

# Pathways to Success

Volume 2, Issue 1, Winter 2010

**OPP**  
Our Piece of the Pie.  
Helping Hartford youth become successful adults

## Let's Get Together!

More than 100 OPP college youth, funders, staff and friends of OPP came together on January 7th to mingle and welcome in a new semester during OPP's College Reunion/Annual meeting held at Capital Community College.

The event included performances by youth and an address by Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez.



"OPP represents one of the cornerstones of everything we are doing in the city to encourage young people to work hard," Perez said.

In 2009, 220 OPP youth

were enrolled in a post-secondary program.

Christopher Brown, a Youth Development Specialist at OPP, graduated from Trinity College in May. "You have to find the dream that lives inside of you," Christopher said during his address to college students. "That is what will set you free."

Each college youth was given a care package containing "creature comfort items" donated by the Prasanthi Center in West Hartford (See story page 2).

## Carnegie Corporation Commits \$1.3-Million to OPP

Carnegie Corporation of New York has awarded a \$1.3-million three-year grant in support of Our Piece of the Pie's® efforts to advocate for, and implement a strategy to re-engage young people who have fallen behind or have dropped out of high school.

The funding will enable OPP to replicate a youth development strategy to get over-aged and under-credited students back on track to earn a

high school diploma, and be successful in post-secondary education and careers.

The model has been jointly developed with Hartford Public Schools.

In August, OPP and Hartford Public Schools (HPS) opened Opportunity High School.

*(Continued on Page 4 See "Carnegie Corporation")*

## In Her Own Words

*From OPP Youth to Successful OPP Adult*

My name is Nazmie Ojeda. I'm a graduate of Hartford Public High School and a recent graduate of Eastern Connecticut State University. I am currently working on my Masters in English Literature at Central Connecticut State University.



OPP has had, and continues to have, a huge impact on my success as an adult.

As a kid you do things because you are bored, parents make you, or you have nothing better to do. These feelings can lead to bad habits and have a negative impact on your future.

As a teenager I was always looking for a way to beat the boredom. During my sophomore year, a school mentor recommended I enroll in Our Piece of the Pie to not only find exciting new things to do, but also to prepare me for the future.

OPP and the caring adults who work here opened up an exciting new world for me. The program provided me with employment opportunities that have been essential in preparing me for the future.

Through OPP, I attained a summer internship with the Connecticut Department of Public Health. The

job experience taught me to manage money and foster the necessary persistence to seek better opportunities.

Currently I am working with OPP Hartford AmeriCorps as a Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA). As a VISTA member I have worked to establish a Youth Advisory Board giving young people a voice in issues that affect them.

I know that part of my personal development was greatly impacted by my experience with OPP. I am so happy to be giving back, and helping other young people realize that there is so much opportunity out there; and that if they're willing to put in the hard work they can be successful.

### Inside this issue:

<i>Financial Literacy</i>	2
<i>Speaking Out for Summer Jobs</i>	2
<i>Local Restaurant Helps OPP</i>	3

# Local Group Reaches Out to OPP College Youth

Heading back to college for the second semester can be a stressful and lonely time. Thanks to Prasanthi Center in West Hartford the transition has been made easier for more than 100 OPP college youth.

More than 60 members of the Center, a non-denominational organization focused on providing community service to individuals, families, educational and other organizations, delivered care packages to OPP's Sargeant Street Youth Center in Hartford on January 5th.

"It honestly means a lot to me that someone else realizes the struggle and dedication it takes to get through college," said OPP youth Ashmeer Williams, a student at Manchester Community College.

Jatin DeSai, Executive Director of the Prasanthi Center and CEO of the DeSai

Group, a consulting, learning, and research firm in West Hartford, organized the effort.

The care packages, many assembled by college-aged members from the Center, contain some essential and some "creature comfort" items such as snacks, shampoo, soap, lip balm, and school supplies.

"These care packages will give a huge emotional lift to our youth as they head back to school for the spring semester," said OPP President/CEO Bob Rath. "Thanks to this caring effort by members of the Prasanthi Center, our youth will know someone is thinking about them," Rath said.

"Being a college student myself, I know how difficult it can be to

return for a new semester," said Shreena DeSai from the Prasanthi Center and a University of Connecticut freshman. "I feel blessed that we are able to give back."



