Black-Latino Working Groups Build Social Capital

Trust and understanding between local African Americans and Latinos have ebbed and flowed over time. For the past two years, the Egan Center has been encouraging closer ties between two populations living in close proximity in four neighborhoods, facing mutual concerns, but sometimes operating in isolation from each other.

“We’ve had a process that engaged community folk with university folk,” explained John Zeigler, project director of Neighborhood and Community Partnerships. “We’ve been coming to the table so that ‘partnership’ is not just a word, it has some validity, particularly in communities with a long line of failed partnerships.”

Zeigler coordinates the EUC’s Black-Latino Working Groups project, funded by The Chicago Community Trust and Folk Bros. Foundation. The project is nurturing African American and Latino residents in Humboldt Park, Chicago Lawn, and North and South Lawndale “to come together, share, look at lessons learned, vet issues, exchange ideas and [undertake] collaborative efforts,” Zeigler said.

The Egan Center acts as a conduit to “facilitate, provide technical assistance, agitate, provide the glue,” Zeigler said. “We can’t be out in front because it’s the communities that are the ones running this at the end of the day,” he said.

“When you don’t know much about a certain area, it is a darkness — and darkness breeds fear, distrust,” said the Rev. Frankie Freeney, an active participant in the Humboldt Park Working Group. “The more we know about one another, the more we can begin to trust.”

Each Working Group formed has coalesced at its own pace, fed by its own unique set of interests. In a cross-cultural exchange in Chicago Lawn, human rights and community activists from Central America shared their personal experiences with local black and Latino youth and adults. African-American and Latino youth in East and West Humboldt Park put their experiences into music, dance and words in a joint performance for their parents. And group members from North Lawndale have crossed into Little Village to take part in anti-violence discussions and events.

Focus on Safety

The Working Group in Chicago Lawn, an ethnically mixed community on the city’s Southwest Side, began as an effort to help the Local School Councils by bringing parents into area schools as “cultural ambassadors.” When school tensions surfaced while that group was taking shape, the focus changed.

continued on page 9
From the Director

I still can hear the voice of Father Jack Egan as he placed his hand on my shoulder, looked into my eyes and asked, “Michael, have you raised any hell today?” Raising hell on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged residents of Chicago was his raison d’etre. And while you haven’t seen me with a raised picket sign or voice marching outside institutions that victimize the poor, I have perhaps been raising a refined voice of protest from the academy at the Monsignor John J. Egan Urban Center, concentrating on the design and analysis of policies, programs and practices aimed at eradicating poverty. Here, for the past 11 years, I’ve had the pleasure to guide a magnificent set of professionals, faculty and students in assisting community and institutional partners in research and community development efforts throughout Chicago and beyond. Although endeavors of this sort will occupy me for the rest of my life, I’ll no longer be undertaking them as Director of the Egan Urban Center. On June 30, I resigned that position.

The work of the Egan Center must go on. It embodies DePaul University’s Vincentian mission to bring social and economic justice to the disadvantaged. Although the future form of the Center was unclear as of this writing — staff direction and budget allocations not having been set yet — our community partners, faculty and student collaborators, and funders demand that the EUC continue building what it has begun.

The Black-Latino Working Groups initiative, featured on page 1 in this newsletter, is one example of the groundbreaking efforts being led by John Zeigler, project director of Neighborhood and Community Partnerships, and the Egan Center staff, in conjunction with an innovatively assembled group of community residents and organizations. This community-based, participatory action research project is producing frank dialogue among ethnically diverse residents, more precise language to describe racial and ethnic commonalities and differences, and emerging concepts on how to conduct successful community development work in multi-ethnic communities. A university unit like the EUC is uniquely positioned to dedicate staff with the experience, temperament and credibility — developed over decades of engagement — necessary to guide and maintain this sort of organic, longitudinal, community-building process.

Some talented people have contributed to the Center’s role as an incubator for innovation and a liaison between DePaul and marginalized populations outside the university. Jerry Watson and Laurie Worrall, both former staffers who later obtained doctorate degrees and are now university administrators, gave birth to DePaul’s community-based service learning initiative being steered by Howard Rosing and his Steans Center staff. At the Egan Center, Bernice Taylor pioneered a community technology initiative that produced the Michael L. Mezey Faculty and Community Research Lab. The work of her and her staff produced the foundational funding, and the hard and soft resources that laid the ground for a social science research center being planned for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

By conducting and developing both ongoing and new research projects as a member of the DePaul sociology faculty, I will continue to work, plan and advocate with many of you on critical issues facing our communities and the nation. Our Vincentian ideal demands it.

