

Calendar of Events:

- February 20 Domestic Violence Impact Panel
Law & Justice Center
(call Kay Chrisman - 888-5943)
- March 28-29 LIHEAP Spring Conference
Crown Plaza, Springfield, IL
- April 19 CICOC Meeting (Continuum of Care)
Pontiac Fire Dept,
413 N Mill St, Pontiac, IL
- May 3 6th Annual Dinner & Awards Ceremony
Interstate Center, Bloomington, IL
- May 5 Community Day
Bergner's, Eastland Mall, Bloomington, IL
- May 11 9th Annual Senior Fair
Pontiac Bible Church
Rte 116 West, Pontiac, IL

Youth Takes Action to Bring Awareness to Domestic Violence

The village of Heyworth is described as “diverse, prosperous and full of small town character!” Part of that small town character is the annual Heyworth’s Christmas Organization’s Miss Noel contest. As part of the contest, participants are asked to write a special essay about why they would like to donate their prize money to an organization, club or charity of their choice.

Kelsey Davis is one of last year’s winning participants and we are honored that she chose Mid Central Community Action’s Countering Domestic Violence program as the charity of her choice.

“One out of every three women will be victims of domestic violence or sexual assault at some point in their lives. These women could be our sisters, cousins, aunts, grandmothers, or best friends.” Kelsey continues “I can’t imagine the thought of someone drawing a fist and punching me time and time again. There are, however, women in our community, our neighborhoods, who will go home tonight and maybe fix the wrong thing for dinner only to get a painful black eye from it. We as a community need to reach out and help these women and children.”

Kelsey’s final sentence sums up her reasons for choosing the Countering Domestic Violence program: “I truly feel that these women and children deserve a soft place to fall where there is no need to fear the ones they are supposed to trust.”

CDV Advocates are humbled and grateful for Kelsey’s inspirational insights. Thank you, Kelsey!

State Farm Bank CEO Honored by President Bush for Volunteer Service

In October 2006, NeighborWorks® America congratulated Stan Ommen, president and CEO of State Farm Bank, for receiving a Lifetime Volunteer Service Award from the President of the United States. Ommen, who is a long-time supporter of efforts by NeighborWorks® America to strengthen communities through housing and community development work, was cited for his extensive volunteer activities and for his leadership of The Financial Services Roundtable’s 2006 Community Build Day initiative.

“Stan has been a strong supporter of our work in towns and cities,” said NeighborWorks® America CEO Ken Wade. “His recognition by President Bush is well deserved and we’re happy to add our voice in praise of his great efforts.”

Ommen chaired the tremendously successful 2006 Community Build Day, where more than 46 Roundtable member companies mobilized more than 5,000 people to volunteer in all 50 states, collectively serving more than 2,000 families, 25,000 school children, and 14,700 individuals, and built 29 houses, repaired an additional 47 homes, supported 17 school supply drives, five food drives and homeless shelter projects, and nine walks/runs.

State Farm Bank was a direct sponsor of several local NeighborWorks® Week events in 2006. In 2006, across America, NeighborWorks® Week mobilized more than 40,000 volunteers in over 350 community projects.

State Farm Bank is also a strong supporter of Mid Central Community Action, Inc., one of Neighborworks® America’s chartered members.



Want to help us with a great fundraiser?
Purchase a Coupon Booklet for Bergner’s Community Day!

Each booklet contains one \$10 coupon to use on a single item of \$10 or more. You’re getting paid back twice the amount of your donation! Also, eight merchandise coupons and exclusive Bonus Buy offers.

100% of the \$5 coupon booklet price goes to Mid Central Community Action!

Call Vikki Baptiste at (309) 829 0691 ext 237 to purchase your booklet today!

