

# Pathways to Success

Volume 2, Issue 2, Summer 2010



## Over 500 Youth Work & Learn through OPP this Summer

For most, the summer is a time to relax. However, at OPP, summer is one of the busiest times of year. With youth eager to participate in programs run through OPP, including its Youth Businesses and area internships, it's no wonder that the halls were flooded this summer.

"Participating in Summer Youth Employment is invaluable. Not only are youth learning work and life skills, they're having fun and committing themselves to six weeks of work," said Toka Okamoto, OPP Youth Business Supervisor. "We saw

great transformations from the time youth walked in for orientation until the end-of-session celebration."

The Summer Youth Employment program is funded by the region's workforce investment board Capital Workforce Partners – *Developing Tomorrow's Workforce Today*. OPP was selected as a main center for services. OPP served more than 500 youth through its Youth Businesses and internship-placement programs this summer alone.

Younger youth, between 14-18 years old, were involved in OPP's experiential learning programs known as Youth Businesses. This summer, there were over 200 involved.

*(Cont'd on Pg 4; see "Summer Youth Employment")*



Junior Art Maker's newest mural at the Hartford Public Library, combining many world-wide fables, is the culmination of six weeks of research, "client meetings," design and painting.

## 'Acting Out' Creature for the Teacher

### OPP Youth Perform at Hartford Stage Company

By Jamie McDonald, Youth Business Manager

On May 10<sup>th</sup>, more than 250 people attended *Creature for the Teacher*, a modern-day adaptation of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, an original play written and produced by the youth of OPP's 'Acting Out' Youth Business. OPP and Hartford Stage Company, with the cooperation of the Greater Hartford Arts Council and The Mayor's Office, put on the original two-act play. This production was a

year in the making, and included OPP's Multi-Media, Junior Art Makers (JAM) and River Wrights Boat Builders Youth Businesses.

Youth earned their acting roles by participating in the audition process including the creation of actors' resumes, head shots and acting exercises. They then developed and memorized the script, created music for scenes

## In Her Own Words

*Opportunity High School Parent-Teacher-Staff Organization President speaks about school's direct benefits*

Greetings,

Opportunity High School is a special and unique partnership school between a community based organization, Our Piece of the Pie and a school district, Hartford Public Schools (HPS). This impressive combination of partners provides students with the necessary academic and youth development supports to eliminate barriers to success. As a proud parent and the Parent-Teacher-Staff Organization (PTSO) President, I know these combined services are necessary, especially as our children prepare for college and the world of work. While HPS partners prepare our children to graduate from high school and for the rigorous academics of college, OPP assists them in eliminating barriers in their way on their path to success and prepares them for the world of work and college.

Similarly, this school not only represents an opportunity for our students but also for our families. We are very proud to have an active Parent Teacher Student Organization that unifies parents, staff and students as one working body in unison for our young people's successful future. This unique high school gives us, as parents, the opportunity to be more involved in our youngsters' lives and a place to rejoice in their successes. We meet quarterly and participate in various workshops of interest to parents and the school community. This year we will see our first students graduate! Parents are getting ready for this big moment. As a parent, I'm very proud of our organization. Our school is located at 875 Asylum Avenue in Hartford. Stop by and visit us and become part of our family.

**Lourdes Fonseca**  
PTSO President



Youth perform scene *Creature for the Teacher* on May 10<sup>th</sup>

and constructed the sets.

The JAM Youth Business designed and created costumes,

*(Cont'd on Pg 4; see "Creature for the Teacher")*

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## OPP Supporters Sip, Sail and 'Do Good'

On the evening of June 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Lady Katharine's *Mystique* set sail down the Connecticut River. It was a calm evening on the water, as an afternoon storm had already passed by. However it was not so calm aboard the boat; Our Piece of the Pie's annual Sip 'n' Sail wine tasting cruise fundraiser was well underway.

Sip 'n' Sail 2010 presented by ING helped OPP raise more than \$75,000 to support its programs and services aimed to *help urban youth become successful adults*. While on board, guests tasted wines from ten vineyards generously sponsored by Super Cellar Warehouse

Liquors of Avon. In addition, over 30 silent auction items were available – including sports tickets, OPP youth-made canoe bookcase, private dinner for six prepared & presented by Hell's Kitchen finalist Kevin Cottle and much more.



President of ING Financial Services Ron Barhorst, OPP's Elizabeth Torres, and OPP President/CEO Bob Rath aboard Sip 'n' Sail

ING was the presenting sponsor for this year's event. "We are proud to give our support to OPP and the young people of our state," said Ron Barhorst, President of ING Financial Advisors. "At ING, we believe in the importance of ensuring that young people have a better future through quality education, and in the empowerment of individuals."