Michael Bennett

Hourglass Conference Puts Magnifying Glass on Shrinking Middle Class

E is rising economic inequality in the U.S. an inexorable result of the global, high-tech economy, or could public policy shore up the shrinking middle class? Is the longstanding compact in American society that hard work leads to the American Dream giving way to a permanently bifurcated workforce with reduced mobility?

Some numbers illustrate the polarity: Since 1980, the average CEO’s pay has gone up 442 percent (adjusted for inflation), compared to just 1.6 percent for the average worker during that same period. Over the past 30 to 35 years, a wage scale shaped like an hourglass has developed as both the number and income of those in the middle gradually declined (see chart, page 8).

A conference co-hosted this spring by the Egan Center, “Economic Inequality and the Hourglass Economy: The Decline of the Middle Class — The End of the American Dream?” invited a selected group of economists, sociologists, policy makers and academics to exam-
GIS Project Maps Out New Lenses to View Community

How can geographic information systems (GIS) technology help community development organizations do their work?

For the past five years, a DePaul research team has been collaborating with two community organizations in Greater Humboldt Park to explore and find practical answers to that question. Funded by a National Science Foundation CAREER Award, former Geography Department Assistant Professor Sarah Elwood created the project, pairing DePaul with Near Northwest Neighborhood Network (NNNN) and West Humboldt Park Family and Community Development Council (WHPDC).

Elwood’s DePaul students initially went to Humboldt Park to collect information on community assets as well as land use, demographic, crime, environmental and other data. They then created a resource library, made maps and built a small GIS lab at each organization. Later, project staff trained the organizations to gather and analyze data and create GIS maps themselves. As the grant neared its June 30 conclusion, project participants took stock of what they’ve accomplished.

“We’ve really been talking about, ‘How do we sustain the momentum of the last five years?’” explained Elwood, who is now on the faculty of the University of Washington. “How do we build sustainable GIS capacity with non-profits? That’s the overall framework.

“The staff at WHPDC and NNNN have just taken that community capacity-building piece and run with it,” Elwood added. “They have really integrated GIS into the organization in all kinds of creative ways that we didn’t imagine might happen over the last five years.”

EUC Technology Coordinator Nandhini Gulasingam has been offering on-site GIS instruction to both agencies’ staffs weekly. “Since this project started, these organizations have been using GIS mapping at the local level to better understand their community and make better decisions in revitalizing their neighborhoods,” she said.

Those uses range from identifying the demographic and socioeconomic make-up of their communities to mapping resources, infrastructure, and housing, retail and commercial development to identify needs.

NNNN staff use GIS in their annual land use survey to inventory their service area’s housing, commercial and retail building stock, and to identify resources and gaps. Their GIS mapping has revealed a mismatch between the location of re-entry services and the settlement patterns of formerly incarcerated individuals, for example.

“Sometimes the old adage, ‘a picture is worth a thousand words,’ really does ring true,” said Kathleen Gems, director of development for NNNN. “You’ve been trying to explain it in words, and sometimes [a map] brings it all into focus.”

Staff at WHPDC created a map of the 10 lots where land trust homes are being built, overlaid with a map showing households with the lowest income and highest unemployment. “They were able to show, using the maps, areas in need of subsidies,” said Gulasingam. This information can be used for funding applications and to attract developers and investors.

“It’s our walking tour,” summed up Janice Simmons, WHDPDC community development coordinator. She said GIS guides their selection of affordable housing and mixed-use development targets. “You can see where there’s a big gap for affordable units, or where they’re too concentrated,” she said. “It’s a great resource for community development. The visual really helps when you’re talking about what we need in the community.”

Satisfying another project goal, both community partners have extended their map-making resources beyond their own doors, occasionally hosting other organizations in their GIS labs “to make that function as more of a community resource,” said Elwood.

Reid Mackin, who directs small business services for the Greater Northwest Chicago Development Corporation, often visits WHPDC, where he previously worked, to use the GIS software to map out business, socioeconomic and demographic profiles of Greater Northwest’s trade area.