How to contact us:

McLean County Office
923 E. Grove St.
Bloomington, IL 61701
(309) 829-0691

Livingston County Office
741 W. Washington St., Suite 1
Pontiac, IL 61764
(815) 844-3201

McLean County Domestic Violence
24-hour Hotline
(309) 827-7070

Mayors Manor Supportive Housing
504 W. Washington St.
Bloomington, IL 61701
(309) 827-2967

by Email:

mcca@mccainc.org

For employment opportunities, updates on upcoming events, links to other assistance related sites, etc., visit ...

www.mccainc.org



MCCA Housing Staff Help With Clean Up Project in New Orleans ... and the band played on

In December 2006, Kathy Shubert and Rick Barrera of MCCA's Housing Department attended a NeighborWorks® Training Institute in New Orleans. Three volunteer work projects were to take place over three days and Kathy and Rick were quick to sign up. Volunteers were able to choose a day, with projects revealed after receiving confirmation that they were on the list. Kathy and Rick chose Sunday, to avoid the loss of a training day.

To start the day, three charter buses of volunteers toured the ninth ward, the area most affected by Katrina. Much time has passed since the hurricane hit and much clean up has already been done, but the devastation is still clear. Many people are still waiting for the government to approve their homes as "safe to enter". Some people are living in trailers as they repair their homes while others no longer have a home.

Above left: The volunteers were entertained, New Orleans style!
Below: Kathy Shubert takes another load to the dumpster



As everyone received their purple t-shirt and team assignment, organizers announced they would be cleaning up the grounds of a school yard. The City planned to have the school ready for students by the first of the year; three weeks away. As the volunteers wandered to their appointed area, everyone began to recognize they could not complete the project in the time scheduled. Midway through the five hour project, sidewalks began to appear where greenery on soil once grew. Mowers began to mow where weeds five feet tall once stood. Laughter was in the air and adrenalin energized people to uphold their momentum.

Only the threat of the buses leaving could slow the volunteers to a halt. The pleas to let them work just a little longer with assurance that they could complete the job echoed. However, it was time for a group picture and smiles gleamed with pride as people looked back at the overfilled dumpster and pile alongside that will overflow another. The ride back was a reminder of how little was done to meet such a mammoth need. It's a need that no solitary group or plan can meet, only a team of teams with multiple plans can accomplish such a feat. As a nation we are living what was once said by Doug Smith; "Teams share the burden and divide the grief."

Livingston County News

We are planning our 9th Annual Senior Fair to be held on Friday, May 11th from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the Pontiac Bible Church on Route 116 West. The Senior Fair brings together county and state providers with seniors and their families. It gives everyone a change to meet face to face and also gives agencies a chance to network. Community Action sponsors this event which is held each May to help celebrate Older Americans Month.

Cut at dotted line

Please consider investing in Mid Central Community Action's programs by making a donation:

Name: _____
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 Address: _____
 City: _____
 State: _____ Zip: _____

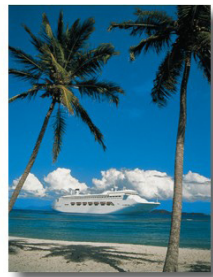
Please accept my donation of:

\$100 \$50 \$20
 \$10 \$5 Other

Mail your donation to:

Mid Central Community Action, Inc.
 Vikki Baptiste
 Development Coordinator
 923 E. Grove Street
 Bloomington, IL 61701

Thank you!



Congratulations!!

The winners of our 2006 Lifetime of Travel raffle are:

- 1st Prize: Gayle Rogers
- 2nd Prize: Bernetta DeMay-Jones
- 3rd Prize: Pam Reilly

Thank you to everyone who supported us by buying a ticket!

Housing News

MCCA to Offer Lending Program

Mid Central Community Action has been providing homebuyer education, downpayment and closing cost assistance, and housing counseling for over 10 years. In order to continue to serve its mission, MCCA will be offering mortgage lending to boost home ownership among the nations most underserved buyers. MCCA intends to assist homebuyers in realizing the American dream by offering lending programs that provide eligible borrowers with an alternative to expensive and riskier sub-prime and predatory lending programs. MCCA's programs will concentrate on the needs of minorities, low to moderate income families, and borrowers that do not meet traditional credit requirements.

¡Se Habla Español!