*Jatin DeSai, Executive Director of the Prasanthi Center, OPP President/CEO Bob Rath, UConn students and members of the Prasanthi Center Shreena DeSai, and Heena Jaden*

## TD Bank and OPP Team-up to Help Youth

*Financial Literacy Program Prepares Young People for the Future*

Thanks to TD Bank, 18 students at Opportunity High School (OHS) are better prepared for their financial futures.

TD Bank Managers from the Hartford area donated their time to teach OHS students the importance of money management during two after-school sessions on January 19th and 20th.

The 90 minute sessions focused on bank account and credit card management. "Money management is key to becoming a successful adult," said Lucy Carmona, Career Coordinator of OPP's Pathways to

Success at OHS. "It's engrained in all of our curriculum at OHS."

The financial literacy course was offered exclusively to OHS students. OHS, a partnership between OPP and Hartford Public Schools (HPS), combines the youth development strategy of OPP with the curriculum of HPS to help



*Manaicha Gonzalez*

over-aged, under-credited youth earn their high school diplomas.

18-year-old Manaicha Gonzalez participated in the program.

"It was very educational," Manaicha said. "It will definitely help me in the future. I thank TD Bank for their help."

More financial literacy workshops are planned at OHS this spring.

## OPP Youth Speak Out for Summer Job Funding

Losing \$3.5-million in state funding for summer youth employment would be devastating to hundreds of urban youth, according to OPP members who spoke before the State Legislature's Appropriations Committee on February 17th.

The funding, which helps agencies like OPP provide job placement and workforce readiness to young people during the summer months, would be cut under Governor M. Jodi Rell's proposed budget.

Alberto Rosado, a University of Connecticut sophomore, works at TJ Maxx's

thanks to the program. He says the funding is vital.

"We need this program now more than ever," Alberto told the committee. "It is a pathway to open doors for youth of all backgrounds."



Deedra Willingham, a junior at Bloomfield High School, worked at Hooker and Holcombe, an actuarial and employment benefit firm in West Hartford, thanks to the Summer Employment Program.

"OPP and Summer Youth Employment have motivated me." Deedra said. "Let funding remain so it can motivate even more young people."

More than 7,000 youth statewide benefit from the Summer Youth Employment program.

## A Letter from the President

At OPP, we are very grateful for the generous commitment from the Carnegie Corporation for \$1.3-million over the next three years. Their confidence and support will allow the agency to strengthen our Pathways to Success program in Hartford and help us share the practice with communities throughout Connecticut.

Prestigious organizations like Carnegie are teaming up with OPP to help close perhaps the largest socio-economic and educational gap in the nation. By working together, we can help at-risk youth in Connecticut graduate from high school and achieve success as adults.

However, the work we do would not be possible without the contributions of individuals like you. Organizations such as OPP are relying on individual donations now more than ever. Consider your dona-

tion an investment in the future of our state. Each dollar spent is used to ensure that each youth we serve has a caring adult in their lives who helps them establish a plan for the future, a plan that will lead to success in the classroom and the work place.

We are proud and thankful to welcome nine members into OPP's inaugural Leadership Circle. They are listed in an article below. Leadership Circle Members are individuals who have donated \$1,000 or more to OPP. They receive special recognition in OPP's Annual Report and are invited to exclusive OPP events. Their contributions have had an immediate impact on the youth we serve.

To become a member of the Leadership

Circle you can go to [OPP.org](http://OPP.org) and click on "Donate Now" or contact OPP Director of Development and Communications Jo-Anne Leventhal at (860) 761-7375 or [jo-anne.leventhal@opp.org](mailto:jo-anne.leventhal@opp.org).



Together each contribution is helping to make a better life for the young people we serve.

Thank you for your support.

Regards,

Bob Rath  
President/CEO

## Hartford Restaurant Steps Up to Benefit OPP

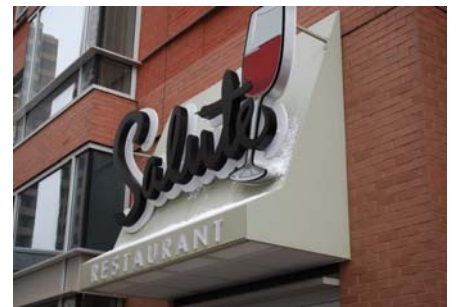
Putting their money where their mouth is. That's what the owners of the new Salute Restaurant in Downtown Hartford are doing in an effort to help Our Piece if the Pie.