He appreciates Elwood and Gulasingam for providing the tools without imposing a direction. “A lot of times, colleges will come in and say, ‘We need to do this,’ whether or not we need it,” he said. “Dr. Elwood turned it around and said, ‘OK, this is what we have. Do you think you can use this?’”

Apparently they do. Both organizations are exploring continuation grants that include a GIS component.
CPS to Launch New Tech Academies, Egan to Engage Partners

The Egan Center is helping CPS survey community infrastructure

The Egan Center is helping Chicago Public Schools (CPS) inventory the infrastructure and assets of five communities with struggling elementary schools where CPS will debut its first-ever technology academies this fall.

The targeted communities — Roseland, Austin, North Lawndale, Woodlawn and Englewood — have a large percentage of schools currently not meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress standards of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Many parents in those communities have been sending their children elsewhere in search of stronger schools, said John Zeigler, EGC project director of Neighborhood and Community Partnerships.

Under a new initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Voluntary Public School Choice program, CPS will infuse the five elementary schools with equipment, training and support designed to integrate technology throughout the K-8 curriculum. Each will anchor a cluster of linked schools within their community that will include four other elementary and two high schools.

The goal is to give parents more and better local school choices, inviting greater parental and community involvement and bringing historically marginalized voices into the schools, said Zeigler. Engaging partners from the community will provide a foundation when the academies open in September at Dunne Elementary in Roseland, Dvorak Math and Science Tech Academy in North Lawndale, Dumas Elementary in Woodlawn, Nicholson Math and Science Elementary in Englewood, and Spencer Math and Science Academy in Austin.

CPS is subcontracting the Egan Center to foster community-school partnerships and linkages. “Their role is to assess the resources within each of these communities so that we can build stronger choices,” said Amane Casarjian, a CPS evaluator. “It’s about linking schools to the communities within which they exist.”

“That’s our charge — to find some of these assets,” Zeigler said. The asset-based approach being used identifies the individuals, institutions, associations, programs and services that could be tapped in each community. Assets might include underutilized computer labs in church basements or parents, local businesses and service agencies that can offer tutoring and other help.

“That’s gigantic,” said Jason Pasatta, CPS technology magnet administrator. “They’re informing the process and helping us understand who in the community we need to engage, and some of the variables we might want to consider.”

Cynthia Smith-Peterson (rear, left to right), Gloria Riley, Carol Johnson and (in front) Michelle Elders attended a meeting May 28 at Spencer Math and Science Academy in Austin to learn about the CPS project and contribute to the EGC’s inventory of community infrastructure and assets.

Each cluster will choose an annual focus to incorporate into the curriculum — say, how to incorporate blogs into teaching, said Pasatta. Representatives from each school in the cluster will meet monthly to compare notes, and all five clusters will gather annually to share best practices.

“Throughout all of this, we’re going to be doing assessments of what’s going on in the school and what’s going on in the community, and if it isn’t successful, what’s challenging it?” said Sarah Korhonen, EGC service project coordinator.

“If CPS wants this process to work, they need to be accountable,” Zeigler said. “We’re documenting what’s happening and not happening...If the culture is not one that is inviting to the community, it’s not going to work.”

Dvorak Math and Science Tech Academy in North Lawndale is one of five CPS technology academies opening in September under a new federally funded initiative. Egan is helping CPS build bridges to the communities.
Would 2016 Olympics Be Golden for Chicago’s Neighborhoods?

The Egan Center is analyzing and comparing the planning process of Chicago’s bid for the 2016 Summer Olympics, and those in previous host cities, from the perspective of community participation.

“We come at it from a social and economic justice point of view,” EUC Executive Director and Associate Professor of Sociology Michael Bennett said. “How do we stimulate inclusive thinking on the part of government officials, blue-ribbon committee members and others with a decision-making role?

Last June, he, EUC Senior Research Associate Stephen Alexander and DePaul Political Science Professor Larry Bennett (no relation) began the research and information-sharing project supported by a grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Their examination rests on the assumption that citizen participation would help define and expand the goals of Chicago’s Olympics beyond simply increasing tourism.

“We want to present evidence that previous Olympics have had success when they have involved their citizens,” said Alexander. Citizen involvement could have a bearing on decisions concerning jobs, transportation, the construction of temporary versus permanent sports facilities, and whether cities target specific benefits to communities or just borrow a community to site a venue.

