legacy. I wanted to be able to make that same difference with somebody. I worked the restaurants, the grocery stores and all those jobs but they weren’t gratifying. But it does make a big difference when you are working with students and in a space where you are allowed and expected to do so.”

A man of experience, Michael wanted to make a difference beyond the Colorado borders, somewhere like Hawaii. Now it takes a certain type of person to drop everything familiar to embrace the unknown, but that’s just who Michael is. With just three weeks to pack, move, prep his classroom and plan lessons, he left home for a job as a photography instructor on the island state.

“I showed up and they pointed and said, ‘here’s your dark room.’ It was an old ladies bathroom painted baby blue. There were enlargers inside of the stalls instead of toilets.”

After making a few design changes to transform his unconventional classroom into a real dark room, it became the foundation for the reputable photography program that Michael soon established. It was also the beginning of the seven-year stretch he would spend teaching in Hawaii.

*Sculptures from the Talking Heads Gallery Show
Photo courtesy of Tamara Leigh Photography

As Michael reflects on his experience he says, “Even though I was a teacher, I was there learning more than anything. It’s a weird space to be in as an instructor. You want to teach, but your students are teaching you as much, or even more, about their culture and how they do things. It was eye opening.”

Once Michael returned stateside, he eventually made a home for himself and his fiancé at the Artist Lofts in Lancaster. HCA was a partner on the Lofts, so it was not long before the two became acquainted. At their meetings, Michael learned that HCA needed a change at a couple of their Antelope Valley communities, the Arbor at Palmdale and Village Pointe. After years of technology-based youth programs, HCA was ready to shift direction towards the fine arts. But they couldn’t do it alone. They needed a dynamic artist-teacher to design a long-term program, inspire participation, and guarantee a display-worthy result from each student. Michael was the perfect match.

“I like to do big projects instead of the small stuff. I led a large-scale sculpture project in Hawaii with my number one art student..The final product was amazing. I knew that achieving the same quality might be difficult with younger students, but I knew I could do it. And so when Corey and Nicole came to me with the opportunity to do this art project I racked my brain around and thought, ‘we can try this sculpture thing’ I pitched the idea and wrote up the proposal. I think their enthusiasm, more than anything, drove me, because when you teach you get used to being told ‘no’ a lot. Funding and other restrictions come up with the school district. But Corey and Nicole never told me ‘no.’ They embraced my ideas and it was refreshing for me. I dove in head first.”

A couple weeks into the program, things were starting to get messy. Quite literally. With participation up to twenty students, all of whom were generously packing wet clay onto paper-filled wire armatures, Michael needed some help. And that’s where I came in.

Trying to find a relevant job in a creative field had proved to be challenging, even more so in the slumping economy. After graduating college with a BA in art, I ended up working various odd jobs to make ends meet, in the meantime repeating to myself, “this is only temporary.” After working in the restaurant industry for sometime, the production of my artwork had slowed and my creative well was all but dried up. That’s when I decided it was time for a change. I abruptly quit and went travelling. Without the burden of a J-D-B looming overhead, I was free, if only for a little while, to reflect upon being an artist, finding a career and more importantly, finding satisfaction in my work.



Talking Heads instructors Nuri (Left) and Michael (Right)
**Photo courtesy of Tamar Leigh Photography*

Upon returning to the states I was determined to not only find a job that was more creatively inclined, but one that I would feel good about doing. I stumbled upon a listing on Craigslist for “assistant arts instructor,” I figured that this was as good of a place to start as any. In college I had worked as a resident advisor so I had some experience in putting on events and programming, but had never really taught in a traditional class setting.

Little did I know, this class would be anything but traditional. The more I learned about the class and the sort of bundle it offered—teaching art, financial literacy and design—the more I wanted to be a part of it. Not only did it seem like a great way for me to get back into creating my own art, but it was driven by a greater purpose. Even though I had only been living in the Antelope Valley for less than a year at that point, it was blatantly clear to me that both Palmdale and Lancaster needed a cold, hard, injection of the arts. What better way to start than with the youth of these communities.

With sound purpose and an eagerness only matched by the participants themselves, I met Michael on my first day. After observing for a bit, I hopped in and followed Michael’s lead. I was instantly hooked.

The feeling of the clay squish between my fingers. The visceral rush of moving

clay and forging it into something tangible, something that can be held. Something three-dimensional that you can walk around. Each class was a full-on studio environment where everyone was creating, collaborating and learning from each other—myself included. It really was a one-of-a-kind experience.

Working with Michael was a valuable lesson. His teaching style was solidly grounded in selflessness and a genuine commitment to education. He would often spend an entire class dedicated to just one student, teaching not only methodology, but also a sense of appreciation and ownership of her/his work. Fortunately for me, I was also part of Michael's learning process.

"I've always taught alone. I never realized what an asset it is to have a co-instructor. Someone who can contribute ideas and help students move forward. I could not have done it without you [Nuri]."

Once the program wrapped, more than twenty sculptures were placed on a custom-made steel display, courtesy of MGS Bikes, at the Artist Lofts Gallery on the newly revamped Lancaster Blvd. On December 11th 2010, the opening night, the street was closed to automobile traffic. Christmas lights lit up the many stalls of holiday vendors as hordes of people passed by and into the gallery. More than fifty people watched as we congratulated our twenty resident sculptors and announced their accomplishments. In addition to creating a take-home sculpture, students benefitted from HCA's signature financial literacy framework. For the 507 hours of work and \$1,014 of student earnings (based on a modest pay rate of \$2/hr), students earned \$607 back in the form of gift cards, invested \$257 in the program, and micro-financed a Kiva entrepreneur with the remaining \$150.

It was an epic night to say the least. You could see it in the kids' eyes. They had seen their sculptures every day in class, but I think they finally got it— that this was big. As much as you teach the students, you can't describe or anticipate the end result. You just have to be a part of it.

In schools students are often told to dream big. The sky is the limit. Unfortunately, the realities of budget cuts and funding allocation - especially for the arts - can stifle even the most ambitious of educators. If resources could only meet with ambition, great things could happen. Talking Heads is proof.



Both classes meet at the final show
**Photo courtesy of Tamara Leigh Photography*



Resident artist Valerie poses by her piece
**Photo courtesy of Tamara Leigh Photography*

A program such as Talking Heads does not succeed by simply throwing some clay at an eager student and hoping for the best. Nor does it hinge solely on the ambition of the teacher, who attempts to guide the student to greatness. Rather, its success rides on the participation of an entire community working to provide a safe and stable environment that encourages both discipline and creativity alike.

At the Arbor at Palmdale, resident participation is not just helpful to the continual wellbeing of the property, it is essential. The relatively dense property consists of ninety units of housing that roughly seventy-five children call home. This high concentration of youth demands a constant stream of new and meaningful ways to occupy their time. In past, the Arbor relied on its technology center for answers; it offered a variety of computer-based programs in subjects like music editing and digital imaging. But this all changed in the summer of 2010 with the launch of Talking Heads.

While a computer lab may not be the first thing that comes to mind when envisioning a sculpture studio, the technology center was more than suitable for fine arts. It quickly became a re-invented hub of creativity for resident youth. Carol Rook, the Arbor at Palmdale's manager of four years, explains the transition of pro-

gramming from digital to tactile as well as the evolving landscape of the Arbor as a property that prides itself on community involvement.

"The children really need to have things that keep them busy," states Carol. "Busy hands help them stay out of trouble. And they like it. They like staying busy."

Carol remembers how different things were when she first started out at the Arbor. "When I first came here, people were afraid to come outside. When I had my first neighborhood watch meeting, I said, 'You guys need to understand this is your home. Don't let somebody else make you afraid to walk out your own front door.'"

Domestic disturbances were gradually replaced by classes in the technology center and children playing in the courtyards. Word spread fast, such that students from neighboring communities began to show up, hoping to participate in programs.

In a digital age where computers and new media continue to play a dominant role in the social, creative and professional development of youth, programs must spur social interaction while still being hands-on in their approach

While the Talking Heads sculpture program was not the be-all and end-all for social programming, it did emphasize working in a collaborative studio environment amongst fellow residents.

Even while gearing up for the second round of sculpture, Carol admits that everyone is pretty excited.

"They are all waiting for it." And why not? The end result after the first sculpture program was a renewed sense of accomplishment and ownership. Something that effectively spread outside of the studio.

Emphasizing a more open and proud community, the Arbor at Palmdale continues to illicit participation from its residents. This ranges from youth enrolling in upcoming programs to their parents dropping by class to offer an extra set of hands.

"I've seen a lot of changes here. It's calmed down a lot. They [the residents] are beginning to take more pride. You have to like where you live to care about it," Carol exclaims. Not only does she like what she sees, but she would like to see more. In addition to more programs geared towards the younger children of the property, Carol wants more parental support.

I want to see more participation from parents. If the parents participate they could see how their children interact with other children and that their kids actually like having their parents there. They really do. It makes them proud, 'My mom, my dad are here seeing what I'm doing.' They need that. Parents shouldn't just send their child out—they need to come too. This is our home. This is where we need to step up and be proud of it."



Resident artists remove the armature from their sculptures



Carolina working on her sculpture during class

THE ARBOR AT PALMDALE: MOLDING A BETTER COMMUNITY

VILLAGE POINTE: FROM COMPUTERS TO CLAY

Village Pointe, much like the Arbor at Palmdale, has a high concentration of resident youth and young adults. With twice as many apartment units and double the space, Village Pointe is large indeed. Promoting an active community while also fostering a safe, neighborly environment can be daunting at any property, but particularly so at one this size. With multiple common areas punctuating an expanse of buildings, creating a focal point for programming can be difficult. Manager Gary Booker and Assistant Manager Diane Nieto however, are more than up to the task.

In an effort to counteract the size of Village Pointe, both Gary and Diane prioritize their involvement in resident life. "It's kind of like you have your family around you when you are here," explains Diane, who has been at Village Pointe since 2008. "You get to know your residents and learn what their needs are and how you can make that happen. It's been exciting."

"Exciting's a good word," Gary chimes in. Gary came to work at Village Pointe in August of 2009. It was his first experience with a tax-credit property, and the unique dynamic that it offers. As he learned, it takes a different kind of manager to run the day-to-day workings. In addition to the typical responsibilities, you have to go above and beyond to develop

a sense of community and create a place residents can fondly call home.

"What I've learned, is that unlike other industries, you do get to see progression here. This is where people live and raise their families. You see people born here, people raised here, unfortunately, you see people pass away here, but you are involved in the fabric of their lives. So it has a special quality to it, to be here and doing this kind of job."

Aware of the importance of extending programming beyond what is normally expected, Gary and Diane have fostered an environment in which the raw talent of Village Pointe's youth can be displayed front and center.

When asked about the history of programming at Village Pointe, Gary runs down a long list of previous programs, all beneficial in their own rite. For Gary however, one stands out more than the others. "By far since I've been here, sculpture has been the most successful program that we've had." Unlike many of the past programs in photography and videography, which involved a slew of computer technologies, this program required youth to create a 3D sculpture using little more than wire, clay and their own hands. It was an attractive challenge," explains Gary, "for a technology-reliant generation of youth."

"It's amazing how many young peo-

ple don't dream anymore because it's easy to turn on the computer, get on the social networks, turn on the video games and spend hours doing that and not having real contact with the outside world...When you have the connection with other people and you are out doing things, then you can be inspired. You can't be inspired to create on your couch, in front of the computer or playing video games twelve hours a day. It doesn't happen."

For Gary, this sculpture program is an important building block for a grander vision. A true believer in the arts, he hopes that this program and others will ultimately lead residents to better and more successful futures.

"What I really want is for the kids of the people who live here, to not be future residents of this property. To not have them be HUD recipients or Section 8 recipients. They want to do better. It's okay for them to want to go to college, or want to go to art school or trade school, but the idea is to not have the same types of outcomes with these kids as their parents or their brothers or uncles or aunts. It has to break the cycle and we have to do our part to help them break the cycle. Having a program come in and give them other options is what's needed. Who knows, this kid might grow up to be the next superstar sculptor or painter. You never know."

This is the perfect breeding ground for those kinds of future artists. Why shouldn't we cultivate that?"

Diane, who shares many of the same beliefs as Gary, understands the importance of these programs, as well as the importance of reaching out to all residents.

"Everyone's interests are going to be different. Maybe somebody could excel at art and another at music. It shouldn't just be limited to the people who excel in one category and not give other people the opportunity to see what their talent is and what they are capable of."

In the meantime, Gary continues to focus on maintaining positive relations with his residents—especially the children.

"If I'm out doing rounds, I'll shoot baskets with them. My whole philosophy since I've started managing is that the mood and attitude of our office is going to be reflected in the community. So if we have the right spirit about what we're doing in here, as a staff, as a unit, it's contagious, it's infectious. It gets to the people and the people understand that. Try to create that culture of caring - where people care about their environment, about where they live - and that means keeping out the drug dealers, the gangbangers and other negative influences. We're trying to do that as best we can. It's not always easy, but we try."

TSA staff lending a hand to Habitat for Humanity



[TSA]

Thomas Safran + Associates

TSA RESIDENT SERVICES TALKS CARE, COMMUNITY AND GIVING BIG

notion of community. Sarah Parsa and Analee Villalpando, the dynamic duo forming TSA's resident services department, are no exception.