The Italian Bistro on Trumbull Street, which will officially open its doors later this month, held a preview of the menu with samples for neighbors and friends on February 25th.

Patrons made donations to help fund OPP.

Co-owner Andy Rizzo, a Hartford native who attended Hartford schools, says he's pleased to be helping out.

"This city has so much potential and the young people are a big part of that," Rizzo said.



### Holiday Sale



*OPP Youth Businesses brought in more than \$600 during their Holiday Sales event at OPP North in December. Products, including holiday cards, ornaments, frames, candles, African drums and environmentally friendly soap were all designed and produced by OPP youth.*

### OPP Welcomes Members to Leadership Circle

Thank you to the members of Our Piece of the Pie's Leadership Circle. Individuals and families become members of the Leadership Circle by donating \$1,000 or more to OPP. This is the inaugural year for the Leadership Circle. Members are:

- Scott and Claire Burns
- Sue Ann Collins
- Courtney & Chris Combe
- Mr. & Mrs. Michael F. Connolly
- Jo-Anne Leventhal & Jeff Koerner
- John & Mary Little
- Bob & Marilyn Rath
- Jason & Melissa Reeve
- John & Lisa Sundean

These generous donations are having an immediate impact on helping Hartford young people achieve success.

All members of the Leadership Circle will be given distinction in OPP's Annual Report and be invited to various exclusive OPP events.

To become a member, please contact Jo-Anne Leventhal at (860)761-7375 or go to [OPP.org](http://OPP.org) and click on "Donate Now."

# OPP

## Our Piece of the Pie.

Helping Hartford youth become successful adults

Our Piece of the Pie  
20-28 Sargeant Street  
Hartford CT 06105



Phone: 860.761.7300  
Fax: 860.297.0174  
Donate Online at [www.OPP.org](http://www.OPP.org)  
Editor: Steve Coates



## Our Mission:

*The mission of Our Piece of the Pie, Inc. ® (OPP®) is to “help Hartford youth become successful adults.”*

*OPP works with Hartford youth, ages 14 to 24, with multiple barriers to independence and economic success, engaging them in programs to help them achieve the long term goals of: a two or four year college degree or vocational certificate; and/or to obtain gainful employment leading to their career goals.*

## Carnegie Corporation (cont. from page 1)

The partnership school combines the youth development strategy of OPP with the rigors of HPS curriculum.

“Momentum is building for state-driven reform to tackle what is arguably the widest socio-economic and racial achievement gap in the country,” said Bob Rath, OPP President/CEO of OPP. “I thank the Carnegie Corporation for their foresight and confidence in OPP to address this serious issue. This funding will be monumental in helping to address the high school dropout crisis in Connecticut,” Rath said.

Support from Carnegie will enable OPP to establish additional partnerships throughout the state and disseminate information on this model to communities statewide. This will allow OPP to strengthen its practice in Hartford while using its work to help spark changes in other communities.

In addition, funding will aid OPP in advocating for policy changes needed to support recuperative education across Connecticut.

Leah Hamilton, Program Officer, Urban Education at Carnegie Corporation said, “Our Piece of the Pie is an important component of the foundation’s efforts to invest in innovative designs for schools and systems. Their ambitious strategy aims to radically increase student achievement, graduation rates, and college readiness in some of Connecticut’s highest-need, lowest-performing urban districts.”

OPP has established a core partnership group to help facilitate this revolutionary change in education. The partnership includes Hartford Public Schools Superintendent Steven J. Adamowski, State Commissioner of Education Mark McQuillan, Commissioner of Higher Education Michael

Meotti, and Alex Johnston CEO of the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now( ConnCAN). Over the next few months, the group plans to form a broader network of stakeholders dedicated to building a strong recuperative education strategy statewide.

“Hartford Public Schools is proud to serve as a leader in the field and help disseminate this innovation across the State of Connecticut,” said Adamowski.

Carnegie Corporation of New York is a philanthropic foundation created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to do “real and permanent good in this world.” In education, the Corporation works to create pathways to opportunity for many more students by promoting systemic change and innovation in secondary and higher education.