“We are also going to look at how Olympic Games are financed in a broader way, to get a better sense of the overall costs that the public may have to bear,” said Alexander. They’re scrutinizing the make-up of public-private financing that supported Games in Sydney, Barcelona, Atlanta, Los Angeles and other cities, reviewing the different methods cities used to factor costs and revenues into their budgets, and totting up investments in urban development.

Research to Track Upward Mobility Within the Restaurant Industry

Egan Center research into the careers of Mexican Americans in the U.S. restaurant industry is challenging racial and ethnic stereotypes as well as theories that low-skilled workers lack the educational background needed to advance economically.

“How is it that the restaurant industry has become this industrial niche where Mexicans are attaining upward mobility?” said Black Hawk Hancock, sociology assistant professor and EUC faculty fellow. He’s conducting the research with EUC Senior Faculty Fellow John Koval.

Hancock points to figures showing an 80 percent increase in the number of Mexican-Americans working in the restaurant industry nationally from 1980 to 2005, and to an observable increase of Mexicans in the upper reaches of kitchen positions.

“If you’re good at what you do in the restaurant industry, you go up the ladder. You don’t need a college degree, or any sort of credential,” Hancock said. “And behold, you find an overwhelming number of Mexican immigrants in those industries.” While some stereotype immigrant laborers as economic parasites, “What you’re seeing is the paragon of American industrialism or entrepreneurialism,” he added. Similar patterns exist in construction and landscaping.

The researchers recently received IRB approval to begin interviewing Mexican restaurant workers and are seeking project funding.
Interns Bolster Egan Center’s Research Efforts

Three DePaul graduate students from widely dispersed parts of the U.S., Bianca Suarez, Petta-Gay Hannah and Liezl Alcantara, are helping the Egan Center on a variety of projects that are exposing them to Chicago from the community level.

Detroit native Bianca Suarez recently finished a master’s degree program in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education at DePaul and will continue her research interests in urban education, indigenous knowledge and race theory issues when she enters a doctoral program in Language and Literacy, Society and Culture at the University of California-Berkeley this fall. Since December, she has been doing literature reviews, attending community-level meetings and taking field notes for the EUC’s School Choice, Black-Latino Working Groups and Dropping Knowledge projects. She hopes to return to Detroit after leaving school. “I would like to continue working in environments where there is strong university and community collaboration,” she said.

Sociology master’s student Petta-Gay Hannah began working at the Egan Center in January, gathering and analyzing data, creating GIS maps and conducting occasional literature reviews, primarily for the CPS School Choice project. Hannah, who came to DePaul from the University of Florida, her home state, says: “I always tell people, I didn’t choose sociology, it chose me.” At DePaul she is focusing on issues of gender identity and health disparities. She plans to enter a Ph.D. program in sociology after she leaves DePaul.

The newest intern, Liezl Alcantara, entered DePaul two years ago to pursue master’s and doctorate degrees in Community Psychology and to develop her interests in “promoting healthy communities and using notions of social capital, empowerment, participatory research methods and participatory planning.” Time spent abroad, studying in Florence, Italy and later teaching English in South Korea, deepened her interest in diverse populations. Her commitment to asset-based community development (ABCD) — identifying and applying a community’s assets in service of its needs and its needy — brought her to the EUC. “The Egan Center is taking these principles and putting them to work — taking them to the street,” said Alcantara, a Seattle native. “It really is a Vincentian mission.”

Egan in the Public Eye

Egan Center projects and staff have been well represented in the local news media recently.

WBBM-TV invited Executive Director Michael Bennett to take part in the televised “Speaking Truth: Town Hall Meeting on Violence” held on May 10 at Kennedy-King College. In a video clip on poverty taped before the event, Bennett talked about the impact of unemployment on youth living amidst poverty.

On May 1 Bennett was quoted in a Chicago Tribune story on this year’s immigration march in Chicago, saying that while blacks can sympathize with Latinos about prejudice, some recent comparisons to their own civil rights struggles of the 1960’s.

