

Hand in Hand

...HELPING ONE ANOTHER

A NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIS CENTER · SPRING 2005

The Willis Center was established in 1991 to provide critical services to the African American community. Since then our guiding principle has been access to quality, culturally appropriate services. It continues to define our work, through services which have expanded to meet the evolving needs of those we serve.



We created the African American Festival in 1997 to encourage appreciation of the traditions and culture of the African American community. The success and growth of the festival illustrates the desire for cultural education that promotes greater understanding and cooperation within the Worcester community.

Similarly, in 2004 we established the Willis Social Enterprises (WSE), an innovative for-profit venture, in response to critical needs of the community. WSE provides employment opportunities and job training to Willis Center service recipients and program graduates. This exciting project helps us create sustainable change in the lives of individuals.

Our mission calls us to listen to those in need; working "hand in hand, helping one another," we truly change our community for the better.

Carlton Watson
Executive Director

African American Festival 2005: Lift Ev'ry Voice & Celebrate

The 8th Annual African American Festival rocked Mechanics Hall, February 4 through 6, 2005, launching Black History Month.

This was a watershed year for the Festival, one which saw both a change of venue and a deepening educational mission.

New Venue

The successful move to Mechanics Hall was a result of the Festival's need for a larger, more unified space than Worcester State College could offer. "Worcester State has been a critical supporter since the Festival's beginnings," notes Festival organizer Gloria Hall; and so, the move to a new space was a difficult, although necessary decision. Festivalgoers found easy access to all activities, under one roof, creating a seamless flow throughout the activities.



Dr. Wilma King, on the social history of families during enslavement

Experiential Learning



Children learn mask making

The educational theme and exhibit "Enslaved in the Americas" shaped the weekend's program design. Lectures, cultural presentations and performances were based on an experiential learning model.



The Tony Vacca group performs

From Brazil to Harlem; embracing dance as well as spoken word - Festival 2005 offered an experience that informed and entertained.



African masked figure watches the festivities

The Festival provided a "snapshot" of African American culture as more resilient and beautiful because of its diverse roots.



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Festival Sponsors

This year's festival was supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts; the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA); Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities; the Massachusetts Cultural Council; the Worcester Cultural Commission; and Greater Worcester Community Foundation.

Our media partner was again Worcester Telegram & Gazette; major partners were Bank of America, Banknorth, Price Chopper Golub Corporation, and Worcester State College.

Supporting partners included Allmerica Financial, Hanover Insurance, the Fletcher Foundation, and the Fuller Foundation. Festival patrons included Assumption College, Fallon Foundation, Unum Provident and Staples.

Thank you to all our generous partners and collaborators!

AA Festival 2005 Highlights

Youth and Family Festival

The Youth and Family Festival featured family-centered activities throughout Saturday.



Children's events included hands-on science presentations by school



Above: Children learning African/Puerto Rican dance. Left: Face painting was a sought after part of the day.

aged youth, mask-making, face painting, hip hop dancing, Afro-Brazilian dance, bomba dance and drumming, magic, and children's book authors.

"Enslaved in the Americas" Exhibit

was displayed at the Worcester Public Library Saxe Room at Salem Square between January 15 and March 31, 2005.



*Transportation Collar with lock, early 1800's
Courtesy of the Gene Alexander Peters Collection*

The exhibit explored the realities and consequences of slave trade on culture and society.

Artifacts, documents, and antiquarian books related to enslavement of Africans in the Americas were included. Lectures, discussions, workshops and performances related to this period in history were presented throughout the festival and the exhibit.

Willis Center Notes . . .

Congratulations Carlton Watson

The National Association of Social Workers Central Mass. Regional Council has named Carlton Watson as recipient of the **2005 Community Impact Award**.

He is recognized for creating positive change in the community.

Check the Willis Center website for current program information and employment opportunities.

New Board Members

We welcome Ms. Dianne Langford-James and Ms. Elizabeth Anne White to the board of directors.

They each bring valuable community experience and skills, as well as a longstanding commitment to the Willis Center.



Dianne Langford-James (l), and Anne White (r).

Taking Homeless Services To the Streets

Project SAFE Path, a new SAMSHA funded homeless outreach initiative provides mobile, comprehensive case management services to men and women who are chronically homeless, with substance abuse and/or mental illness, via an ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) team.