Building on the success of our Home Buyer Education workshops, MCCA now offers the same HUD-certified workshops in Spanish.

As with the English version, the eight hour class covers such topics as credit and how it can potentially reduce the amount of money you pay for your house; building your team of home buying professionals and making sure that they are looking out for your best interest; what to look for in a mortgage loan and how to avoid high interest rates, excessive fees, and predatory lending practices; grants and downpayment assistance programs available to first time homebuyers; what to look for in a house and how you can save yourself thousands of dollars before closing; forms you will sign at closing, what they mean, and how they can affect you.

Best Practices in Transitional Housing

Mid Central Community Action, Inc.'s Transitional Housing Program has recently been identified as a NeighborWorks® America Winning Strategy in their Best Practices listing.

The Mid Central Transitional Housing Program was established in 1991 to provide a stable living environment for homeless or near homeless families. The program focus allows families who would otherwise be doubled up or in homeless shelters the opportunity to move into units owned and maintained by Mid Central Community Action, Inc.

To participate in the Transitional Housing Program, applicants must have income below 125% of the poverty guidelines. Applicants must complete a detailed application form, and when units come available, staff makes contact with families whose size would be able to be accommodated in the available unit.

While in the program, tenants work with the Family Services Coordinator to establish a budget, maintain gainful employment and/or further their education. Clients participate in bi-weekly case management sessions which focus on the individual client's goals, and provide assistance in helping clients overcome barriers they may face toward reaching self sufficiency.

In exchange for the services rendered, transitional housing residents pay thirty percent of their net income as a program fee and are responsible for payment of utilities at the unit. Participants of this program are also encouraged to participate in other assistance programs such as LIHEAP, Business Essentials, Credit Repair, Downpayment and Closing Cost Assistance and Homebuyers Education.

Clients who successfully complete the Transitional Housing Program and remain in a unit between 18 and 24 months, receive an "incentive" pay at the end of their tenancy equal to thirty percent of the rent that they paid, up to \$1,000.00. Most of the families choose to use this incentive to either relocate to another unit, or to apply toward downpayment on a home purchase.

The Transitional Housing Program reflects Mid Central Community Action's campaign to improve the community by helping those in need to acquire and obtain the tools necessary to move to self sufficiency.

Mid Central's Transitional Housing Program was selected as one of NeighborWorks® America's Winning Strategies after Ann DePetta of NeighborWorks® America completed an agency interview with Kathy Shubert, Certified Housing Counselor for Mid Central Community Action, Inc. You may view the complete article and other NeighborWorks® America Best Practices on the NeighborWorks® America website at the following link:

<http://www.nw2.org/WinningStrategies/display.asp?strategy=1355&offset=0>

Furnace Assistance

During the Energy Assistance program year and when funds are available, families who qualify and have a non-working or red-tagged furnace may apply to MCCA for assistance. They must own their home and be eligible for the Energy Assistance program. As soon as their eligibility is determined and the application is approved, the file goes to the Weatherization Department where an assessment is made and work is begun.

This year through combined efforts of our Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) and Home Weatherization Programs we were able to assist 15 families in McLean and Livingston Counties with repair or replacement of a furnace. Families who receive emergency assistance with their furnaces are also given the opportunity to enroll in our Weatherization Program.

National Crime Victims' Rights Week: April 22-28, 2007 Domestic Violence Victims ARE Crime Victims!

Help is Available.
 To speak with a trained Domestic Violence Advocate, call
(309) 827-7070
 Neville House 24-hour hotline
 Everyone deserves to feel safe in their own home!

New Law to assist Victims of Domestic or Sexual Violence:
 "Safe Homes Act"

This Act allows victims of domestic or sexual violence to have locks changed and terminate a lease due to such violence.

Lock Change ~ A tenant who fears an imminent threat of domestic or sexual violence may request a lock change. The tenant must give the landlord written notice along with evidence to support the claim of imminent danger. Within 48 hours, either the landlord shall change the lock or give the tenant permission to change it. If the owner fails to change the lock within 48 hours, the tenant may change it without permission.