Senior Research Fellow John Koval appeared in two segments on WTTW-TV that dovetailed with his recent Hourglass Economy conference (see page 2). On April 10 he was in a panel discussion about the shrinking middle class and on April 21 he was interviewed for a segment on the widening income gap between the super rich and the rest of the population. To view the videos go to http://ctcp.edn.depaul.edu/HGEwebsite/index.html

The Chicago Tribune mentioned the Egan Center’s Black-Latino Working Groups project in a front-page story on race on March 30. John Zeigler, project director of Neighborhood and Community Partnerships, commented on the need for community involvement in Chicago Lawn, one site of that project aimed at bridging racial divisions (see related story on page 1).

People carrying a Nov. 4, 2007 Chicago Tribune article still visit the EUC’s DePaul Center office to see the “Just Plain Hardworking” exhibit featured in the paper’s Sunday Magazine. The permanent sculpture, photography and painting display profiles 10 Chicagoans who made prominent contributions to their communities, all depicted by one family — sculptor Margot McMahon and her brothers, photographer William Franklin McMahon and painter Franklin McMahon.
News Briefs

Olympics continued from page 5

employment and post-Games residuals.

Research shows that targeting jobs and contracts to residents living near Olympic venues is essential if those communities are to benefit, he said: "It's clear that lower-income communities without some plan to deal with that, lose."

"People want to support [the Olympics], but the support is not necessarily unconditional," said Michael Bennett. "The community and other stakeholders are hungry for information. ... We think that's going to be our contribution. We want to be as objective as possible."

The group will present the conclusions of their analysis this summer to interested community, civic and research audiences as informational exchanges intended "to lift up other impacts and raise new questions," Bennett said. They hope their recommendations lead to the development of cohesive strategies that will include a broad sharing of Olympics-related opportunities and benefits, Alexander said.

Chicago will learn the fate of its planning in October 2009 when the International Olympic Committee names the 2016 host city.

Egan Assesses Service Impacts

Two years ago Communities in Schools of Chicago (CISC), which connects Chicago Public Schools to outside service providers, asked the EUC to help assess its work in more than 150 schools citywide.

A preliminary analysis of two school years, from 2005-2007, finds an increase in the number of schools and students participating, and agency improvements in programming, marketing and communications within the schools. Currently, CISC is designing student focus groups to get direct feedback this fall on the impact of its work, said Sarah Korhonen, EUC service project coordinator, who is assisting in the organization and analysis.

In 2006-2007, the last school year data was available, CISC serviced some 55,000 students in grades K-12. The top five services provided were eye care and exams; physical exams; and arts, anti-violence and health education programming.

CISC is partnering with the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children on a health project centered on the slogan, 5-4-3-2-1-GO! — a message to eat at least 5 fruits and vegetables a day, drink 4 glasses of water, eat 3 low-fat dairy products, limit "screen time" to 2 hours and exercise at least 1 hour.

EUC Grateful to the Late Robert Cronin

The Egan Center recently received dozens of donations in the name of Robert J. Cronin, a supporter of the underprivileged like his late friend and the center’s namesake, Monsignor John J. Egan. Mr. Cronin, who died in Fort Myers, Florida in April at age 92, formerly headed the Chicago Roofing Contractors Association and Knickerbocker Roofing and Paving Co., a business his great-grandfather founded in Chicago.

"Jack Egan was an important person in our family," said Mr. Cronin’s daughter, Carol Moran, a clinical social worker. She recalled how her mother, the former Mary Bischoff, walked with the Catholic Interracial Council alongside Father Egan and Martin Luther King, Jr. to promote the integration of Rainbow Beach on the South Side. She said her parents’ social justice activities made their way into the final eulogy for Monsignor Egan, a lifelong friend who baptized and married Cronin children and grandchildren.

Mr. Cronin was serious about his friendships and his commitments. He and Mary were active in the Catholic Interracial Council, the Jewish-Catholic Dialogue Group, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Chicago and Friends of the Chicago Library. Starting with a suggestion from the Illinois Department of Public Aid in 1963, he accompanied a social worker on visits to the Robert Taylor Homes every Wednesday afternoon for 15 years to mentor young male residents. On Saturdays he’d invite the youth to his own home in Beverley, or to see the city on field trips organized by the Cultural Enrichment for Boys, a club and program he created and the boys named.

