

## Amory Street Task Force Working to Make a Difference

**T**he Amory Tenant Task Force is a close-knit group. It is evident in their jovial interaction and enthusiasm displayed at every gathering. Task Force meetings are more a monthly get-together between friends casually discussing how to better the community they live in, than a formal assembly of elected officials. But the comradeship certainly doesn't diminish their attention to the issues facing the development.

"These are the best task force members," boasted President Ernest Powell. "They keep going strong to accomplish every mission."

"There is very little dissension among the ranks," added Ronald Cassidy, the task force's treasurer.

This sense of unity in the group has led to many accomplishments since they took office over a year ago. Noteworthy among their recent successes are the English as a second language class they offered to residents and a free trip to Foxwoods.

Another important aspect is the group's diversity. "There are all different nationalities in this group," explained Vice-President William Correa-Pagan.

"We are proof that people from different backgrounds can work together," added Powell.

While they have formed a close working relationship, the task force members also demonstrate strict professionalism when it comes to their jobs. "We are like lawyers," explained William Correa-Pagan. Cassidy said, "People in general, we just represent them."

A plaque on the wall of the task force office reinforces these statements and further exemplifies the task force's commitment to serving the development. The plaque reads: "All private conversations between tenants and task force members will not be discussed outside of



*The Amory Street Task Force (R to L) Geronimo Malone, Ronald Cassidy, William Correa Pagan, Ernest Powell and Ramon Arias. (not pictured) Santos Ventura.*

this office."

"We are the liaison between residents and housing," noted Powell.

The task force, consisting of seven residents, holds an open forum in which tenants can file complaints or voice their concerns about activities around the Amory Street Site.

Approximately 30-40 residents attend the monthly gathering. A typical meeting includes a

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## Dental Screenings for Seniors

**P**artners of the Oral Health Equity Project offered free dental screenings to elderly residents in many of the Boston Housing Authority's developments from January through February.



***Codman Tenant Task Force President  
Josie Bishop takes part in the free  
dental screenings***

Residents of Davision, Hampton House, Frederick Douglas, Washington Manor, Torre Unidad, Codman, Walnut Park, Groveland, Pond Street, Amory Street, Holgate, and Martin Luther King took part in the event.

Participants received an oral health information session before undergoing a dental screening at one of many stations set up throughout the sites. Residents were administered a fluoride varnish PRN, a denture ID PRN and were given recommendations for follow-up treatment and supplies to care for their teeth at home.

Haitian Creole, Chinese and Spanish translators were at several of the locations helping residents of all backgrounds understand the procedure.

The screenings were well received throughout the BHA. At Groveland, 18 residents turned out to take advantage of the free dental care. The residents' enthusiasm in embracing the

event is a testament to the imperative role oral health plays in the lives of the elderly.

"Screenings are very important to residents because they sometimes bring up health issues that might not otherwise be discovered," explained Gloria Johnson of the Elderly and Disabled Services Department at the BHA. "It is a good chance for them to get some care."

In addition to the screening, participants received free toothbrushes and denture kits.

The goal of the event is to increase access to preventive services and dental care for elderly residents in a number of public housing developments throughout Boston, while also enhancing the educational experience of dental students connected to the project.



***Raymond Hines of Codman after  
undergoing the dental procedure***

Oral health is extremely important to the overall well-being of the elderly. Studies indicate that the elderly are more likely to have roots of their teeth exposed from gingival recession, putting them at a higher risk for root cavities.

Unfortunately, while many Americans are retaining their teeth later in life, many cannot afford adequate care. Also, many elderly who have dentures fail to receive follow-up treatment to retain them.

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# Out & About

## Artist's Vision Landscapes the Lower Mills Community Room



***Lower Mills Vice-President and Artist Charlie Soberanis poses in front of his work with Task Force President Ruthie Hardiman***

### **Artist Biography**

Mr. Canuto "Charlie" Soberanis is the Vice-President of the Tenant Task Force at the Lower Mills Development. Born in Mexico and raised in British Honduras, Mr. Canuto has been a house painter since the age of 15 and has been painting portraits and landscapes for 40 years. Mr. Canuto resides in Dorchester with his wife Veronica.

**In his own words:** "I have been to a few BHA buildings and noticed that they had paintings and decided that Lower Mills needed something to inspire its residents and bring new life to the community room. I spoke to the President of the Lower Mills Task Force, Ms. Ruthie Hardiman, and she obtained authorization from BHA to do this mural and so I went ahead and completed this task for the residents. The mural was completed in three days and all the residents have already thanked me for this great work of art and have complemented me for having donated my time and talent to the building."



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# Offering a helping hand:

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## Esther Hardy

### Perseverance Personified

**E**sther Hardy has lived at the Walnut Park Development in Roxbury for more than 30 years and is proud to hold the distinction as the oldest reigning tenant at the site.

At 84 years old Esther is as enthusiastic and energetic as someone half her age. She focuses a great deal of that positive energy to a cause she loves: helping others.