Armed with a BA in Sociology and an MBA from Pepperdine, Sarah came to TSA from the ranks of marketing and advertising. An unexpected crossover, Sarah's decision to join TSA was a no-brainer given her common desire for purpose and meaning.

"What I've found is that you can be a skilled worker, but if you are not driven by your cause, you can't achieve in the same way. I think that is what differentiates TSA from other companies. We all care about our cause."

A similar cause, what Analee describes as "a sustainable future that meets human needs" led her to International Development Studies at UCLA, and later to her work in after-school programming with the Youth Policy Institute (YPI). Her continued commitment to the affordable housing demographic and her passion for impacting many communities at once eventually landed her in TSA's Brentwood office.

"Many communities" is an understatement. TSA currently boasts thirty-five leased apartment communities with more in the pipeline. When it comes to resident services, Sarah and Analee have their hands full. But when the going gets tough, both women credit their endurance and inspiration to TSA's founder and visionary, Thomas Safran.

With more than thirty-five years in the affordable housing industry, Thomas Safran and Associates (TSA) has worked hard to distinguish itself. A bold development-management company with its own in-house resident services team and a commitment to quality right down to its trademark landscaping, TSA's success can be summed up in a single word: community. From development to management to resident services to maintenance, the TSA team is committed to an all-inclusive, reciprocal



Sarah Parsa

Sarah confesses, "Beyond just being the owner, Tom is also a leader. He really inspires everybody from senior management to residents. He has a very hands-on approach. Many of our residents are personally acquainted with him. He pays close attention to detail and takes great pride in his work. We do the same because of the example he sets."

Analee adds, "I think the backbone of TSA is the sense of family he [Tom] creates, not only here in the main office, but also with our managers and residents. He builds everything in the image of family and home and we in turn provide that for our residents."

It's clear that the spirit of family shapes TSA services, but what exactly does TSA provide in the way of services? What is their winning strategy?

Even with this system of feedback, there are times when a program may

not be as successful. Nonetheless, this has become second nature to the TSA team; the idea of trial and error is something they have learned to embrace. "We're open to trying things, facing unanticipated results and picking up again the next day," says Sarah. "Nothing is failing, every-

thing is learning. What works at one property might not work at another property. The beauty is that you can adapt."

Analee adds, "Sometimes it's just a matter of tweaking one tiny thing, taking the time to fine tune it and it works. The possibilities are limitless."

“
Nothing is failing,
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”

Speaking of "limitless", TSA has certainly proven this word to be the perfect modifier for their mantra of community through their annual event, the Big Give. First inspired by Oprah's Big Give, TSA's Big Give began in 2008. Each apartment community was given extra funds to spend on something that benefited the property. Over the next year, the Big Give vision shifted from the immediate TSA community to something greater. The team decided to elect a charity for which all properties could raise donations. Not only that, but Tom designated a staff day where everybody could help that charity on the front lines. In 2009, the lucky recipient was the LA Regional Food Bank. The TSA community raised 30,000 dollars and 17,000 pounds of food, and spent a full day helping out at the food bank.

Always trying to outdo the previous year's Big Give, TSA chose Habitat for Humanity (HFH) as its recipient charity in 2010. "HFH is interesting because it actually builds affordable housing for low-income people, the same demographic we have in our communities," Sarah points out. "Partnering with them was a great opportunity to open our residents' minds...Another great outcome, was that it gave our maintenance team the opportunity to lead. With their knowledge in construction, they were showing us how to do all sorts of things." With building momentum and awareness in this third year of "big giving," TSA raised \$35,000 for HFH in addition to several thousand



Analee Villalpando

dollars worth of building materials.

For TSA, the Big Give truly encompasses their mission for a new kind of community, one that transgresses income, hierarchy and property lines. "The Big Give is about expanding our notions of community, and encouraging new perspective in all of us, not just our residents. You might be struggling, but there's probably someone who's struggling more. In my mind that's the lesson behind it, being able to not only think outside of yourself, but to give as well."

"And that's really what TSA represents," Analee chimes in. "Just giving back."

SKYLINE VILLAGE

BUILDING A COMMUNITY

IN THE

CONCRETE JUNGLE

HCA'S MISSION TO PROVIDE

meaningful social programs has made its mark across the many suburbs that dot the Southland. Sometimes, though, these programs take HCA into the big city itself.

Enter Skyline Village, a modern affordable housing complex located in the center of Downtown LA, just a few minutes from the Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Los Angeles Public Library and the Staples Center. Like HCA and other TSA communities, Skyline also aims to educate its residents with classes that go beyond the standard movie nights and pot lucks that many properties offer.



Skyline's Digital Imaging Class. Property manager Lisa German (Right)

**Photos courtesy of Tamara Leigh Photography*





A Skyline resident showcases his work

“PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE THAT YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE, ONE BY ONE”

As Lisa German property manager says, these services are “a very important part of our management style.”

With almost a decade of experience in the affordable housing industry prior to joining TSA, Lisa noticed this unique style almost immediately after her twin sister, already a TSA employee, introduced her to the company. Tired of working for firms that “were really more concerned about the bottom line,” Lisa opted for TSA because she “just liked what they were about.”

Furthermore, using classes and programs to inspire residents in an urban environment like Downtown LA, offers exciting challenges and rewards. Lisa, a transplant from Riverside, was not altogether unfamiliar with city living. She still admits however, to some culture shock. “I’m still amazed when I look around. There’s so much diversity here—people and culture, just different from what I had experienced,” but, Lisa adds, “They’ve been very warm and accepting—all of the residents.”

Aside from computer classes, movie nights, birthday and holiday celebrations, Skyline also offers yoga classes as well as nutrition and exercise courses to residents. More intensively, seven youth residents finished a photography and digital imaging class taught by visual artist Davida Nemeroff.

“We had a ton of people come out and support it, parents and other residents. It was great. Kids really got into it, and they did a great job. I loved it, every bit of it. Every time I saw them in class, it just warmed my heart thinking of all the great changes that it’s caused. The students are all still in school. Some of

them that were out of school are going to college. It was amazing—the turnout and the result of the classes.”

Most students were 14 to 17 years old, though some were as young as 11. While there are different programs to benefit residents of all ages in the 72-unit community, Lisa sees a special need to help guide the youth. This year, Lisa intends to stress the importance of education, especially in the form of scholarships. Several scholarships are offered through the property, its partners, and on-site programs, and Lisa sees even applying as a step forward in building better habits among residents.

“The social service aspect of this job is one of my favorite things because kids don’t get it. People don’t realize that you can make a difference, one by one, and I think that’s important, especially when we’re in challenged communities like this.” And while living in the city can be intimidating, Skyline has made tangible strides since TSA began managing. “I think it’s great what I’ve been seeing with the kids here. I don’t think we have any kind of gang problem here. Graffiti—no more. If they [the kids] see it, they come tell me. We have to take pride in where we live. I tell my residents, we create a nice living environment for you and you guys have to help us keep it that way.”



HCA presents a certificate of completion to a Skyline resident

LARK ELLEN VILLAGE

PHOTOGRAPHY FINDS THE GOLDEN GENERATION

Following Skyline, Lark Ellen Village became the third TSA community to launch a digital imaging and photography program. More importantly though, it was the first community in both the TSA and HCA portfolios to invite senior participation.

Lark Ellen, with its supportive resident community of both families and seniors, was the perfect choice for an intergenerational pilot. An "active property," boasts five-year Community Manager Cheryle Perez, its monthly calendar includes quilting classes, Dodger game outings and other regular events that unite residents of all ages. With a history like this, it's no wonder the students were able to collaborate throughout the course to create what Cheryle proudly describes as, "incredible pictures."

Although in the end, nine of the ten Lark Ellen photographers were youth ages 8-18 years, our one senior shutterbug, Delores Baker, more than made up for this. Aside from photography, Delores is very involved in the community and helps to teach one of its most popular activities, quilting. The Lark Ellen quilters alone have turned in more than 432 charity quilts. As if that were not amazing enough, Delores tells me she spent the past summer in Montana mining sapphires. When I asked how she went about the mining process, she replied, "get in the dirt, and start picking."

It was precisely this exuberance and go-get-em attitude that shined at Lark Ellen's photography art show. As Cheryle recalls, "The pride that the children had from being able to accomplish this—take the class, take the photos, and then show them to everybody—they were really excited about the work they had done."



Above: Property Manager Cheryle Perez with resident Delores Baker.

Below: Delores next to her photography



WESLEY SHIVE

PHOTOGRAPHY IN MOTION



Above: Instructor Wes Shive enjoying a tropical fruit
Below: Wes presenting certificates at Lark Ellen's DIP show



It's a mid-winter afternoon in January, which equates to a warm, sunny day in Brentwood. I stroll to Peet's Coffee to meet up with Wesley Shive, instructor of Lark Ellen's photography and digital imaging program.

The bustle of the busy cafe mixed with the calming aroma of ground coffee forms a pleasant juxtaposition of opposites, not unlike Wes himself. With a BA in economics from NYU and an MA in film from the University of Southern California, Wes leads a dual career. He manages real estate in the Antelope Valley, carrying on what he calls "the family business," but he also spends much of his time writing screenplays. His R&R consists of shredding the salty waterways of SoCal beaches.

An industrious entrepreneur, creative mind and adventurer, Wes was destined for success with HCA. Though admittedly, his grad school TA experiences included neither youth nor seniors, he jumped at the opportunity to mentor developing photographers. "It's always nice to teach people that haven't been taught before," Wes confesses. "The initial experience shapes them. And with youth, it's important to give them a different perspective when they are growing up. You can come back twenty years later and not even realize the lasting effect it has."

Despite these rewards, Wes confesses that managing a room of predominantly eager computer savvy youth is quite the challenge. While others may be stumped in this given situation, Wes found that the best remedy is simply maintaining a balance between structure and adaptability. He designed assignments and class work to revolve around two central course objectives: digital photography and photo editing. Students would frequently spend the first class of each week learning about the camera and taking photos, and the second class, in the computer lab navigating the editing software.

At the same time however, Wes made sure to leave room for spontaneous discussions and creative experimentation. As he successfully proved when he graduated ten students from his class, keeping interest and enthusiasm is "the most important thing," even if it means straying from the syllabus every now and then.



JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT OF

PRESIDENT GARY HICKMAN EXPLAINS THE IMPORTANCE OF A FISCAL EDUCATION

The average school day isn't short on lessons—math, English, the sciences—but one subject tends to be left out. Junior Achievement of Southern California wants to fix this by addressing a topic some students don't even think about: financial literacy.

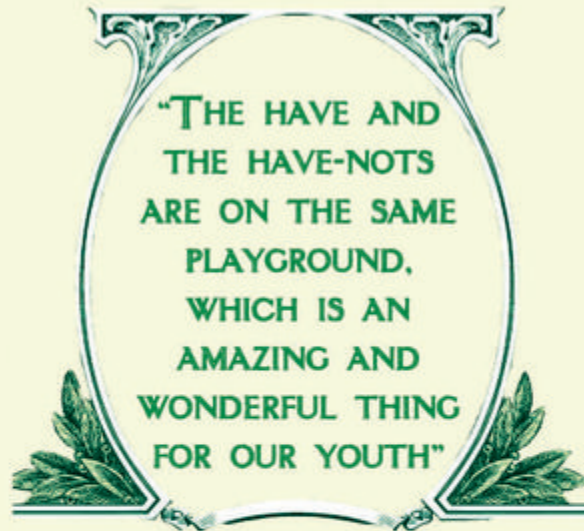
Junior Achievement of Southern California (JASoCal) teaches students how to effectively budget and manage their finances. President and CEO Gary Hickman sees the nonprofit organization as providing education and facilities in a necessary but overlooked area.

"Everybody in our society has some sort of income. I don't care if its flipping hamburgers, it could be whatever. Somebody has some money coming into their household and they have to manage that. This program is one of few that demonstrates how to manage that money in a long-term, effective way because we actually change behaviors."

JA works within the community. Every year, it collaborates with over 80 regional nonprofits and recruits volunteers from neighboring areas and universities to supplement its staff. HCA has been one of these nonprofit partners since 2005, when JA representative Amanda Sattler facilitated multiple curriculum trainings for affordable housing staff in Los Angeles County. JA's more recent work in the HCA portfolio includes a program for 3rd-5th grade youth at both Cottonwood Place Apts and Hemet Vistas Apts.

Throughout all of these trainings and programs, and indeed a great deal more, Hickman has been a strong advocate for JA's brand of financial literacy. He boasts 30 years with this powerhouse, the last 16 of which he spent at the Southern California offices. The civil unrest of

1992, strongly influenced his relocation and commitment to this area. "I always said if I continue with my career in JA, I'd like to do it in Los Angeles because I saw a need. I saw a need for adult interaction with young people in our communities because so many do not have positive adult interaction or they don't have role models. If they do have them, it's a sports figure or somebody that's unreachable."



While volatile events such as civil unrest can shape the lives of youth, there can be constants. JA itself is rooted in a long history of providing financial literacy to those who seem to be affected by the ever-changing economic climates.

"Junior Achievement is over 90 years old. We're probably one of the oldest organizations around, but we're also the most relevant. We're trendy, we change with the needs of our communities. Our programs are new."

One of JASoCal's most valuable resources is Finance Park. On my visit to the complex, located just off Forest Lawn in LA, it was a sunny morning ripe with potential, only mirrored by what I found happening within the walls of Finance Park itself. The 10,000 square foot "learning laboratory" is equipped with mock storefronts, banks, and other urban facilities. Industry heavyweights like Toyota, State Farm, and Union Bank dot the mock city's landscape providing a hands-on experience like no other.