The Wednesday activities were all about education; Saturdays were for culture and fun. In The Glow of Embers, a book Mr. Cronin published himself, he wrote, "A magnificent world was ours to discover, with me at the wheel of the borrowed school bus. ... Wherever we went, we found Chicago to be a generous city." He made sure that food — and leftovers — were part of every outing. One of the former boys from those days returned from California to visit Mr. Cronin in the hospital and was a pallbearer at his funeral in Chicago.

In 1964 Mr. Cronin received the Chicago Volunteer of the Year Award from Mayor Richard J. Daley. On his passing, the Chicago City Council passed a resolution in May citing his service to the community and "his love and open acceptance of each person he met."

The Egan Center extends our condolences to Mr. Cronin’s extended family. We thank them and the many donors paying tribute to him for their generosity.
ine the scope and implications of this phenomenon.

The event, held on April 2-3 at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, was organized by EUC Senior Faculty Fellow John Koval and funded by the McCormick Tribune Foundation Citizenship Program. It was co-hosted by the University of Notre Dame's Institute for Latino Studies and the Economic Policy Institute.

Sociologist Rachel E. Dwyer of The Ohio State University set the stage by presenting wage data that depicted “bulges” of people at the top and bottom of the economic wage ladder, separated by a relative few in the middle — the “hourglass” shape that inspired the conference’s title.

Research by Dwyer and sociologist Erik Olin Wright of the University of Wisconsin-Madison finds the greatest job growth since the early 1990s occurring in either the top or bottom 20 percent of the wage scale. This “asymmetric polarization” of the 1990s boom years was followed by more anemic expansion after 2002 and more symmetrical polarization, with relatively equal rates of job growth at the top and bottom of the scale. Both periods witnessed much slower growth of middle-wage jobs, a sharp departure from the far more equal growth patterns seen in earlier expansions.

The current mix of anemic growth and widening inequality can lead to the kind of social and political pathologies that have emerged in the past, warns Harvard economist Benjamin Friedman. His research shows many Americans doing less well economically than the country as a whole. Even in a country with institutions as entrenched as that of the U.S., citizens could lose their basic democratic values if they sense that their economic progress is stagnating, he contends.

“Without a strong middle class, societies become less open, less willing to accept differences, less willing to be generous,” says Koval. “A host of negative consequences ensue. That unrest may produce an awful lot of turmoil.”

UCLA sociologist Roger Waldinger has tracked the potential consequences the current situation poses for immigrant groups. He says the overall progress of Mexican immigrants has slowed in recent decades, with newer arrivals earning less than previous generations in both their initial and later wage-earning years. He sees the economic prospects for male immigrants in particular lagging behind those of native white Americans.

William Darity, a professor of public policy, economics and African-American studies at Duke University, has analyzed the short- and long-term effects of economic inequality on African Americans and Latinos. Darity points out that, on the whole, blacks transfer far less wealth than whites across generations, resulting in an ever-widening economic gap over time. That helps explain the "gross inequality" we see in the net worth of blacks and whites, he says.

Some blame globalization and a shift from industrial to high-tech jobs, and consider it inevitable that "in the short term, a lot of people will suffer," said Koval. He rejects that interpretation.

"There are factors other than, It's part of the change process and, sorry, that's how it goes, and eventually we'll get back to normalcy," Koval said. "Policies produce inequality that can't be attributed to market forces alone."

As an example, Koval cites tax breaks from earlier this decade that primarily benefited higher-income earners. "That's got nothing to do with globalization," he said. He believes that changes can be made again using the same sociopolitical levers that gave rise to them initially — by reversing the tax breaks, for example.

Koval hopes the conference will inspire more research on where to go next. "How do we slow down inequality and reinvigorate the middle class?" he wonders. "It's an enormous, complicated issue. This issue is not on anyone's radar."

In an appearance on WTTW-TV's "Chicago Tonight" following the conference, Koval complained about the vague economic solutions he hears from the presidential candidates. "What have you got in mind? More jobs?" Koval asked. "It's a lot more complicated than that. It's such a large problem, and the scope is so great, that people don't know how to address it."

Abstracts of the conference papers are available on-line at http://ctcp.edn.depaul.edu/HGwebsite/Abstracts.html
Black-Latino Working Groups continued from page 1

“They wanted to talk about community safety problems, so we put together a brochure to help parents understand their rights at school,” Zeigler said. In May the group organized a Town Hall meeting to ask fellow residents what issues they consider most important and how to address them. One suggestion was the need for a resource guide on safety, violence prevention, and after-school and health programs. Participants cited language as a barrier to neighborhood monitoring efforts.