Other sponsors included: Admiral Sponsor Lindberg & Ripple; Captain Sponsors Travelers and Bank of America; Commander Sponsors CIGNA, Halloran and Sage, and Prudential Retirement; and Ship's Mate Sponsors Capital Workforce Partners, Connecticut Light & Power, The First Church of Christ in Simsbury, Hartford Hospital, Lincoln Financial Group, The Technology Group, Webster Bank, and Whittlesey & Hadley, PC.

If you're interested in sponsoring or volunteering for Sip 'n' Sail 2011, please contact Jo-Anne Leventhal at (860) 761-7375 or [Jo-Anne.Leventhal@OPP.org](mailto:Jo-Anne.Leventhal@OPP.org) for more information.

## Youth Advisory Board Gives Youth a Voice

Being a *youth development agency*, it is critical to receive input from not only the Board of Directors and Administrative & Program Staff, but also from those we serve – the youth! In June of 2009, a Youth Advisory Board was formed giving youth a formal way to develop a voice within Our Piece of the Pie.

The Youth Advisory Board is currently comprised of fifteen youth who represent all program areas within Our Piece of the Pie. The function of the Youth Advisory Board is to assess current programs and recommend changes they feel will improve the programs.

The Youth Advisory Board hopes to play a larger supportive and influential role within the agency, starting now.

Their first project is, as part of the annual United Way Campaign, to solicit friends and family to donate money and place a

small paper 'dancing' man ('dancing' being the theme of the campaign this year) on the LIVE UNITED wall at OPP.

"It's something that they came up with on their own and they're very excited about it!" said Nazmie Ojeda, the AmeriCorps VISTA member who is facilitating the Youth Advisory Board.

"I have learned a lot about dedication and motivation," says Ashley Mallord, the Youth Advisory Board President. "It takes both of those to run a group well and get things running."

A year after the group's formation, meetings are well-attended, focused and productive. "I feel like I have really gotten a taste for what it takes for youth to work together to improve an organization," member Joshua Vidot said. "I look forward to seeing more community and youth involvement as the board develops."

## New OPP Director for Opportunity High School

By Carmel Paleski, Director of Youth Development Services at Opportunity High School

As the new Director of Youth Development Services at Opportunity High School, I am excited to get Year Two of the school off of the ground! If Year One data is an indication of success, then the 2010-2011 school year will be an amazing year for our young people.



As you may know, Opportunity High School is the first partnership school in Connecticut and for students who are over-age and under-credited. A typical 17 or 18 year old should be in their senior of high school or a recent graduate of high school. Mathematically it would be next to impossible for them to graduate at a school with a traditional structure of credit accrual. Opportunity High School exists to provide these students with the necessary supports and resources needed to graduate from high school and continue to be successful adults.

In its first year, Opportunity High School had a student retention rate of 66%. This is very promising data!

OPP provides each student with a caring adult or Youth Development Specialist to create an individualized plan with stated goals and deadlines and provides ongoing support and motivation to ensure youth attain their goals. This relationship and support is central to student success.

Our Piece of the Pie also provides Job Readiness Training and paid internships to students to help them become job-ready and gain authentic work experiences. Seventy-four percent (74%) of students who enrolled in Job Readiness Training successfully completed the class. Additionally, this summer 21 students successfully participated in various subsidized work experiences.

I bring over a decade of experience in education and youth development to my OPP position at Opportunity High School.

I welcome visitors and conversations with our community members to support our work at OHS.

# A Letter from the President

Remember the song - "those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer?" That's exactly the opposite of summer 2010 at Our Piece of the Pie! This summer we helped over 500 youth gain employment. That's the largest number in OPP's history.

But numbers aren't what's important. What's important is the opportunity that over 500 youth had to learn about and hone their business skills in an employment setting. OPP's Employment Team worked long and hard (far from being lazy and hazy!) to prepare our older youth (17-24) to work. They held job fairs to introduce employers to youth and then they held orientation meetings - you can read the details in the article "Over 500

Youth Work & Learn through OPP this Summer" on page 1.

Our younger youth worked in six youth businesses doing everything from designing and painting murals at the Hartford Public Library and in the Administrative Office of OPP, to running in a 5K marathon, to publishing a magazine, to designing fashions and much, much more.



As the head of this organization, I could not be more proud of the young people who represented themselves and OPP so well. I am also very proud of the entire OPP staff who helped to make this possible. Our Employment Team worked long hours to

place all the young people; our Youth Business Team worked with over 200 young people on site at OPP to make their summer experiences engaging, meaningful and fun; and our Youth Development Specialists made sure that the youth they work with met their goals and ambitions.

So ... no lazy, hazy days of summer for us. And we couldn't be happier for our youth, our staff and all our collective accomplishments!