Inside this lab, I witnessed a group of local high school students actively engaging in one of JA's 'Role Playing Simulations'. Students go to the lab and are seated for instructions. After orientation, the simulation begins, and students are given a bankcard, an income, and a new life that may include marriage, children, and taxes. They have a set amount of time in which to make purchases and manage their needs as well as those



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

of any 'family members'. The students run around frantically trying to budget things like insurance and car payments, concepts that feel like light years away from homework, football games and prom. Being thrust into these real-world scenarios allows the students to have first hand experience with many of the fiscal responsibilities that await once they complete high school. The students learn how to balance a checkbook, and balance their lives by rationalizing needs over wants. Facilitated by Liz Vickers, Program Manager at Finance Park, and overseen by Kimberly Blum, Director, the simulation is interactive for both volunteers and students alike, creating an environment that tackles the systemic issue of financial mismanagement at the root, by changing behaviors.

Hickman continues, "Students will tell you, 'Oh, my god, I have two kids and I only make \$25,000 a year. How am I going to do this?' But if they budget properly, they can win. And they can balance. If they make stupid decisions they will not balance. So the lowest economic level to the highest can achieve and win during this process. And they'll know the sacrifices. What's even more important, there's the inner city youth or less fortunate schools or lower-socio economic neighborhoods. A lot of people say they can't compete with the kids from Beverly Hills and Manhattan Beach and that kind of thing. They can here. The kids take our curriculum, which we provide at no cost to the school, before they come here to do the simulation. They converge. The have and the have-nots are on the same playground, which is an amazing and wonderful thing for our youth."

Financial responsibility has become a larger concern for young adults. High unemployment, competition in the job market, and a continuing recession are forcing more young people to think carefully about money and their future. JA believes that Finance Park, as well as its other programs, help students focus on what's important.

These lessons can be frustrating, but, as Hickman insists, they are relevant.

"One of the things they do is they get really angry at this process. They thought they had \$31,000, but they don't bring home \$31,000. So the first lesson in life is 'where does my money go before I even get it?' So a real education process starts."

JASoCal also offers lessons for adults, using the same curriculum. In Southern California, the organization reaches ten counties and even has eyes on building more facilities like Finance

Park. While the goal "is to put caring adults in front of young people with a curriculum and with a meaningful outcome," Hickman admits there's still much to be done.

"I think we've made a tremendous impact with young people. But even though we're reaching what seems to be large numbers of 100,000 students and more, it's a drop in the bucket when you figure there's 4 million K-12 kids in our franchise area." Having finished the JA programs at Cottonwood Place Apts and Hemet Vistas, HCA hopes to fill that bucket with more youth from their communities.



JASoCal's Finance Park features mock store fronts to simulate real-life scenarios

STEVENSON MANOR AND THE THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED

Bright-eyed and bubbling with energy, Erin Elizabeth Patrick had me convinced that she'd just switched on the charm for our interview. Surely a young starlet can't be this genuine. Certainly not in Hollywood, I thought to myself. But after sitting down with Erin at Stevenson Manor, a 61-unit senior community in the heart of Hollywood, I was silently humbled by the truth. Though she is an up-and-coming actress with international training, the star of several shorts, a writer and co-producer to boot, Erin is deeply enthusiastic about the people and endeavors she encounters off-screen. A born storyteller, Erin thrives on not just listening to the tales of others, but making a connection with them, an interest she has been able to transform into something truly special for the Stevenson seniors.

With forty-nine other potential home-states, Erin grew up about as far from Cali as you can get: Alaska.

Confirming popular belief, she admits that it is "really cold and dark there." As one might also assume, it was quite difficult to follow a career in acting in such an isolated territory: "As a kid I knew acting was something that I wanted to do, but it just seems like a joke out there. It's not something you can make a career out of." There was nothing left to do but leave the last frontier for urban promise elsewhere.

Erin graduated from high school and started making her way down south to Vancouver where she began her formal training as an actor. After some time in British Columbia, Erin pursued her childhood dream of studying drama in London and enrolled at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. She eventually found her way to Hollywood, this time looking to beef up her acting chops for film. While training

at the American Academy, she searched for a side job to help support her studies.

"I worked at a couple different cafes as a barista, but it was really kind of unfulfilling. Then I found, funnily enough on craigslist this job for an artistic activities director, and I thought, 'How cool would that be?'"

Erin came to Stevenson Manor and the first event she threw was a dance party. A dance party is perhaps not the first idea that comes to mind when one thinks of activities for seniors. But Erin pulled it together, knocking on every door of the four-story property to get the word out about the upcoming celebration.

ERIN ELIZABETH PATRICK BRINGS DRAMA TO STEVENSON MANOR

Residents of Stevenson Manor participate in The Theater of the Oppressed



"I made these big fliers and I was very excited about it. I set up the party, had Michael Jackson blaring and I actually got 20 residents. There's a large number of Russian and Spanish speaking residents here, so the language barrier was a bit difficult, but very interesting for me and for all of us. Some of the Russian residents brought down music and they were dancing and showing me how to dance. It was really cool."

Erin continued programming at Stevenson, leading regular activities such as bingo, walks to the park and something Erin calls movie madness: "We had a Marilyn Monroe month, an Audrey Hepburn month... I would bring in these movies that some of them had watched and that some hadn't seen in years. We'd pop popcorn and all come down and watch them together."

They were able to talk about what was going on in their lives

the last time they had seen these movies. After that I thought, 'If I can't do acting or I need a part time job, what's better than doing something that's so fulfilling?' So then we got hooked up with Stella Adler Acting Academy here in Hollywood."

Stella Adler, the legendary acting instructor, initially founded this nonprofit academy in New York based on her philosophy of acting as humanity. Now, more than 60 years later, Stella Adler has a Hollywood school and an international presence. The academy approached HCA to coordinate a mutually beneficial trade: free theatre for and with seniors, in exchange for a more meaningful way for students to practice their craft while earning their tuition.

Students and seniors practiced a specific theatrical form founded by Brazilian director Augusto Boal called, "Theater of the Oppressed." Erin describes the resulting program as "bringing to life past stories, or events or problems you have had with your life and telling them to a group of people." Each participant may then cast Stella Adler volunteers as characters in these stories and subsequently watch them act it out. "It's amazing," continues Erin. "These residents come



Erin Elizabeth Patrick

from all over the world and they have these amazing stories that just blow your mind. It's so cool for them to be able to cast these young actors, to portray them when they were twenty-two dealing with a situation in their lives and just see it unfold. It's really special to them."

There is no pressure for anyone to perform as Erin explains it. Some just come to watch. Others even participate in the

Erin posing with Stevenson residents and members of Stella Adler



"I'm in the theater arts and acting specifically so its been an absolute joy for me to see it happen."

Erin, who had never worked with seniors in this capacity, was changed by the experience and even by her time at Stevenson. "It really opened my eyes to everyday troubles of seniors. It made me much more patient—not that I was impatient—but it just made me realize that all of these people were me at one point."

Since our interview, Erin's acting career has demanded her full attention and schedule. While she is no longer working at Stevenson, her experiences there continually shape her future. "Living all these different places and seeing all these different cultures has really opened my mind to the fact that there is so much to be treasured in hearing people's stories. I'm a story teller and they all have helped me a lot."

PROFILE

THE METAL MAESTRO

M

IKE STAFFORD

OF

MGS

MIKE WITH HIS CUSTOM CREATION, "RADICAL SIMPLICITY"



HERE ARE TWO THINGS TO SAY ABOUT MIKE STAFFORD. THE FIRST IS that he is an artist, though he doesn't use an easel or hang his work on museum walls. The second, is that Stafford, or 'Big Mike' as he is affectionately called, owns and operates MGS Custom Bikes.

Boasting the slogan, "Designed to be ridden, created as works of art," MGS Custom Bikes is all about designing, building and maintaining custom motorcycles for riders and hobbyists. But more and more, Stafford's inventive design skills and genius with steel has contributed to a growing repertoire of work outside of bikes. His metal creations already adorn Lancaster Boulevard and serve as functional pieces of art for HCA programs.

Given that all this came out of his love for motorcycles, it may then come as a surprise that at one point, Stafford had no interest in them. A native of the Antelope Valley, he grew up riding dirt bikes. It wasn't until he met his future wife, Paula that all that changed.

"She and her parents rode [motorcycles]. I started getting interested because I was tired of following them in my car," admits Stafford. "I actually built a bike so I could ride with her and her parents because I couldn't afford it at the time."

When their first child was born the couple sold their bikes. But Stafford still had enough materials for a side job. "I figured I'll just build one or two bikes out of my garage to make extra money, and that just kind of snowballed."


His entry into the bike business was a little unexpected, but his career as a metal maestro was born out of necessity. After the economy took a dip around 2007, MGS went from designing custom bikes and building them from scratch to working on other people's rides. As Big Mike explains, "we had to start diversifying." When the economy did not pick up, his other talents came into use.

Stafford and MGS have been making things that appear throughout the Antelope Valley for some time now. Stepping inside MGS is like stepping inside a trophy case. The walls are decorated with plaques and other accolades from past industry conquests. Magazine spreads and news stories similarly litter the walls. Most impressive, of course, are the bikes. Like liquid steel they seem to float in the showroom, each sculpted with its own distinct personality. Most of these were not just made from scratch, they were made from less than that, and each one seems to have a story of its own.

"Because I have the skills to fabricate metal, we started doing all kinds of different things. When I got involved with Scott [Ehrlich] over on the boulevard, it just took off from there."

Aside from being commissioned to design and build the giant bowling pin that greets patrons at the Underground Bowling Lounge at Bex Restaurant, Stafford also lent his skills to HCA's Talking Heads sculpture program. Stafford designed a steel arched sculpture stand that displayed two-dozen ceramic busts. Through Ehrlich, Stafford was connected with the City of Lancaster and was commissioned for a public art project, which entailed a series of scaled down motorbikes that adorn Lancaster Boulevard.

He is currently collaborating again with HCA to design a unique storage trough made from steel and old whiskey barrels for a senior mural program serving Arbor Court, Arbor



"I'VE ONLY ACTUALLY DRAWN ONE BIKE OUT. THE REST I JUST STARTED, AND THEY JUST EVOLVED ON THEIR OWN."

Grove and Arbor Gardens.

Mike admits, working with the community offers benefits that go beyond exposure and free advertising for his business. "I'm very honored to be able to do something that everybody sees, something that's going to be there for a long time. To be a part of that is really cool," Stafford said.



MIKE AND PAULA

A friend (also an editor of biker read V-Twin Magazine) was angry at the disqualification but incredulous at Stafford's design expectations, asking, 'Mike, you didn't really think that you were going to build something like that and walk it in there amongst all those builders that had been there forever and get a trophy for it?'

Stafford's response: "Well, yeah."

While his friend offered, "it doesn't work that way," it eventually did. One month after the easy Rider Show, Mike was Dragon Slayer on Speed Vision on national TV, a year later, that MGS took it to Daytona and won the Rat's Hole Contest.

"I've only actually drawn one bike out. The rest I just started, and they evolved on their own. When I think back on it though, the one that I drew out and planned out was probably one of the most successful bikes. We won the Grand National roadster show with that bike—Radical Simplicity."

The same bike also won the Street Chopper Build Off and was displayed in Caesar's palace for six months for an exotic car exhibit, at the V-Twin Expo in Cincinnati Ohio, and for 6 months in the Reading Library in Pennsylvania where one of its fellow displays was none other than the Liberty Bell. There's also the Dragon Slayer, currently on display on Lancaster Boulevard, winner of the Rat's Hole Contest - "probably one of the biggest bike shows in the industry," Stafford says - and the Super Radical Class in Daytona Beach, FL. Ironically enough, the Dragon Slayer was disqualified on its debut at the Easy Rider Show in Pomona.

"When we built that in '05, that thing was so far ahead of what everyone else was doing. They said it wasn't a motorcycle, it was unridable," he said.

Even when success has to be proven, MGS has flourished. The bikes have taken their makers all over the United States to compete. Stafford's work has been shown on the Discovery Channel, Speed Vision, American Thunder, Comcast Cable, Metric Revolution and Biker Build-Off. As he says, "We've been on every TV thing that had anything to do with bikes."

Still, "Big Mike" is humble about his success. A motorcycle might have put him on the road to marriage, but it was a dicey economy that caused him to branch out. "In this economy that we're living in right now, I just thank God every day that I'm still here and talking to you, and answer the phone and say 'MGS,'" he said. Mike's humility and endurance is contagious too. "We're going in another direction with our new clothing store on the boulevard. It's very exciting."

It's true. MGS is no longer just a custom bike shop/metal work art studio. The brand name extends to a clothing boutique, which caters to tastes both biker and casual.

"It's actually a really cool mix—we have biker apparel there and our traditional t-shirts. We design some t-shirts for men, and she's got a really cool mix of women's clothes, kind of a boutique thing going on. It's a really cool atmosphere," he adds. The "she" Stafford refers to is his wife Paula, and he is not shy about mentioning her. There's a third thing we can all say about Mike Stafford: he's a family man. Accordingly, MGS is somewhat of a family business.

"She does all the books here, and MGS on the Blvd is totally hers. She buys all the clothing, runs it and heads all the responsibilities in there. Everything you see in there is her," Stafford says.