On February 26, Esther's service to the community was recognized. She was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award during the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual African American Achievement Awards Ceremony hosted by Mayor Thomas M. Menino.

Esther said that she was "shocked" when she heard that she would be receiving the honor from the Mayor. But the award comes as little surprise to those she has helped.

Ms. Hardy had the generous spirit of a volunteer instilled in her as a youth growing up in Washington D.C. She was raised the oldest of fourteen children and had to learn how to care for people early in life, watching over her brothers and sisters.

"I laugh when I think about it," she said with a smile. "We didn't have a lot of money, but there was love in that house."

Esther started working with the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) in 1980, and has since served more than 16,000 hours.

"I'm a people person, I like to figure out what's wrong with people," said Hardy. "And anything that needs to be done, I'll do it."

A stroke subjected her to a wheelchair at the age of 69, but has done little to slow her down or diminish her giving spirit.

A former secretary at the Pentagon and manager of the Pioneer Night Club in the South End, Esther was ready to get back to action before she was released from the hospital.

"When I found out I had a stroke I asked if I could work," she explained. "I needed to com-

pensate for what I used to do." She recalled: "Volunteering just became a fun thing to do."

Even with the right side of her body paralyzed, Ms. Hardy returned to doing the things she has always love to do.

"Every Thanksgiving I cook a whole turkey dinner with one hand," she said.

"My friends sometimes ask me 'don't you feel bad'," explained Esther. "I tell them, why I did it all."

She has taught herself Spanish and traveled to Spain and Mexico. She also boasts about having met Celtics Hall of Fame Inductee Bill Russell and legendary musicians such as, Nat King Cole, Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong.

"I think of my memory as a library with volumes of books that I can pull out and read anytime I want," she explained.

Esther claims that she would like to continue to "stay busy, but try to slow down a little bit too." She said: "When I stay active, the pains go away."

Every Wednesday Ms. Hardy helps supervise the "Dollar a Bag Program" at Walnut Park. She also serves as the official photographer for all of the development's events.

The bottom line, says Esther is to "live every day as if it were the last, and to find some happiness."

"Not many people can say they accomplished almost everything they wanted to," she continued. "I feel I have, even with a stroke."



# Residents Volunteering Around the BHA

## Petra Santos Inspiring Others

**P**etra Santos' day begins before the sun rises; long before most people leave their homes and join the hectic morning commute. But besides her cup of black coffee at 4:30am, there is no daily routine for the longtime resident of the Annapolis Development in Dorchester.

On any given afternoon you can find her helping clients by preparing lunches and dinners, taking them grocery shopping, scheduling doctor's appointments, or translating for those who do not speak English well.

"I do so many things, every day is different," she explained. "I just help whoever needs help."

Ms. Santos offers more than 20 hours a week to assisting seniors from Dorchester, Mission Hill and Jamaica Plain. She has been a Senior Companion in the Senior Corps Program since 1992.

Annapolis residents have come to look to Petra as the person to go to when they need help with just about anything. One of her most memorable moments serving the development occurred when a resident was cooking food in the kitchen and left the oven on. While smoke was bellowing out of the building, Petra sprung to action to drag a man out of the room.

Ms. Santos also regularly checks up on her neighbors. She recalls knocking on the door of a resident she had not seen in a while and finding him passed out. She quickly called an ambulance and saved the man's life.

One of her clients went as far as to call Petra his 'guardian angel' for all of the work she does.

"People say to me 'you're doing too much, calm down,'" she admitted.

When asked why she commits so much of her time to assisting others she modestly replied, "Because there are people who need help."

"Some of the elderly don't have family that take care of them, so I am their companion," she explained. "I am there to offer them help."

Last summer, Petra received a community service award from the Neighborhood Crime Watch Unit in recognition of her dedication to helping senior citizens in her community. She has also garnered the recognition of ABCD Parker Hill and Boston City Hall for all of her charitable works. In all, Petra estimates that she has received 27 awards.

But you won't find any of those honors around the Santos house. "She keeps all of her awards in Puerto Rico so her grandkids can see what she is doing," noted Marielh, Ms. Santos' daughter.

"I want them to see their grandmother's old, but she is still doing good," explained Petra.

Ms. Santos is also known around the Annapolis site for coordinating Christmas parties and Thanksgiving dinners for seniors who wouldn't otherwise have a place to be or people to eat with. In the summer she organizes barbecues.

As for her plans for the future, she simply wants to continue assisting others. "I love this community," she declared. "I want to keep volunteering."

Ms. Santos takes pride in seeing her daughter inheriting her generous spirit.

Marielh assists her mother in anyway she can, in addition to performing community service of her own. "She is my right arm," explained Petra.

Marielh sums up the admiration and respect that is echoed by many of Petra's clients: "She is a very generous person," said Marielh proudly. "She's my hero."



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# Amory Street Task Force Working to Make a Difference

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discussion over financial reports and task force funds, maintenance and resident concerns and possible future events.

In addition, the task force is very accessible to residents of the development throughout the day. "We have an open door policy," said Cassidy. "You can reach us morning, noon or night."