Regards,

Bob Rath

# Department of Children & Families Visits OPP

By Hector Rivera, Vice President of Pathways

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, Connecticut's Department of Children and Families (DCF) Chief of Staff Karl Kemper and some of his lead staff, including Leo Arnone (newly appointed Commissioner of Corrections), Donna Cambria (Education), Antonio Donis (Parole), Stacy Geber (Child Welfare) and Gary Minetti (Assistant Bureau Chief), visited Our Piece of the Pie.

The Department of Children and Families has always been one of OPP's biggest supporters and this was a great opportunity for key DCF staff to get to know the

leadership and programs at OPP and truly see the impact that they have.

"OPP is very honored to have a successful working relationship with DCF that spans over 10 years," I stated during the group's roundtable discussion.

DCF youth Tina T. was also a part of the group and has been involved with OPP for over 6 years. "OPP has played a significant role in my life. Without the guidance of my Youth Development Specialist Marie Jones, I don't know where life may

have led me," Tina informed the group. Tina will be returning to American University in Washington, DC for her sophomore year this fall after serving in OPP's AmeriCorps program this summer.

The group's visit culminated with a tour of OPP's Summer Youth Employment Programs. During the tour the DCF group was able to experience some of the Youth Business related activities while also interacting with some of the program participants.

# Friends and Family of Betty Kate Rath Donate more than \$5,000 in her honor

The impact that Betty Rath had on those she knew was only reaffirmed upon her passing. On April 14, 2010, Betty Kate Rath, at the age of 92, the mother of OPP President & CEO Bob Rath, passed away after having lived a good, long life. A fully-committed member of her neighborhood, church, and family, her life was full of enjoyment. In lieu of flowers, the Rath family suggested donations to her favorite charity, Our Piece of the Pie. As a result, 61 individuals donated more than \$5,000 in Mrs. Rath's memory.

"No one ever needed to ask her for help; she always knew when to help and just did," Dr. Rath recalled about his late

wife. A philanthropist in her own right, graduating with a degree in Sociology, working for the first free dental clinic in Cleveland, Ohio and volunteering to help Hmong refugees, amongst many other charitable projects, it is fitting that Mrs. Rath wanted her legacy to live on through the lives of OPP's youth. Her involvement started years ago when Mrs. Rath helped OPP's Junior Art Maker's Fashion Youth Business get up-and-running by donating their first sewing machine.



Dr. Charles Rath stops by Opportunity High while on his tour of OPP

Because of the generosity of the Rath family and friends, OPP is able to help more youth on their journey to becoming economically independent members of society.

If you're interested in learning more about donations made in honor or memory of someone, please contact Jo-Anne Leventhal at (860) 761-7375 or [Jo-Anne.Leventhal@OPP.org](mailto:Jo-Anne.Leventhal@OPP.org) for more information.

# OPP<sup>®</sup>

## Our Piece of the Pie<sup>®</sup>

Helping urban youth become successful adults

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**FIND US ON:**



## *Our Mission:*

The mission of Our Piece of the Pie, Inc. <sup>®</sup> (OPP<sup>®</sup>) is to “help urban youth become successful adults.”

Our Piece of the Pie works with urban youth, ages 14 to 24, with multiple barriers to independence and economic success, engaging them in comprehensive programs and services focused on helping them achieve the educational attainments of a college degree, vocational certifications and/or gainful employment leading to their career goals. OPP believes that with access and opportunity, all youth can be successful.

## **Summer Youth Employment** *(cont'd from pg 1)*

While working for six weeks, the participants in Youth Businesses produced different projects in each program: JAM Art morning session created a mural at the Public Library which combined fables and JAM Art's afternoon session created a mural in OPP's new Administration Office detailing OPP's services; JAM Fashion worked on fashion sewing projects, including clothing and accessories; Multi-Media wrote, produced and recorded a CD in the morning session and a Public Service Announcement during the afternoon session; River Wrights Boat Builders constructed bistro sets; We 'R' Fit researched and presented materials

on health and completed a 5K; and Hartford Voices wrote and edited a magazine.

Older youth were involved in 8-week-long OPP-placed internships. There were more than 250 youth working for area businesses and organizations including TJ Maxx, Shop Rite, and Aaron's, amongst many others.

While the summer session has come to a close, it is certain that the experiences that these youth learned will not only enhance their resume but also better equip them for their future employment success.

## **Creature for the Teacher**

*(cont'd from pg 1)*

props and coordinated makeup. Youth involved in the River Wrights Boat Builders Youth Business built the set pieces, including a full-functional blackboard and coffin.

The performance itself was flawless. After much rehearsal, the ensemble cast and crew pulled off a problem-free show to a packed house at Hartford Stage, which was the theater's last performance before its renovation.

tion. “I thought I knew about acting, but I learned how to really act on stage, and have patience for other people” says William Braswell, who played “Ray Johnson-the Playa,” a pivotal character in the play.

All involved expressed much gratitude and hope to have more opportunities to perform in the future.

Bravo!