Lease Termination ~ Tenants may end their rental agreement without penalty if they supply evidence that domestic or sexual violence occurred on the property and the reason for leaving the property is the violence. The tenant must give written notice to the landlord before or within three days of leaving the property.

The Act does state that public housing is excluded.

Countering Domestic Violence Court Advocates
 are available to assist victims with legal advocacy services.
 Please call (309) 888-5521 for more information.

Right Where We Need to Be

Previously in the Observer, I wrote about the Business Essentials office technology program of study offered by Heartland Community College, which is overseen by Pam Westerdahl, Heartland's Director of Workforce Services. To recap, Business Essentials is a 16-week, 16-credit hour program. Successful graduates receive a nationally recognized Illinois Community College Board certificate as well as job placement assistance. The Business Essentials program is thriving with an average successful completion rate at almost 90%.

This past December, I had the pleasure of attending the Fall 2006 Business Essentials (BE) graduation ceremony. In the moments preceding the ceremony, students were busy finding, tending to, and seating their family and friends. Excited conversations, mutual congratulations, and camera flashes filled the room. Dr. Jon Astroth, President of Heartland Community College, and Dr. Allan Saaf, Vice President of Instruction each gave their obligatory welcome and remarks, followed by the commencement address, given by Janis Green, Business Essential Graduate, and long-time program aide.

Over the past several years, Janis has operated as the liaison between students and teachers/program administrators and as every student's most dedicated cheerleader. A former BE student herself, Janis has a natural ability to develop a positive rapport and deep connection with students, since through her own experience she understands the unique challenges faced by BE students. In return, students have a deep reciprocal gratitude and admiration for Janis. Fall 2006 was Janis's last class as she has moved on to further her own education. Naturally, Janis's commencement address had particular significance.

Janis spoke of trust, the kind of trust that builds up people's lives. She voiced her comprehension of the dark places through which we must all trudge during our lives, and her hope that we would all know the kind of trust we need to see us through those times. Of particular significance was her reassurance that while we all must endure trying and perhaps dark times in our lives, we are all "right where we need to be" at that moment. We should embrace it! Just as we embrace the more pleasant, brighter times in our lives. Graduates and guests applauded, cheered, wept, and honored Janis in her moment. From BE student, unconfident and fearful, to BE grad, full-time social work student at Illinois State University, wise and content, Janis serves as a testimony to the important work Pam and her staff are doing to improve people's lives and our community. Thank you all!

Maria L. Garcia Gettman, MSW, Family Services Coordinator

Mid Central Community Action, Inc.
923 E. Grove St.
Bloomington, IL 61701

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Our Mission: Building community by helping people move to self sufficiency
Mid Central Community Action serves McLean and Livingston Counties



Community Leadership in Action

Mid Central Community Action sponsored a team of seven volunteers who have written an action plan focused on building leadership and strengthening the community by increasing resident involvement. Socorro Alvarez and Marivel Escatel from Western Avenue Community Center; Vikkie Cossio, community volunteer and concerned citizen from the South Hill Neighborhood; Dennis Arnold, Cindy Arnold, and Angela Scott from the Gridley Allen Prickett Neighborhood Association; and Angela Frazier from Mid Central Community Action are hoping to create a pay it forward approach to building community strength. This team attended a NeighborWorks® America Community Leadership Institute in Nashville, TN, in 2006.

The group successfully undertook its first project this past September when a large group of volunteers worked with the Ortiz family in Bloomington, making needed repairs to their home. Several businesses volunteered their time and materials to make this plan a reality by donating supplies and skilled labor. RP Lumber, Midwest Lumber Products, Rob Blessing Construction, Milworks, and Hundman Lumber donated over \$1,000 in needed materials. C & W Roofing employees were on hand to tear off the old roof and put a new one on. The Ortiz family plans to pay it forward by working on another project in the community and by volunteering in their neighborhood.

If you are interested in building your leadership skills and helping to build a strong community this is a great opportunity. No experience necessary!!! Please contact Angela Scott at (309) 828-9442 to find out more.