Building MGS into a brand is only half the job. The Staffords have five children, who have more or less watched their parents start a custom bike shop, help decorate a boulevard, and open a clothing store.

"I couldn't do any of this without her. When we first started this, we were literally working 16, 18 hours a day. I didn't take a day off for the first two years I started this, and she was at home, not only doing the books here but also taking care of our five kids. She kept it all together," Stafford admits. "She backed me in whatever I decided to do."

"If you asked me a year ago if I was going to open up a clothing store I would laugh at you, I would've laughed. I have no idea where it's going, I'm just along for the ride."

MIKE AND PAULA ON THE ROAD



Leffingwell Manor

In Search of a Place Called "Home"



Manager Kara Rawson stands outside of Leffingwell with a resident

"This is what I was looking for. This wasn't in the books. Books have general information, but learning from them, their experiences, what they need, their ideas, is what helped me find out what I needed to do. Everything I needed to know came from them. I knew I was in the right place."



They say it never rains in Southern California, but it's falling in sheets over Whittier blanketing the streets in a wet slick. Through my windshield, traffic lights and taillights are blurred into streaks of red, yellow and green making the navigation of the busy intersections all the more treacherous. I duck my head and scurry into Leffingwell Manor. The rain begins to fall more heavily, but you wouldn't know it inside. Upon entering I am immediately greeted by a wave of warmth. The residents of this 89-unit senior affordable housing property are out and about in full force with the spirit of the holidays in the air. It's not only the Christmas cheer that contributes to this feeling, however. Property manager Kara Rawson and Resident Services Intern Mireya Vigil are highly instrumental in maintaining this community's jolly disposition.

Built in 1978, Leffingwell has undergone a transformation that one really must see to believe. With TSA's acquisition of the property came remodeling, both literally and figuratively. In addition to sprucing up the facilities, TSA was able to partner with HCA to provide resident services.

Enter Mireya.



Mireya is a teacher, a volunteer, and a mother. Hers is an inspiring story that anyone can learn from. Born in Mexico and raised in East LA, Mireya ventured north of the border like so many others for the promise of a better future, something she has never forgotten. "It's in my mind every day that I live." Mireya started volunteering at Leffingwell back in 2008 while studying at Rio Hondo College in Whittier. She was able to continue her work at Leffingwell while she completed her Bachelor's in Human Services from Cal State Fullerton, further strengthening her bond with the Leffingwell community. Recently graduated, Mireya is excited to put into practice everything she has learned.

"Sometimes you know what you want to do in life, but you feel that you are lacking in this area and that area," explains Mireya. "I learned certain things about myself that led me to just go out there and take a chance. I knew that I wanted to help people, but I wasn't sure that I had the right skills. So I learned that the only way to be able to learn the skills is to learn the basics first."

When deciding what community to volunteer with, Mireya looked no further than her parents. "I looked at which population I felt had the most need, and from what I had read and what I had seen, it was the older population. I looked to my mother and father and saw how they were excited by different programs where they live."

This led Mireya to her first internship with a human services program at school. When presented with the opportunity to intern, Mireya jumped at it and landed at Leffingwell. Once she started working with the residents, Mireya admits her real education began.



Mireya Vigl

"This is what I was looking for. This wasn't in the books. Books have general information, but learning from them, their experiences, what they need, their ideas, is what helped me find out what I needed to do. Everything I needed to know came from them. I knew I was in the right place."

Being a full-time student and mother, Mireya admits that it's tough finding time to volunteer. Yet in addition to Leffingwell, she has volunteered at many different places and enjoys working with people regardless of age group. Her marathon-like endurance, which extends to all aspects of her life, is largely attributed to Mireya's genuine desire to help people.

"It has allowed me to learn and grow—have a growing experience while enriching other's lives. Helping people gives me the opportunity to relate, feel normal. When I see that you [can] make things happen for people, that gives me a bigger cause and I am able to move forward and be positive."

And moving positively forward is just what Mireya is doing. Mireya heads a wide variety of activities for the residents of Leffingwell including gardening, arts and crafts, baking, bowling on the Wii, puzzles, bingo, word games, and just simple conversation. Mireya is resourceful as well. "As a mom with four kids you live your life on a budget the whole time. You learn to bring activities that are not too pricey, but that everyone will enjoy."

After some time, Mireya also began initiating Internet classes for interested residents. With no existing lesson plan in place, Mireya had to use her open ness and natural gift of communication to continually drive her students' success. Rather than dictating rules, she watches for strengths and then caters to them. "I started with three of my 'regulars' and observed how they learned and what they were looking for."

As classes went on Mireya adjusted accordingly. "I set out by making a list of topics to cover," continues Mireya. "I would write the steps, sometimes handed out pictures of the keyboard, asking residents to look it over, color primary keys. It's okay to type with one finger, just trying to figure out what is best. As lessons went on, I changed little things and relied on feedback from residents."

This method of feedback and adjustment helped to quickly propel Mireya's computer lessons into a large success with classes often filling up. "Sign-ups go out a week before and fill up immediately." Having such an impact on the residents has allowed Mireya to witness first-hand what such programming can lead to. One of Mireya's students, a poet, was able to connect to his own writings online and described the session as "the best internet class of his life."

The ability to teach is one thing, but being able to effectively identify the needs of the resident population and adapt to fit those needs is where Mireya meets success. Perhaps even more so in the online and computer literacy context, an area which the elderly often avoid. "It's a way to get in touch with family without picking up the phone. [Being] able to contact families instantly. Some residents have even moved on to Facebook. They see family photos and connect on an entirely different level. They have access to current pictures without having to spend a lot of money to get in touch."

While it's no mystery that social networking is a current favorite pastime of all ages, the other activities are widely attended as well. "For arts and crafts, my personal policy is that no one gets turned away. Activities are not limited to certain participants. I don't want an activity where they say, 'I can't do this,' and walk away..It all starts with not knowing, but they are the ones teaching me."

The other half of Leffingwell's success lies with its property manager Kara Rawson. Positive and upbeat, she is a stark contrast to the weather outside. Peppy though she may be, Kara's demeanor is still down to earth; she tells it like it is. When asked about working for TSA, she is blunt. "By far, the best experience I've ever had in this industry is with this company." Since Kara has been in the industry for twelve years, that's saying something.



Leffingwell residents making flower pens



Kara Rawson

"All the things that the other companies say that they believe in, like integrity, quality and that they want to give people a good living experience, that's all hanging on a wall in somebody else's corporate office. But that's actually the way it goes with Tom Safran and Associates."

And the difference is evident. TSA's breed of property management stresses the philosophy of providing not just housing, but a family-centric community. For Kara, it really is a case of TSA fitting her ideals as much as it is the opposite.

"We have a really good sense of community here. It's been a great experience for me especially compared to working with other property management companies and feeling like nobody was actually going to do what they said they were going to do. Then I found TSA. Somebody actually does it. The fact that we offer housing to people is so important. You raise your families here. You have holidays here. So many of your memories have to do with your surroundings and you are a part of giving somebody a home, even if it's for a certain number of years. What's more important than your home? Where do you feel more comfortable than your home?"

Being able to provide a home for her residents is obviously something that Kara works towards relentlessly. But the reward of belonging is not just limited to the seniors.

"When I started to work with TSA, this company full of people that are just as sentimental about it as I am, it was like finding my home. And I think that's what Tom Safran intended.

That's the cross we take up. This guy really means it when he says he wants to provide quality, affordable housing. He believes it makes an impact on people's lives and helps them thrive longer and I see that. I'm on the ground level and I see it happen."

Being the first line of contact and having open communication with residents makes a difference when trying to provide meaningful residents services. With a manager as proactive as Kara, it's no wonder that Leffingwell has such a strong sense of community and a full wait list.

"Because our business is so much about people, all we do is interact with people. I know I can take the time to sit down and talk with a resident and no one is going to question how much time I'm spending on that because it's part of my job. We're empowered to really interact with these people and become part of the community ourselves."

This interaction is also made possible by the partnership between Mireya and Kara. Each with her own role to play, the two have successfully gelled to provide Leffingwell with high caliber resident services.

"Mireya has been instrumental because this is a small property. I work by myself so during our compliance reporting periods when we are busy with recertifications, I am really limited on the amount of time I can be out of the office. The computers have been awesome. Residents wait outside the lobby for the sign up sheet to come out and they pounce on it. Mireya's hooking them up with email addresses and putting them in contact with their families. And then they'll come in and talk to me afterwards and tell me how great it is."

It's something that comes as a relief to Kara and also helps to put social programming at Leffingwell in perspective.

"I know that the residents are still getting that outlet even though I'm stuck in here, and I think that's really what this whole partnership is and what TSA means, so we can help each other. She's able to keep the social activities going when I am not able to. That's the essence of the partnership between HCA and TSA. One steps in where the other is short. It's a good balance."

The partnership of TSA and HCA continues to improve the lives of all parties involved. It ultimately makes such properties like Leffingwell great places not just to live, but also to call home. A sentiment felt on both sides of the office door, even on stormy days such as these, Kara describes it in her own words, "To have a job at all is wonderful, but to have a job you love—is amazing."

"LANGUAGE IS THE ARMORY OF THE HUMAN MIND, AND AT ONCE CONTAINS ESL AT THE VILLAGGIO & VICENTE RODRIGUEZ

It's a rainy day in Carson, CA and while people scurry from store to store seeking dry land, the inside of the Vilaggio remains vibrant and lively with the chatter of residents. The chatter of two residents in particular sparks my interest. They are ESL students of Vicente Rodriguez.



Vicente instructing a class at the Vilaggio

A graduate of UC Santa Cruz, Vicente exemplifies the sort of amenable and composed demeanor often associated with his alma mater. Originally from Long Beach, Vicente's true interest in volunteerism emerged in college where he spent his free time and weekends at soup kitchens and children's hospitals, not to mention a spring break in Mexico building homes. Vicente also studied abroad in the Netherlands, lived in the International House at UCSC, contributed to the relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and is now working with the Peace Corps in Mozambique to improve community health.

When I caught up with this international man of intrigue, he asserted his love for directly engaging with people and learning their stories as a large part of his drive.

"My favorites projects are when I get to work with people, hear their stories, and really get my hands dirty."

Vicente's ESL classes are held in small, casual sessions to better enhance the quality of learning. He began by teaching his students the tenses, but as time went on and he was able to identify the needs of his students more readily, Vicente switched the focus to vocabulary with an emphasis on pronunciation and mechanics. This has resulted in lessons that more strongly emphasize conversation. Vicente concedes, "I think in the long run, it's better that they can speak some form of English even if it doesn't make perfect sense."

As dedicated as his students are to their lessons, he admits that some days are hard. "English is a tough language to learn, it's important as well. There is a lot of emphasis in this country on knowing English, so I want to be able to help. If it makes me review some of the rules and similarities between English and Spanish, then it's good for me too. Everybody benefits from ESL."

Yvette Duenas, the Resident Manager of the Vilaggio, is happy to have such a beneficial program in place. "It's really a great program. There is a demand for it and they are always ready to learn."

Aside from Vicente's ESL classes, the Vilaggio has no shortage of onsite activities or programs that actively engage the surrounding community. Trips to the YMCA, The Max Straus Camp, and the South Pacific Theater are just a few of the programs that connect the Vilaggio to organizations in the community. Carson City Council member Lula Holmes even attended their Holiday Potluck this past year. TSA's trademarked monthly birthday celebrations round out the short list of activities at this lively property.

-SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

THE TROPHIES OF ITS PAST AND THE WEAPONS OF ITS FUTURE CONQUESTS"

VILLA LA JOLLA

CHRISTIE PAIK

Much like Vicente, Christie Paik writes lesson plans for her ESL class at Vila La Jolla according to the needs of her students. Having a flexible methodology has allowed Christie to fluidly instruct anyone attending her classes regardless of age or prior knowledge. This is in large part due to her diverse and extensive experience in the field. Christie boasts three years of professional instruction to international students in both the USA and abroad. Holding numerous positions such as ESL teacher, tutor, instructor, and pronunciation assistant, it is hard to believe that she almost did not become a teacher.

"I never thought that I wanted to teach," she admits. "My father is in the army and was stationed in Korea, so after I graduated he said I should go there and see what it's like. Teaching English is a big industry there. When I arrived, I started learning Korean. After I studied Korean for a while, I started looking for a job. Once I got a job, I was pretty much thrown into it. You don't really get any training. They choose you for your qualifications and native English speaking abilities, but they don't teach you anything about classroom management or pedagogy. It was a challenge, but I really liked it."

Upon her return to the USA, Christie worked for various organizations and institutions instructing English as a Second Language to virtually every demographic imaginable. From children to adults, and from private lessons to group classes, she is driven by enthusiasm and a genuine interest in helping those around her.

"I am very thankful to have the opportunity to teach English," Christie admits. "I'm also glad that HCA considers this a priority. In California we have one of the most diverse populations, but yet our political policies don't support English instruction. Everyone is expected to come and learn English, but nobody is providing the tools. It's a lot easier said than done."

Complex though it may be, the political climate of ESL has worked in Christie's favor; she has become a pro at adapting and changing her lessons to better instruct a varied assortment of learners. This skill has been particularly valuable at Vila La Jolla, which she cites as one of the most culturally diverse communities that she's worked with.