Did You Know?

If you contribute to the United Way through employee payroll deduction, you can designate all or part of your contribution to the Willis Center.

Building Sober Lives Through Willis Social Enterprises

WSE: Balancing high expectations with support & encouragement

"This is the right job for me," shares a Willis Remodeling crew member; "we stay focused on doing our jobs well *and* staying sober."

Willis Social Enterprises, Inc. (WSE), a separate for-profit business provides jobs to service recipients and graduates and offers job training to those who participate.

Willis Remodeling, a division of WSE, competes in the open market on renovations and small construction, as well as facilities maintenance to both business and residential customers. Since its inception, WSE has employed twenty-six Willis Center service recipients and program graduates.

"A supportive work environment helps employees in recovery become self-sustaining," shares Opal Stone, Vice-President of WSE. "WSE empowers its employees as they work toward greater stability for themselves and their families."

WSE provides employment opportunities for people in recovery who have "spotty" work records or who lack the skills needed in the workforce. Stable employment is one factor that helps reduce relapse in recovery. WSE provides on-



the-job training and support, sometimes simply requiring that workers have the attitude and aptitude to do the work well.



Willis Remodeling crew, from left to right: Dexter, Anthony, Gabriel (front), Dennis (back), Paul

Expect Excellence

"It's only good enough if it's the best you can do" is how Paul D., Willis Remodeling crew leader, approaches his work. Through his leadership, Paul helps new WSE employees "expect excellence" from themselves and from their peers. Crew leaders such as Paul, experienced in remodeling and facilities management, supervise the work teams and ensure the high quality of work necessary to compete in the marketplace.

Paul, who three years ago "got sick and tired" of substance abuse, entered Willis Center's Channing House; he has been

sober ever since. A proud graduate of that program, he now acts as role model to others on his remodeling crews, balancing high expectations with support and encouragement.

Over the last year Willis Remodeling has renovated apartments, decks, kitchens and bathrooms, while WSE facility maintenance services have provided Willis Center programs with upkeep, snow removal, repairs, landscaping and cleaning.

A Socially Conscious Mission

Through WSE, Willis Center provides jobs to individuals with disabilities who have had difficulty finding stable employment. As a result, many are now self-sufficient, tax-paying citizens who no longer need public assistance.

Social enterprises have changed the paradigm by which not-for-profits generate the capital they need to carry out their mission, according to Social Enterprise Alliance's Charles King. Social enterprises are accountable to a dual bottom line: they not only generate a profit, but also fulfill a social mission.

Learn more about Willis Social Enterprises and Willis Remodeling. Request a free estimate or contract for our quality services. Please call 508-363-4526

Invest in People...



When you make a donation to the Willis Center, you are making an investment to help build better lives.

Make checks payable to:
Willis Center
119 Forest Street
Worcester MA 01609

Call to donate:
508-799-0702, ext. 132

Donate at our web site:
www.williscenter.org

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Yes, I want to be a supporter of the Willis Center!

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Willis Center Programs & Services

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Thank you to all who contributed to our 2004 Holiday Drives. You helped 1655 families and individuals with their holiday meals. *Your efforts* made it possible for 945 children and families to receive holiday gifts. These efforts were supported by more than 25 local businesses and corporations, and more than 300 people from all walks of life: schools, temples, churches and community. **Two thousand people** who benefited from your generosity say **"Thank You!"**

National Volunteer Week is April 18-23
 Willis Center thanks all of its volunteers for their dedicated service. Your energy helps people create healthier, more fulfilled lives.

Become a friend of the Willis Center

"Friends are angels that help you fly." - Julia VerKost

Our service recipients and programs have many

needs. You can help.

Art supplies

Cordless electric razors

Twin size sheets and blankets

Towels and washcloths

Sweatshirts and pants (M - XL, basis colors)

Gift certificates to discount stores

(for personal items for kids in our programs)

Full size bed

Full size freezer

New and used softball equipment

Board of Directors
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To create in Central Massachusetts a community in which people of color and the disadvantaged can gain equal access to quality human and social services that will improve the quality of their lives.

Willis Center Vision

Merci! Gracias! Obrigal! Thank you!