Chicago Lawn has changed significantly in the 16 years since the youth organization Southwest Youth Collaborative (SWYC) was created there, said co-founder and Executive Director Camille Odeh. “It’s a different challenge. You can be black and be from the Middle East, from Venezuela. You can be Latino and be from Guatemala and El Salvador and Mexico. Even among the brown and black, there’s a lot of diversity,” she said. “When we started this initiative, we saw rifts among the community, not only black and brown, but within the black and brown communities.”

In March SWYC played host to the “Women of Power Conference — Culture, Identity and Voice in the African Diaspora.” Three human rights and community activists talked about their experiences concerning race and color as women of African descent living in Panama, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Many in the audience of some 100 blacks and Latinos, which also included Working Group members from Humboldt Park and North and South Lawndale, were moved to share their own stories with the women.

EUC student intern Bianca Suarez, a DePaul graduate student in Education, said it was a powerful demonstration of one of the major goals of the Working Groups project: to build mutual understanding and respect across borders. “It was an opportunity to share strategies on what you can do locally,” said Suarez. “The context may change, but the struggle is the same.”

“This work is really critical,” Odeh said. “In many cases, African Americans and Latinos have never spent time together. It’s really shocking to hear that — not had a meal together, not known one another. The Latinos in the neighborhood isolate themselves in their own community, and the African Americans the same, and the Arabs the same. ...”

“What we hope is that our community getting to know one another, getting to trust one another, will eventually stand with one another, so that we can be a voice and say to our city, state or federal government, ‘We need public policy that will address the needs of our children,”’ added Odeh.

‘Living My Story’

A group of block club and community organization members has been reaching out across divided Humboldt Park, where Latinos generally live east of the park and African Americans live west.

This Working Group started with a strong desire to focus on youth. “They asked, ‘How do youth become leaders in this community? How does the voice of youth resonate? How do youth begin to understand each other’s cultures?’” recalled Zeigler.

About a dozen black and Latino youth met at a local bank for six weeks last summer, where a Chicago singer, songwriter and poet, Ugochi Nwaogwu, wu, helped them explore issues of identity, policies that mutually affect them and obstacles that hamper interaction. They compiled their stories and poems into a journal and staged a performance called Viviendo Mi Quento (“Living My Story”), held at a partner organization, Young Chicago Authors.

“This is what this is all about,” said Zeigler. “It’s a coup for them to be able to come together as a common voice that supercedes the issue of race.”

“It was difficult in the beginning, but the agreement they made was, ‘We must respect one another,’ and we held them accountable to that,” said Rev. Freeney, associate director of the Nobel Neighbors housing organization. “We did get them to express themselves and be able to accept their differences.”

“The thing is to bring young people — Latino and black — together,” agreed Maggie Martinez, executive director of the 18-year-old Block Club Federation, which promotes block club and leadership development in both East and West Humboldt Park.

“They all have the same needs. We know it’s a good idea for them to sit together, to share together.”

From Violence to Expungement

The Working Groups process started slowly in separate but adjacent North Lawndale and Little Village (also called South Lawndale) — the former heavily African American and the latter
Black-Latino Working Groups continued from page 9

predominantly Latino. With a lack of participation from primarily black North Lawndale, Zeigler looked for alternative ways to involve them.

“We found North Lawndale has a deeper set of issues,” he said. Those range from a low, 25 percent homeownership rate, to schools not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind, to the possibility that a 2016 Olympics swimming facility could land in their backyard. “They are fighting to hold onto their community. Engaging with Latinos is not a top issue on their radar,” Zeigler said.

Over time, the Working Group members have developed trust through their participation in issue-based discussions and events. Last summer a rally in Douglas Park gave youth a platform to express their reactions to the killing that year of more than two dozen Chicago Public Schools students. Last winter North Lawndale residents were invited into facilitated discussions at Little Village High School concerning school violence issues. And in May a group of North Lawndale women invited both communities to an informational forum at Farragut Career Academy on the expungement of criminal records.

Noting the variety of “silosed” activities going on, Zeigler said: “We want to synergize those efforts into a more cohesive strategy on how you move forward.”