"Normally, when I teach ESL there tend to be one or two ethnicities, but this site has Korean, Vietnamese, Russian, Spanish speakers—it's a good mix." Having a varied number of ethnicities ensures a challenge, but Christie is up for it. "What I like about teaching, unlike other jobs, is that it's more creative and flexible. You have to teach one thing and there are numerous ways to teach it. I really like experimenting with different methods. Every group is different

and everyone has different learning styles. Some people learn better through pen and paper, others are visual learners, and others are more auditory learners. So every group I get, even though it's the same subject, is always different. Age can change things too. Senior citizens take a lot longer to learn than 20-30 year olds, and of course 20-30 year olds take a lot longer to learn than elementary aged students. Teaching ESL is fun and rewarding, especially with the adults. They know that learning English is difficult, which lends itself to an appreciation for someone like me who comes out there and takes the time to help."

In addition to ESL, Christie began offering computer courses at Vila La Jolla this past December. Classes focus on basic computer literacy and provide another level of social connectivity to the residents, making the impact of her English lessons that much stronger.



Christie Paik and her students at Vila La Jolla

LIFE STEPS

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE, ONE STEP AT A TIME

MEREDITH CHILEMI & BETH SOUTHORN

From Orchard Villas in Coachella to Arbor Court in Lancaster, HCA's SoCal portfolio is like most California drivers: it covers a lot of miles. Not only this, but it houses thousands of youth, families and seniors. With a humble services department of two, Corey and Nicole are the first to admit that forming personal acquaintances with all these residents is an impossible task. How then, have they come to understand the individual character of each community? How can they predict whether a program will succeed at a given community?

The answer for a handful of lucky HCA communities in the Inland Empire lies with fellow nonprofit and partner, LifeSTEPS. With their support and intimate knowledge of resident trends, HCA was able to launch Junior Achievement Classes at Hemet Vistas and Cottonwood Place, in addition to the most highly attended digital photography program ever at Cottonwood.

Based in Sacramento, Life Skills Training and Educational Programs, Inc. (LifeSTEPS) provides supportive services to 176 affordable housing complexes in California. With a portfolio over three times the size of HCA's, LifeSTEPS has a larger infrastructure and a strong curriculum of standard programs in case management, conflict mediation, emergency assistance and education. Heading this machine, we have Senior Director of Programs Meredith Chilemi and Executive Director Beth Southorn. With MAs in both gerontology and health administration, Meredith's academic background packs a punch. The yin to her yang, Beth's MA in counseling and more than two decades of social work experience create the perfect complement to her colleague in crime.



Beth (Left) and Meredith (Right)

Together they lead efforts to fundraise and secure in-kind donations, maintain stable on-site staff, and establish valuable nonprofit partnerships. Representatives meet with local agencies to determine ways that they can share resources and build each other's momentum. This was exactly the case with LifeSTEPS and HCA. HCA offered a history with JA's proven financial literacy program - one of few curriculums in this subject that can maintain the interest of elementary-aged youth - as well as a seasoned but fresh photography program for those hard-to-target tween and teen audiences. LifeSTEPS on the other hand, brought a thorough knowledge of the community and resident trends to the table. The result? Well-tailored programs that complement the existing afterschool curriculum and encourage a general increase in community activity. "And that's where the win-win works, and why we have really good, strong partnerships with the agencies we work with," says Beth. "We don't expect them to do it themselves, we get behind their effort."

Beth is excited about teaming up with HCA. "They are really great partners and we feel lucky to have who we work with. The impact that we can create is so much more uplifting, and positive, and encouraging and that's the part that keeps our tanks filled and gives us the energy to do what we do."

Part of this energy is currently being funneled into the design of a tracking database for case-management referrals, Meredith explains. "We want to be able to know what we are doing is making a difference so that people are not having to move or potentially be homeless, so that their children can grow up in one place and have a consistent connection to their community and their school."

LifeSTEPS has also started tracking the success of the after school program at various properties. "We survey children and parents on how they feel the program helped each child, socially and academically. We also look at their grades to monitor and make sure that if they are struggling in a certain subject that we can really fine tune the program to increase their academic success."

"Because the local community non-profits that provide services oftentimes have funding streams that are intermittent and grant reliant," explains Beth, "they are not as stable. That's why a marriage with LifeSTEPS is so helpful."

{ ZOILA PARODI AND VERONICA VILLA }

WHEN IT COMES TO FINE-TUNING A COMMUNITY'S PROGRAMMING, REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF SERVICES ZOILA PARODI AND COTTONWOOD ONSITE CASEWORKER VERONICA VILLA ARE AT THE HELM.

Zoila, Veronica and I got acquainted at a busy Cottonwood community meeting introducing the HCA photography and digital imaging program. This is just one example of the many community events that Zoila and Veronica make a point to host throughout the year, including birthday parties, St. Patrick's Day, Halloween celebrations and potlucks to name a few. Because if there's one thing that their combined experiences working with at-risk youth, victims of domestic violence and case management have taught them, it's that fostering strong community starts with the residents. Lucky for them, LifeSTEPS not only shares this belief, but also created a model by which relationships could be cultivated over time.

"LifeSTEPS is great, not only because you have a chance to work with people, but because it's a longer commitment," Zoila explained. "It's not like they're in the program for 6 months and that's it. I've been with LifeSTEPS for 5 years and at some of the properties I've worked at, I've seen the progress. I've seen children who were 5, turn 10. Watching them develop, watching people go through their hardships, offering them support and seeing them overcome...That is just so rewarding at all times."

In addition to monthly resident events, Veronica and Zoila stress the importance of an afterschool program as a community tool. The Cottonwood afterschool program is open approximately 4 afternoons a week and includes homework, arts and crafts and educational games in its curriculum. It is open to all resident youth ages 5-18 years, but most participants are 8, 9 and 10 years of age.

Though the provision of a safe space for learning always has value in a family-oriented community, it is particularly instrumental at a culturally diverse property such as Cottonwood. "We find that some children do come from monolingual families, where they only speak one language at home and it's not English. So getting the assistance with homework is a big deal for them," adds Zoila.

Children in this situation are often more challenging to assist, but the LifeSTEPS afterschool coordinators are well equipped to help all students achieve in school. Veronica recalls one student in particular who proved the success of their model. "He was struggling, not doing his schoolwork," recalls Veronica. "Then he all of a sudden, within 6 weeks, turned around completely and his mother was just really happy to see the positive change. She is a Spanish-only speaking resident who was unable to help him with his homework and wasn't really able to get too involved with the school. Through the afterschool program, the child has been able to gain an understanding of the material, complete his homework and get the support he needed. He went from D's and F's to A's."

While Zoila & Veronica are pleased with their residents' academic progress, they're also excited to offer a different brand of educational programming. Though the cultural and language barriers create a premium for homework help at Cottonwood, they're excited to provide a wider array of enrichment programs, such as the Junior Achievement financial literacy program and the digital photography program.

From left to right: Jennifer Chrony, Veronica Villa and Zoila Parodi



“TEENS SEE THE WORLD THROUGH SUCH A DIFFERENT LENS AND THEY CHALLENGE US TO DO THE SAME.”



Student work from Cottonwood's photography program

PALM DESERT DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

BOBBIE BARNETT & KATHY HOGE

With 273 units spread out over 4 different complexes, Cottonwood Place is the second largest apartment complex in HCA's portfolio. But in spite of its size, Cottonwood boasts a very friendly resident base, something I noticed during my last visit full of passing smiles. While much of this community vibe can be attributed to the work of nonprofits like LifeSTEPS, HCA and Junior Achievement, the affordable housing development and management companies play a vital role in laying the foundation for such a strong community.

Founded in 1979 by Dan L Horn, Palm Desert Development Company is not only committed to a community-centric affordable housing model, but also an end to the cycle of poverty for many low-income families. Their team packs just as much punch as their mission statement.

"I want Palm Desert Development to be the best tax credit developer in the industry," proclaims Bobbie Barnett, PDDC Asset Manager. "I know Scott's not going to like that, but that's just the way it goes."

Bobbie has been in property management for 20 years. "I used to do market



Kathy Hoge (Left) and Bobbie Barnett (Right) manage PDDC's assets emphasizing the need for quality programs for residents.

rate deals, but I decided I wanted to do something my girls could be proud of. I was just tired of the business side of it, being really aggressive with the rent, which is very political. I love property management, but wanted to do something that had a cause to it. So I interviewed with PDDC and I just fell in love with everything there."

In her quest to transform PDDC into the resident services juggernaut that it is, Bobbie affirms that various partnerships and liaisons were essential to offering a richer sampling of resident programs. In what she called, "bringing resident services up a few notches," Bobbie was introduced to LifeSTEPS, which she sees as a valuable and real asset.

"They were not just babysitters or instructors that came in and did the after school programs or the bare minimum. They actually care. They just help people grow, help them excel. I brought LifeSTEPS into HCA's office to meet with Corey and Nicole and wanted them to partner up and work on some projects together and that's how we got the photography class going. So now we take these two powerhouses - because those two, Corey and Nicole, are just insane at your office - put them together with LifeSTEPS and then bring these services to the residents."

The importance of offering arts programs like the digital imaging and photography class in place at Cottonwood is no news to Bobbie. "My daughter is an artist. She does portraits and it saved her life because it channeled her energy into something positive so she wasn't out being restless. All of these emotions are going through them, they can put it on paper and they can channel it there. That's what I want to do. It's not just about stopping them from kicking holes in our laundry room."

In fact, Bobbie wants to bring more arts to PDDC properties. Music and expan-

ding other art programs are next up on her list. Cottonwood just finished revamping their computer center, which will serve a large role in facilitating these imminent programs. The lab has been fitted with new computers that run from a remote server ensuring a safe and secure environment for learning and creativity alike. Adults as well will be able to utilize the lab as Bobbie plans to install Rosetta Stone software to assist non-English speaking residents. After the basics, Bobbie envisions ESL workshops followed by resume classes, hopefully netting jobs for residents who may have had trouble finding work in past due to the language barrier. PDDC is also partnering with Junior Achievement of Southern California to provide a strong financial literacy component to programming, and HCA in its vigilant scholarship efforts to continue offering assistance to aspiring college students.

From start to finish, it is clear that there is a fundamental difference in the quality and mission of such programs. They function both as activities and tools that increase the quality of living to whomever they reach as opposed to more passively run programs which can only hope to snag a few participants.

Perhaps Bobbie put it best. "The property is going to be here, it's going to manage. It's going to have residents. There will be move-ins and move-outs, but it doesn't have to be just that."

Kathy Hoge, the Assistant Asset Manager at PDDC, comes from a slightly different background than Bobbie, though her experience does stem from servicing communities. Previously a part of the In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program, which aims to keep the geriatric community at home instead of putting them in homes, Kathy was offered the opportunity to manage Mission Palms, a PDDC senior site in Rubidoux, CA. "It gave me an opportunity to be able to see what things are like on the other side," recalls Kathy.

After some time, Bobbie offered Kathy the opportunity to work directly in PDDC's office as her assistant. One of Kathy's first projects was prepping the computer center at Cottonwood Place. She had to ensure that all residents who use the facilities had adequate supplies and equipment, and a large enough work area for their needs. Kathy was particularly jazzed about the benefits of this lab for the resident middle school and high school students. "They form a unique age bracket with great energy and vision," explains Kathy. "They just need a forum - this new lab - to express it. Teens see the world through such a different lens and they challenge us to do the same. The lab and the digital photography program will be beneficial all around."

The culture that PDDC promotes is one of proactive community building in which each resident stakes a claim in the wellness of the property. And it seems that the earlier the residents and youth buy into the philosophy, the more successful it tends to be.

"We have over 700 children here. It's not just about filling a unit. It's about giving families an after school program that they can benefit from and making sure the grounds and playground are safe and maintained. We're proactive in our community. We don't just wait for the kids to respond to see what kind of area we can fill. We find their needs, and we do our best to meet them."

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY AT COTTONWOOD

SABRINA CAPTURES ART WITH A CONSCIENCE



WHILE LIFESTEPS'S COTTONWOOD AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM DRAWS MANY STUDENTS IN ELEMENTARY AND EARLY MIDDLE SCHOOL, HCA'S PHOTOGRAPHY AND DIGITAL IMAGING PROGRAM TARGETS THE OLDER MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL CROWD. WITH A FINAL EXHIBITION SCHEDULED FOR THE SUMMER OF 2011, INSTRUCTOR SABRINA DE LOS REYES IS ON A MISSION TO TRANSFORM HER STUDENTS INTO CONFIDENT AND BOLD PHOTOGRAPHERS IN JUST UNDER THREE MONTHS.

A RIVERSIDE NATIVE, SABRINA HAS ALWAYS HAD A PASSION FOR THE ARTS. HER INTEREST IN PHOTOGRAPHY STARTED IN HIGH SCHOOL WHEN SHE SIGNED UP FOR A PHOTOGRAPHY COURSE WITH THE SATURDAY HIGH PROGRAM AT THE ART CENTER COLLEGE OF DESIGN. WHAT BEGAN AS WEEKEND CLASSES QUICKLY TURNED INTO AN INTENSE LOVE FOR THE MEDIUM THAT CONTINUES TO FUEL HER CREATIVITY AND PROFESSIONAL GOALS TO THIS VERY DAY. SABRINA'S PERSONAL WORK REVOLVES HEAVILY AROUND SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY. SHE CONTINUALLY WORKS ON LONG-TERM PROJECTS INCLUDING AN ON-GOING SIX-YEAR SHOOT DOCUMENTING SKID ROW IN DOWNTOWN L.A. IN ALL HER PROJECTS, AND PARTICULARLY THOSE THAT INCORPORATE HOMELESS OR OTHERWISE DISADVANTAGED SUBJECTS, SABRINA IS CAREFUL TO NEITHER EXPLOIT NOR DIMINISH HER SUBJECTS. SHE FOCUSES ON BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, UNDERSTANDING AND MUTUAL RESPECT. WHEN NOT PHOTOGRAPHING OTHERS, SABRINA FREQUENTLY EXAMINES THE LENS OF HER OWN LIFE. IN WHAT SHE CALLS A "DAY IN THE LIFE" EXPEDITION, SHE WILL SNAP THROUGH AS MANY AS SIX DISPOSABLE CAMERAS ACROSS A SINGLE DAY IN ORDER TO CAPTURE ALL ITS UNCONSCIOUS DETAIL AND EMOTION.

STRIKINGLY, SABRINA KNOWS THAT NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE MENTORSHIP SHE RECEIVED EACH WEEKEND BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL.



SABRINA AND A COTTONWOOD RESIDENT AT COTTONWOOD'S PHOTOGRAPHY SHOW

"I WANT TO SHOW THEM THAT EVERYTHING YOU DO IN YOUR LIFE IS INTERESTING BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE THAT HAS ACCESS TO IT"

"I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE A REALLY INFLUENTIAL INSTRUCTOR WHO MENTORED ME," SABRINA STATES. "WE ARE STILL CLOSE FRIENDS. HE HAS PRETTY MUCH CHANGED MY LIFE. THAT'S WHY I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO TEACH YOUR CRAFT TO SOMEONE ELSE AND GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY." FOR EVEN AFTER WEEKEND CLASSES TURNED INTO NIGHT CLASSES AND EVENTUALLY, FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT IN ART CENTER'S PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM, NO OTHER COURSE RESONATED QUITE SO STRONGLY AS THAT FIRST HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE. THIS IS PERHAPS THE LARGEST REASON BEHIND HER INVOLVEMENT WITH HCA AND COTTONWOOD.

"I JUST KNEW HOW MUCH MY MENTOR CHANGED MY LIFE AT THAT AGE. IT WAS THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPHY CLASS I EVER TOOK AND THEN I WAS HOOKED, SO I KNOW I CAN MAKE THAT SAME DIFFERENCE."

AND THAT'S JUST WHAT SABRINA PLANS TO DO. SHE WILL ADOPT THE SAME APPROACH AS HER INSTRUCTOR-MENTOR SO MANY YEARS AGO: DISCOVERY OF SELF THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY. FURTHERMORE, SHE'LL USE THE AFOREMENTIONED "DAY IN THE LIFE" EXERCISE EARLY ON IN THE PROGRAM TO SPARK STUDENT INTEREST AND AWARENESS.

"I WANT TO SHOW THEM THAT EVERYTHING YOU DO IN YOUR LIFE IS INTERESTING BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE THAT HAS ACCESS TO IT. NOT EVERYONE ELSE KNOWS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE YOU. I WANT THEM TO KNOW

THAT WHAT THEY SHOOT IS IMPORTANT AND VALID. I ALSO WANT THEM TO GET USED TO HAVING A CAMERA ALL THE TIME AND TO SHOOT WHATEVER THEY REACT TO. THEY DON'T EVEN HAVE TO LOOK THROUGH THE VIEWFINDER. IT'S MORE LIKE A FEELING AND AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION."

WHILE SABRINA WOULD LOVE TO HAVE EACH OF HER STUDENTS EMBRACE PHOTOGRAPHY THE WAY THAT SHE DID, SHE UNDERSTANDS THAT IT WILL NOT HAPPEN OVERNIGHT. SHE INTENDS TO SLOWLY BUILD INTEREST THROUGH OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS AND INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS. SABRINA HAS POST-PRODUCTION, LIGHTING DEMOS AND, OF COURSE, CAMERA SETUP ON THE SYLLABUS AS WELL.

IN SPITE OF THE TECHNICAL PROWESS INVOLVED WITH PHOTOGRAPHY IN GENERAL, THERE IS NO DENYING THAT SABRINA WILL BE DIGGING A LITTLE DEEPER. SHE HAS DESIGNED THE COURSE AROUND SEVERAL FLEXIBLE SHOOTING EXERCISES DURING WHICH STUDENTS CAN CAPTURE WHATEVER THEY ARE INTERESTED IN. THE TECHNIQUE WILL COME AS THEY ARE SHOOTING, SABRINA EXPLAINS. "I WANT THE CLASS TO BE FUN, BUT I'M ALSO GOING TO ASK QUESTIONS, LIKE WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO PORTRAY? WHAT IS IT ABOUT? I WANT TO CONVEY THAT PHOTOGRAPHY IS NOT JUST A PICTURE AND FRAME. THERE'S SO MUCH MORE. I'M HOPING TO HAVE SOME TIME TO BUILD SOME INSTALLATIONS AND HAVE A SERIES FOR EACH STUDENT RATHER THAN JUST ONE IMAGE THAT WE FRAME AND HANG UP. SOMETHING THAT THEY CAN BE PROUD OF AND INTERESTED IN AS WELL."

WITH RESPECT TO THE FUTURE BEYOND THE COTTONWOOD PROGRAM, SABRINA DREAMS OF OPENING HER OWN PHOTOGRAPHY SCHOOL. SHE ENVISIONS IT AS A PLACE WHERE STUDENTS COULD EXPLORE THEIR OWN ARTISTIC INTERESTS FREE OF THE PRETENTION AND EXPENSES OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH ART SCHOOLS. "IT'S A DREAM OF MINE TO TEACH MY OWN CLASS AND RUN IT THE WAY I WANT TO." WHILE A SCHOOL MAY BE PART OF THE LONG-TERM CAREER PLAN, SABRINA IS WELL ON HER WAY TO FULFILLING HER TEACHING AND MENTORSHIP GOALS, HER ART AND HER LIFELONG PASSION.

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SCHOLARSHIP

Judith Ramirez: Keys to Happiness

2010 was a memorable year for the HCA Scholarship Program. It marked the beginning of the Arts Scholarship, whereby residents of HCA senior communities could choose to apply for funding to support a lifelong dream in the arts instead of a traditional education at a college or university. One might ask, "what disciplines do 'the arts' encompass?" Judith Ramirez, recipient of \$1,000 for piano study, is happy to announce that music, in addition to theatre, dance, painting and more, is definitely one of them.

"When I was 8 years old, I wanted to play piano, and they [the nuns at my orphanage] were talking about getting lessons," she said. "It was my desire to do that, but here it is. Fifty years later, it's available to me again."

Judith has been a resident of Arbor Court for almost two years. With the help of resident services staff like Lauren Curry and Nicole Weinstock, she applied for the Arts Scholarship to help her achieve her piano dream. She received \$1,000 of HCA scholarship money to pay for regular private piano lessons. Then, to Judith's surprise, InSite Development decided to buy her a keyboard after hearing her touching story so she could develop her musicianship at home. Interestingly, the story of her life-long goal began with a less than idyllic experience.

"One of the nuns was giving lessons. Her name was Sister Grace, and she was screaming at me, 'Why are you late?' The piano was there, she told me to come over...She started yelling at me again, 'Put your finger here!' I just [thought] 'this isn't worth it. I'm getting out of here.' I ran out and never came back."

A keyboard and newfound motivation changed that. Judith now takes lessons twice a month with a local teacher. Learning with her own instrument, at her own pace, and using her own learning philosophy of repetition (she insists that repetition is the way forward), her once-dashed aspirations are on the rise.

"I'm learning more now, because I'm doing it over," she said, "I told them, 'If I go slower, I'll learn it. I'm not going to go quickly through as if 'that's it. I did it. It's over,' like we do at school for a test."

When asked what she wanted to learn, she hastily offered: "I'm not into a song. I'm into the notes and the chords. That's it." But later she relented. "I like a lot of songs. I like to do them all. Thinking of all the songs she wanted to play—Elton John, Neil Diamond, soul, and gospel were on the list—she had to admit that "there's a lot I like, so there's a lot of songs I'd like to do" before letting out a laugh.

Judith's long list of piano aspirations doesn't end with her; she is looking to better herself and the community with her music. "I basically want to play in the church. It's for my own pleasure. It would be really fantastic and wonderful," she said. "To me, it's fantastic just to play."



Judith with her keyboard

Adam Van Meter: Against All Odds

Adam Van Meter isn't the typical scholarship recipient. HCA has awarded scholarships to many people, but it doesn't take much time talking to him to figure out that Adam is different. What sets him apart isn't the wheelchair or the device that converts what he types into audio. It isn't his stunted speech or the paralysis that grips the right side of his body. What sets Adam apart is that he has a plan to make the world a better place.

Six years ago, Adam had three strokes. Now, thanks to HCA's scholarship program, he has four majors. He started out studying real estate, business administration, and interior design. Eventually, his ordeal influenced him to tackle another subject.

"I added psychology as one of my majors. I find it interesting because I have had 3 strokes. The process I am going through now [is] about brain healing and all the ways my brain is compensating. For all I've lost, brain compensation is very complex as well as fascinating," he said. Understandably, Adam's life has changed greatly over the past few years. Five months after his first stroke, Adam had a second, which took his speech and paralyzed his right side. The stroke, which he describes as the "one that should have killed me," left him in a wheelchair with "incredibly weak" muscles.

"The third stroke scrambled my

brain to where I wasn't even aware of the seriousness of the strokes. I just was so conscious of how hard it was to live like you must fight your butt off or don't and die. I just woke to fight or die, no other choice," he said. "I've had three strokes and since the first mild one I've fought to live."

Adam had lived most of his life unaware that there was a hole in his heart, since fixed by surgery. Compounded with two conditions that cause his blood to clot faster, he described himself as "a walking time bomb just waiting to stroke." The experience tested his will and changed his perspective.

"It's not as if I was hazy in my recollection. It was just like it was such an incredible task to live. I was not scared to die, but I was scared to not live, it was as if I had an out of body experience, yet I was still in my body. I watched myself, as if in third person," he said.

Things have changed for Adam. "Before my strokes, I was such a different person. I played hockey for 15 years and guitar for 11 and was a lead electrician for 6."

Other things, however, have remained constant: "My plans are still the same. Start my own business flipping houses because of the extensive knowledge I gained from my time as an electrician."

If the psychology major was inspired by his medical past, then the other three majors reflect Adam's pre-existing commitment to leading a productive life. Currently a student at

Antelope Valley College, he plans to transfer to SDSU after double majoring in business administration and real estate with interior design as an emphasis. His plan is to start a business that renovates and sells homes, using environmentally friendly designs and technology.

"The major of business administration will aid me in running the business I will create. With the major of real estate, I will sell the houses I have renovated more efficiently. Eventually, I also want to become an architect, all things to add to the knowledge I already obtained on the construction of residential property," he said. "I will be in school my whole life, so these goals are feasible."

His ambition is brazen and his plans long reaching, but having a successful business is just one step towards what he wants to accomplish. Adam states his goals with gusto.

"Just watch. I want to start a for-profit company and, with the profits, start non-profit organizations to help with hunger all over the world. My non-profit organizations will be like franchises that I will put up all over the world," he said.

Further plans include franchised farms/cafeterias that thrive on volunteerism and active participation from its users. Even his work as an interior designer, he insists, will be green and environmentally friendly. Taking into consideration everything that happened to him, Adam decided to start planning for a better future.

"I just thought, if I died, what would I leave behind? If I get out of this, I bet-

ter be serious. I was totally paralyzed. All I could do was think," he said.

Adam describes his life with a directness that's hard to fault. His ordeal "has been a real rollercoaster." He responds to admiration for his expansive and commendable plans by saying, "Inactivity [angers me]."

As one of many recipients of an HCA Scholarship, his aspirations are informed by his struggle and a sense of purpose.

"Often, I come to realize how much and how drastic my life has been changed. I just fought so hard to live, and I feel incredibly fortunate to be who and where I am, from fighting to live to a student working on my extensive goals. I'm living an impossible second chance, and I assure you I will not waste it."



Adam Van Meter

Don Seidel: A Legacy of Knowledge

I meet Don Seidel on the side of the road, standing by his car. Behind him lies a generous expanse of farmland, green rows of crops punctuated only by the sight of new developments on the horizon. The unmistakable taste of salt in the air gives away the looming presence of the ocean a couple of miles away. I meet Don here, close to his new home in Ventura. It is the first time I have met Don and the first time I have heard the tale of his storied life. We drive to a small coffee shop not far from where we first shook hands. Then over a late breakfast, his story begins.

At UCLA, Don played basketball for legendary coach John Wooden for three years. After graduating he practiced as a tax attorney for 25 years. Don's illustrious career paved the way for other endeavors such as contracting for commercial developments including building a three-story, 150-unit independent living facility, something he still views as "where the industry is going today." Don's interest in developing continuing care facilities even took him to Sandpoint, Idaho where he proposed another facility that, due to complications in planning and the overall slump in the economy, never materialized. He returned to Southern California in 2006 and resided in Hancock Park before moving to Arbor Court in October 2008.

Perhaps what stands out the most about Don Seidel is that through all the ingenuity, all the industry, and all the enterprise, he is genuinely driven by his capacity to help those around him.

Don recently moved to Ventura from Lancaster to be close to an old business partner and friend who is battling pancreatic cancer. "I can just tell from his voice—he's up. Because he is here all by himself, thinking, 'What month?' I won't let him think that way anymore. I say, 'we're going to do this, or go here or take a drive'—stay busy."

And staying busy is something Don lived by while at Arbor Court.

Interesting enough, even before coming aboard at Arbor Court, Don had a meeting with Corey. Unbeknownst to all parties involved, this meeting would foreshadow the legacy Don would leave at Arbor Court.

"I said to Corey, 'I don't want to show you my resume or anything, but I think I can help you here. I've got enough stars to construct, operate, manage and to help better run these kinds of independent living facilities. I have done all of that. I would be happy to do that here. I'm not asking for money, I'm not asking for a job, but I think I could really help you.' Long story short, they never took me up on it, so I kept my mouth shut (laughs). Until I saw an opportunity where I could help their facility by starting a library."

Don sites his interest in creating a viable library for Arbor Court in his deep rooted love for reading.

"I love to read. I've read my whole life. I don't care, novels, magazines, the Bible, you name it. I gotta read. With that in mind, I saw a void there at Arbor Court, I could start with a library and get people interested. Get them out of their apartments, give them another activity, something to do."

So when HCA announced its 2010 Scholarship Program, with a special arts scholarship for seniors, Don saw his chance. Although the essay prompt asked applicants to write about a lifelong dream in the arts, Don made an unexpected but strong argument that a library - his dream - stores valuable information, music and images for all arts disciplines and should therefore be considered an art itself. He went even further to include some historical context for his essay as well.

"I started writing about the sixteenth president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, and his love of books and his lack of education. But he was such a powerful, powerful orator. He would just lead people. I did research on that, found out what books he liked to read, found out a little bit on his background, and history and then I interwove that into the idea for my library. You see, books are your basics. That's your tool. You want to educate yourself? We got all kinds of books."

Once Don's idea was set into motion, everything snowballed from there.

"I put out the word [for book donations] and I got inundated! People sizing down from homes to live in a place like that, studios, they've got books galore. I turn around and I must have had 400 books! Everybody said, 'what are you going to do with all those books?' So I had people and I had to set up a crew, what I call my library crew. They were very nice people with as much enthusiasm towards it as I had."

The library itself is still under construction, and progress continues despite



The Arbor Court Library

Don's departure from Arbor Court. He left behind a strong vision of what he intended: expansion of the current space into a contiguous room, new shelving, new flooring and more. Don tells me of one meeting with a fellow "library crew" member where they were discussing new paint, new furniture, and a few other fixtures. "Someone said, 'All we have to do is put your name on it on the outside of the door.' I said, 'No, no I don't want any PR.' What I did suggest was, 'You might want to name it the Lincoln Library.'"

Aside from planning the library, Don spent his time at Arbor Court preoccupied with other "extracurricular activities" as well.

"To be honest with you, I took care of a lot of residents there at Arbor Court, and their legal problems. I could really say that I had a built in clientele. I got every problem on the books: small claims, non-payment of credit cards to IRS problems. You name it, I got it. Fortunately I've been very successful in my pursuit of that as my training prepared me. I don't just shoot from the hip when I go to court. I am prepared and they found that out, so they are happy as well. I enjoyed that."

Although the next chapter in Don's life finds him living in Ventura, nearly 100 miles away from the site of his proposed library, it is undeniable that Arbor Court has left as much of an impression on him as he has there.

"It was hard for me to leave. It really was. It was the best move, no doubt, my move to Ventura. It was the best move, but I still made a lot of good friends there. I will miss it."



Don Seidel



Arbor Court residents and volunteers at the library's grand re-opening



Bob Leon

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

PAINTING WITH BOB LEON

Trojan alumnus. Vietnam Vet. Texan. Rancher. Outspoken. Enterprising. Volunteer. All could be used to describe Bob Leon. One thing Bob claims not to be is an artist. So why, one may ask, is Bob spearheading the arts program at Arbor Grove? And why is Bob's painting class one of the most attended programs at this property? To understand these questions, I sat down with Bob in the lobby of Arbor Court. Everyone stops to greet him and his cell phone incessantly rings, but after a few minutes we are able to get into his story.

Bob Leon spent thirty years in the oil business as an independent oil producer in Texas. He was a one-time owner of a 1000-acre ranch just outside of Oakwood. "I've had some unfortunate problems with health and made some bad business decisions. I suffered a couple heart attacks, a couple strokes and lost most of my wealth. But that's the way it goes," Bob states matter-of-factly.

Bob does mention that his misfortune has been coupled with other success stories, primarily that

of his children; the eldest is a doctor and his second born currently attends graduate school.

When I ask about how he came to be in charge of the arts at the Arbor Grove community he is upfront and honest in his response. "I don't know much about art. Somebody once told me, 'Why don't you come to an art class.' I said 'I can't even draw stick people.' So I decided I could try and I tried. And I found once you start it's very rewarding and you can get to a certain stage. I tell everybody when they come, that they might start with stick people. But I guarantee them that after three classes they'll have a picture to take home with them that they'll be proud of. They think that's crazy, but it really isn't because the reality is that the difficult part is putting the brush in their hands."

For many, picking up a new hobby or trying something new for the first time can be intimidating. Combine that with the overwhelming canon of the art world, and exorbitant prices of supplies and art itself, it's no wonder many shy away from the brush. Bob's classes, on the other hand, focus on demystifying the process of making art. Without the pretention often associated with art, Bob simply makes painting fun.

As he puts it, "There's two types of learners in the world, those who think you must learn to draw before you learn to paint and those who just jump right onto canvas. What I try to show people is that if you can draw, that's wonderful. But I've had two strokes, I don't have [use of] a left arm, and I'm left handed. So I can't draw. But I can put out a painting and I can help them put out something. Now I don't think I'm going to get rich selling my paintings up and down the museum rows and stuff like that, but I'm going to get the satisfaction."

Bob takes me through his process and explains the success of recruiting a loyal group of green artists to paint with. "I get a big kick out of it, especially with the beginners. When I get a beginner in there, they are so sure they can't draw a stick figure. The only reason they are there is that I've bugged them for a month to come. Then all of sudden I'm painting and they're painting and I say, 'Okay, follow me.'"

I take a sheet of paper, I fold it in fours and have them draw a tree with sky and some background. I show them how to develop depth and a horizon, start from the top down, give them the basics. Then I tell them to flip it over and this time draw it without my help. Then they get better. Then, I have them do the same tree, three times, each one better. Well, for some [darn] reason it always works, it always gets better. And then by the third tree they're looking at it thinking, that's not so bad."

Bob has great hopes for the evolution of the arts program. To him, his class is just the beginning; he eventually wants someone with more art training to head an "advanced class" at Arbor Grove's neighboring community, Arbor Court. Not only would it provide a stepping stone for students in his "beginner" lessons, but it would encourage an interest base for an even wider array of potential classes in ceramics, beading, wallet making and just about anything else funding will allow. These arts and crafts workshops would be accompanied by occasional trips to Los Angeles art hot spots such as the Getty Center and LACMA. Ideally, Bob would like to see these programs sponsored through various third parties, so that participants wouldn't have to pay for anything out of pocket. While his vision may take some time to materialize, the large-scale mural project that just kicked off at Arbor Court is a step in the right direction. Bob has pledged his support and helps wrangle resident participation each week.

When he's not busy pumping up community arts, Bob finds others ways to keep busy and stay active. Always outspoken, Bob admits his ambitions have sometimes led to butting heads with management, but as long as he sees results, Bob is fine with that. "They do not pay me here, but I do it anyway. It improves the quality of my life and hopefully I can help improve the quality of life of everybody around me." Last November, Bob and his family hosted a large Thanksgiving dinner at Arbor Court at no cost to any of the attendees. "I want to do things like that and I want the community to get involved. I'm driving up and down Lancaster Boulevard and I'm stopping at all the different stores and meeting the people that own the stores and just getting to know them to see what we can do for them."



A painting by one of Bob's students

"I guarantee them that after three classes they'll have a picture to take home with them that they'll be proud of. They think that's crazy, but it really isn't because the reality is that the difficult part is putting the brush in their hands"

Bob's proactive nature has helped build a tight-knit community centered around programs and activities. "My energy goes to keeping myself busy, doing something that is productive and is rewarding. The reward comes through the teaching. I concentrate on having fun, drawing, painting and more importantly, being productive and recruiting more people so we can help each other out." Bob also admits that he couldn't do it without some help. "Nancy Nelson puts together bake sales to pay for BINGO prizes, rummage sales that lead to other activities." She is one of many residents who have come forward to volunteer their time to better the community.

Despite having issues with his health and losing much of his fortune, Bob remains optimistic on all counts. "I'm sixty-seven years young. I'm healthier today than I was five years ago. I came here to be around my family, but I didn't want to live with family because I'm a stubborn ox. I'm so used to doing it my way. So I'm very fortunate when I look on the bright side. I've got the bad news story and I've got the sad tales to tell and I can tell them as well as anybody. But I also have great fortune and good luck. God's been kind to me. I've got wonderful people in my life. There is a group of people here who just sit around and wait for somebody to give them something or listen to their sad tales. I'm very intolerant of that. We seniors need to pick ourselves up. We owe it to ourselves. I'm very outspoken and very involved. Volunteering gives us a purpose in life."



Work by Bob



PROFILE

IT'S ONLY TUESDAY PRODUCTIONS

WAYNE BERRY BRINGS HIS OWN BRAND OF THEATER TO THE ANTELOPE VALLEY



Wayne (Left) as Edna in Hairspray



IOT's production of the Outsiders

**Photos courtesy of Jennifer Lynn of Phoenix Imagery*

Most people dream of shrugging off their day job to follow their passion, but hotelier Wayne Berry actually did it. Berry is the co-founder of It's Only Tuesday Productions, Lancaster's up-and-coming theater company and troupe. For Berry, living the dream is not only a family venture - his wife is co-founder and also gets in on the family business - but an outlet for the artistic aspirations of the entire community. It's Only Tuesday (IOT) boasts over 40 productions including well known classics such as West Side Story, A Street Car Named Desire, Hairspray and Grease as well as several origi-

nal shows. Located in the Antelope Valley, IOT operates under the simple premise of providing an accessible theatre going experience for "anyone that has ever dreamed of being on stage." According to Berry, "I've been doing this my whole life." Dabbling in theater throughout high school and college, Berry was set to pursue a major in film and telecommunications. However, his life shifted gears with the arrival of his two children. Berry ended up in the hotel and hospitality industry. 20 years later though, the drama bug bit back.

Upon relocating to the Antelope Valley in 1988, Berry took his two daughters to see the play *Annie* and shortly after stumbled across auditions for a local production. "You know how little girls will say, 'I can play that part.' I said, 'here's your chance,'" Berry recounts. "I talked them into auditioning. That was a Cedar Street Theater show. I just took it from there. I mean, I've always loved theater. It's always been my passion. I've always had a dream to run my own theater."

Little did he know, his dream was about to come true.

About 5 years ago, Berry met with Corey Heimlich who wanted to know more about the local theater scene and the Lancaster Performing Arts Center. As Lancaster Boulevard underwent a revitalization of sorts, Corey and Berry stayed in contact.

"I said if there's ever an opportunity, you've got a space, if you put in a little theater, I'd love to run it and do my thing."

In time, InSite Development acquired two neighboring buildings, the Essex House Hotel and the Lancaster Convention Center. The hotel became the Arbor Court senior community, while the convention center became a space for supportive services and amenities for residents. One such service amenity was IOT Productions.

"About January-February of last year, Corey called me and said 'Can you meet me down here? I want you to look at this space...' I walked in the door and he and Scott said 'Where do you want your stage? Cause you know Scott, that's how quickly he works.'"

Berry and his staff got to work and two weeks later it was done. In July of 2010 they opened with *Alice in Wonderland*.

Senior residents at all the Arbors - Arbor Grove, Arbor Gardens and Arbor Court - can receive discounted admission to IOT shows, a mere \$5.00 per ticket. Before IOT's production of *Grease*, the Arbor residents were even invited for a free sneak preview.

"I want them here. I want them to see the theater. I want them to know it's here...I think down the road, we'll do a lot more with that kind of thing. We may try and offer some classes for the seniors. It's a work in progress. So we'll see how that goes."

Of course, theater competes with the cinema, as well as home entertainment for butts in the seats, and Berry is not oblivious to this fact. While attendance has been sluggish at times, he is confident that IOT is not only coming up in the community, but that it offers something different too.

"I think we're building up a brand new audience that really likes the quaintness and the comfortable chairs and the fact that it's local stuff and very inexpensive. I mean 15 bucks a ticket? Give me a break. If you're military or if you're a kid, it's 8 bucks. You can get a great two hours of entertainment for 8 bucks. Where else are you going to get that?" he said.

Bringing in community support is not just about the audience. Everything from the props to the performers is local to the Antelope Valley. Berry's wife, Margaret Berry, is co-founder and CFO. There are about 8-9 volunteers Berry describes as "people who love theater who realize now that we have been handed this dream and this gift of the theater, we can do pretty much anything we want to, and we're having a ball." He adds, "It's all volunteer stuff—you've got to love theater."

In addition to offering local actors and artists a venue to be creative, IOT also sees itself as giving local residents, especially seniors, "something to do." Think of it as theater by the people, for the people. "I think the vision was to make it a small little sort of a society where they would not have to go too far for all of their needs, including entertainment. Plus, I wanted to be—we're the only theater in town that exclusively does only local stuff. I don't bring in rentals. I don't bring in people from the outside. If anything is done here it's done by local people."

I asked Berry how one could go about contributing and getting involved with upcoming productions. His response? "Just show up." He also posts fliers and ads in local papers and has an email list. Those that want to get involved have ample opportunity. The pay is zilch and the hours might be long, but, if you're like Berry and his volunteers, you'll be living the dream.

"I was looking at my Saturday, and I realized I had arrived here at 9:30 that morning and didn't leave here until 10 o'clock at night and didn't even know it. I loved every second of it."



Wayne at Harold's Concession Stand
**Photos courtesy of Jennifer Lynn of Phoenix Imagery.*

RECYCLING AMERICA



The final result of Hannah Cassell's Recycling America Program at Magnolia

AT MAGNOLIA VILLAS

HANNAH CASSELL TEACHES YOUTH ABOUT CONSCIENTIOUS CREATIVITY



Artist Hannah Cassell is a force to be reckoned with. With an aesthetic referencing the great painting masters, and a steady output of portraits and landscapes, it's surprising she finds the time and inspiration to teach as well.

Originally hailing from England, Hannah was in a completely different career prior to abandoning her day job to pursue her true passion—art. In the spring of 2010, Hannah stumbled upon a job posting with HCA, and the rest is history. She now works at Magnolia Villas in North Hollywood where she has continued her own exploration of the arts while facilitating art classes with the resident youth. The defining program of the year was Recycling America. A ten-week program designed to raise awareness about the environment, Recycling America encouraged students to individually and collaboratively use routinely trashed everyday items to create pieces of art.

Before finding herself at Magnolia, Hannah worked in film and television in London for about nine years. Pursuing art was her dream, and as it turned out, working in the entertainment industry was quite the opposite:

“Although I had a lot of fun in my career, I got to a point where I felt unfulfilled. So rather dramatically, I gave up my job, went traveling through Latin America and moved to LA. I’ve been here ever since.”

Unsure of where her creative pursuits would lead her next, Hannah started studying at Santa Monica College, taking classes in various art mediums and bolstering her art skills in painting, ceramics and photography to name a few. Hannah also volunteered her time at after school programs and art clubs around town: Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA), Arts Bridges Cultures (ABC), youTHINK and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), the last of which turned into a job.

And that’s when it all came together.

“I realized how passionate I felt about making my own art and making art with kids... Then I realized, putting these two together is great fun.”

“I REALIZED HOW PASSIONATE I FELT ABOUT MAKING MY OWN ART AND MAKING ART WITH KIDS. THEN I REALIZED, PUTTING THESE TWO TOGETHER IS GREAT FUN”



Hannah Cassell



After a year or so of volunteer work, Hannah was ready to put it to practice in her own “classroom.” Enter HCA.

“The job came up and so I applied for it. I really wanted to get art started and make it part of the program at the property. There was a homework club in place already and they had been doing summer activities, but it wasn’t necessarily just focused on art. It included games and basic crafts. I wanted to focus on the art that I was passionate about and they were all for it.”

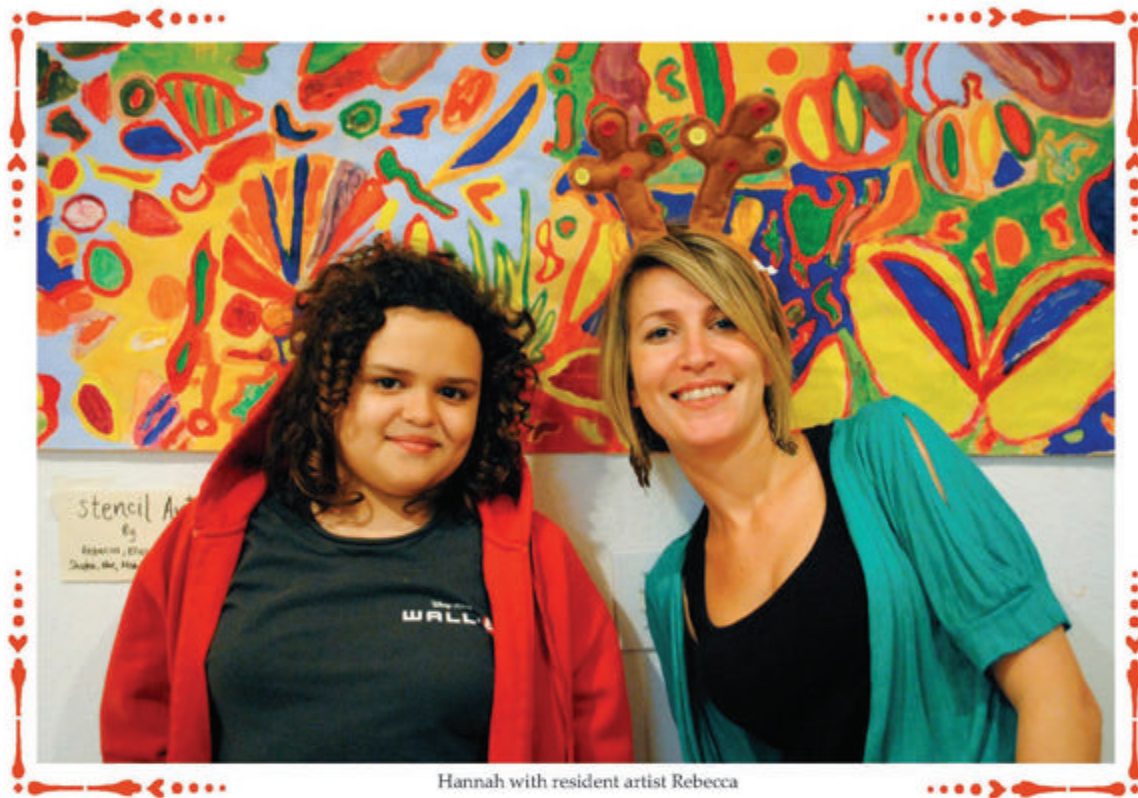
Transitioning from one career to another is never easy. Although Hannah had worked as a producer and a production manager among other things back in London, she now had to apply existing skills on a grander scale while learning new skills to boot.

“It was my first time teaching a class. I had otherwise been an assistant, but never a teacher. Plus HCA wanted me to create an entire arts program. I thought, I’ve never done this before, this is crazy.”

Although she may have been a little uncertain at first, the arts programming at Magnolia quickly gained momentum. The Recycling America curriculum started with smaller-scale projects: turning cereal boxes into magazine holders, LP Records into hanging art pieces, clothes pegs into fridge magnets and egg cartons into animal critters among other creative transformations.



A milk carton lantern



Hannah with resident artist Rebecca



Tin Can Drum

In addition to supplies for the weekly art projects, Hannah asked students to bring in duplicate household items as well as new ones, like food and candy wrappers, to adorn the final group project. This collaborative piece was a large map of the United States covered with recyclable – but often unrecycled – items. Seeing this piece, “America Trashed,” was a unique experience for the youth and raised awareness about recycling.

“I don’t think the kids realized what it was all about until our final project where we worked on the trash map. Making something so large scale was great for them - they went on scavenger hunts outside and at home to fill up the map. It took time, but slowly children started bringing the odd cereal box, egg carton, etc. and getting the idea of the projects and what they were about. Some kids without knowing, finished drinking their water bottle and said ‘can we use this?’”

Since “Recycling America,” Hannah has continued her involvement with HCA to develop and instruct more art programs. The walls of the community space are now adorned with splashes of color and various class artifacts. During this time, Hannah has also become acting Art Director at Stevenson Manor, a senior community in Hollywood.

HEART OF HCA

CO-FOUNDERS RON AND CAROL DISCUSS THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF HCA

Residents, developers, management companies and community organizations know HCA as a nonprofit service provider for affordable housing communities. Developing educational programs and generally ensuring quality of life for low-income residents has been its mission since 1988. What many do not know is how HCA came into its own and developed into the entity it is today. I went straight to the source to get the answers from two of HCA's founders, President Ron Olson and Vice President Carol Cromar.

Ambitious from a young age, Ron has been involved with about twenty businesses throughout his lifetime. He attributes much of his achievements to his brazen sense of determination. Indeed, this was how he landed his first job at Moore Business Works at the tender age of 22.

"They were the largest printing company internationally and I was trying to get a job with them. The rep told me 'I'll call you on Thursday.' As I walked out I thought, 'What the [heck]? What do you mean you'll call me on Thursday?' That's what was going through my mind. I'm kind of brash...I liked to do that with large companies because young people who are getting started out don't want to rock the boat. They want to go in and sell printing, they want to talk to the purchasing agent and the purchasing agent is going to say yes or no. And if he says no, they go to another company. But I didn't when I was young. If he said no, I would go to his boss. Then I would go to the president."

Ron's enterprising net him a healthy sampling of businesses: print, automobile, pizza and housing. His work in this last industry bore the nonprofit HCA.

Carol's career in affordable housing began in 1986 when she joined a land development firm. For Carol, the choice to provide affordable housing was as simple as seeing the need for it first hand. "I had been affiliated with a for-profit developer for a couple years before HCA was formed. There was a consistent need for affordable housing. For most people, there comes at least one time in their lives when affordable housing is needed."



Corey with HCA President and Co-Founder, Ron Olson



Vice President and Co-Founder, Carol Cromar

"WE ARE NOT IN THESE DEALS TO MAKE MONEY, BUT TO BUILD BETTER COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVE LIVES"

It was one property in particular that resonated strongly with HCA's founders. At the open house of Smith Apartments, a transitional housing property that housed many refugees from war-torn countries, Ron was approached by a young child. Carol recounts the story:

"A little boy had approached Ron and said, 'this is the first time my feet have been warm.' It was the first time he had felt carpet beneath his feet. It's a need we enjoy meeting because of the stories that we have heard from individuals and families who benefit from our exceptional communities. We also love the aspect of providing resident services—giving our residents and their children an idea of what's available and possible in their world while at the same time fostering a sense of community spirit within our developments."

The newly formed HCA started out with two affordable housing properties located in Los Angeles and North Hollywood. These were closely followed by a 130-unit development project and the rehabilitation of a 38-unit transitional housing development on the historical register in Salt Lake City. Single-family homes were the next objective for HCA. Ron explains the Lorin Farr Project, a unique model for CROWN (Credit Rent to Own) affordable housing that provides the opportunity for low-income renters to become homeowners:

"Residents could rent these 1100 square foot homes with a basement and two stories, at restricted rates of 35% of median income rent levels. At the onset of the property, these rents were approximately \$375 a month. At the end of 15 years, a portion of the rents paid by the qualified resident was applied to the purchase of the home. The sales price of the 3 bedroom homes was approximately \$89,000, while the market values ranged from \$180,000 to \$200,000. Qualified tenants ranged from single mothers with children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. Last year the property reached its 15th year and the residents were given the opportunity through a mortgage company to buy their home at the reduced purchase price. It turned out to be a beautiful project."

With Lorin Farr underway, HCA focused on Southern California, eager to further their portfolio of affordable housing in the sunshine state. As it expanded from just a handful of properties to the 60+ communities it serves today, HCA discovered that its greatest asset was the ability to build mutually beneficial partnerships. While these may encompass other nonprofits, community groups and committed individuals, they must necessarily include affordable housing development and management companies. Carol further explained how reliance on both the developer and the nonprofit service provider (HCA) to bring different strengths to the table is a key component in the healthy growth of affordable housing.

"A developer is involved in the actual building and construction aspects. It doesn't always have the means or time to get down to the base social issues," explains Carol. Single-parent households, ESL families, cultural differences and a lack of academic, recreational and nutritional resources are just a few of the issues on Carol's mind. "HCA can provide services to supplement their residents' surroundings, touch their lives and build a sense of community. We connect residents to whatever opportunities might be out there for them."

With an aging country and economic hard times, the affordable housing community is no kiddy pool. So how does HCA pick and choose from the emerging crowd of developers? More importantly, why would a developer choose HCA? Carol bluntly answers:

"We are not in these deals to make money, but to build better communities and improve lives. Our partners receive honest service for a fee that does not limit the success of the property. In addition to resident services, we provide an exceptional staff that work with the property management team to monitor compliance to government regulations and financial and physical operations. This protects the tax credits and other funding and ensures that the property operates as intended."

Through such partnerships HCA has been able to bolster its position as a bastion of affordable housing. HCA's strong volunteer program has only helped to strengthen this position. "Really, both Nicole Weinstock and Corey Heimlich have been a huge asset in building our volunteer base and giving them the guidance, direction and support to succeed," states Carol. "We have had community volunteers who do a wonderful job of leading programs at the sites. We have made huge advances over the years with regard to HCA's progress and evolution and we look forward to an even more incredible future."

What's next on the horizon? Carol and Ron hope to increase fundraising efforts to support the Annual HCA Scholarship Program. Ever the entrepreneur, Ron shapes his approach on behalf of the nonprofit based on his experiences in the business world. "Selling an idea. Selling a non-profit. People want to know where their money is going. When we get a check or a grant from a developer we don't have to take a percentage of that to cover operating costs. 100% of that goes back into the cause...It's a bit of an anomaly in the non-profit world." A defining anomaly that, with help from visionaries like Carol and Ron, will hopefully become the norm.

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