The English as a Second Language class (ESL) showcased the importance of a task force in the lives of its residents. The program resulted in nine tenants receiving certificates for completing an intensive course lasting several months.

"I said why don't you offer an English class so that residents who don't speak English can learn," explained Correa-Pagan.

The result?

Correa-Pagan said of the graduates:

"People write and speak English very well."

The task force's commitment to helping their peers was evident when money ran low for the program. The group supplemented the budget with funding from non-tenant participation funds to ensure the class would continue uninterrupted.

Director of Property Management and Operations at the BHA Gwen Friend lauded the task force for their innovative solution.

"I think this is one of the best examples of an excellent use of [tenant participation funds] that I have seen," said Friend. "I am always very happy to see residents working together to help each other."

The Task Force also planned a trip to the Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut. The event was free to Amory Street residents thanks to the group's utilization of money earned from coin-operated machines throughout the development. The event was widely successful among tenants, with a great deal requesting a second trip in the near future.

"It was very successful," said Powell. "Everybody wants to go again."

Another praiseworthy program is the weekly Fair Food "Dollar a Bag". Every Wednesday Cassidy and Correa-Pagan help distribute pre-packaged bags of food for only one dollar. The

Greater Boston Food Bank also visits the site once a month to contribute to the cause.

The Task Force has gone so far as to store rations in the office in case of a snowstorm or other emergencies that would prevent residents from venturing out to the store themselves.

In addition, the group has sponsored health screenings, invited lawyers to the site to help residents with legal issues, and has even aided residents with immigration problems.

Events scheduled for the summer include a 4<sup>th</sup> of July cookout, a return trip to Foxwoods, a day at the beach and a shopping junket.

Funds for task force events are garnered through various sources. Primarily, they receive Tenant Participation Funds (TPF). This funding is distributed to eligible task forces at federally subsidized housing developments based on a \$25 per



*At the ESL Graduation Ceremony (L to R) were Ron Cassidy, Marcos Brea, Alfred Davis, Vicente Fortunato, Ernest Powell, Juaquina Pagan, Alba Arias, Waleska Roman, Vivian Soto and Miguel Angel Paez*

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## Amory Street Task Force

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occupied unit rate. According to HUD regulation, these monies can be used for, "consultation and outreach for public housing residents that support active interaction between the PHA and residents." Residents may also use the funding for activities such as promotion, publicity, training, elections and organizing, leadership development, and gathering of resident input as a way of increasing resident participation. The BHA periodically provides training for residents on how to access TPF and has trainings currently scheduled for all task forces in April.

At some developments, additional funds are secured through coin-operated machines that are located on-site. These funds can be used for the development based on the task force's own discretion. Some task forces also participate in fundraising activities in order to raise money for programs that they would like to have at their sites.

But for all of the financial dealings the Amory Task Force has to handle, they are unanimous in their proudest achievement: reducing the crime and drugs at the site. Powell explained, "there is almost no traffic between 10pm-3am," meaning there are less people loitering on the grounds late at night.

The task force meets with the BHA Police on a bi-monthly basis and participates in a large meeting of BHA Police, Boston Police and BHA employees every three months. Their participation is a testament to their strong determination in deterring criminal activities at the development.

Powell's advice to task force members around the BHA is simple: "Volunteer with the idea of doing it for your fellow residents, don't let your clout go to your head."

It is a motto the Amory Task Force has taken to heart. "We want our task force to be as diverse as possible," noted Powell. "We can't block out anybody."

"The best part is helping other people," said Powell of being a member of the task force. And echoing the group's mentality he added: "I'm a resident too."

## Task Force Elections

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### **Walnut Park**

President – William Molina  
Vice President – Harry Moody  
Treasurer – Louise Michaux  
Secretary – Marieaei McKenzie  
Alternate – Esther Hardy  
Alternate – Marta Viera

### **West Ninth Street**

President – Julia Winston  
Vice President – Alice Smith  
Treasurer – Debbie Kinney  
Secretary – Beatrice Lukash  
Alternate – Patricia Conley  
Alternate – Teddy Home

### **Washington Manor**

President – Martin Grossman  
Vice President – Rupert Duntin  
Secretary – Rupert Duntin  
Alternate – Tom Woods

## Dental Screenings

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Ultimately, residents who took advantage of the free screenings left with a bright smile on their face thanks to the participants in the Oral Health Equity Project: Boston Public Health Commission, Boston Housing Authority, Boston University School of Dental Medicine, The Commission on the Affairs of the Elderly, Delta Dental, Forsyth Program at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences, Harvard University School of Dental Medicine and Tufts University School of Dental Medicine.

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## Task Force Election Results

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Several of the Boston Housing Authority's developments recently held task force elections.  
Below are the results.

### Elderly/Disabled Developments

#### **Ausonia**

President – Peter Butler  
Vice President – Salvatore Folino  
Treasurer – Yvonne Holbrook  
Secretary – Elena Ventresca  
Alternate – Margaret Flynn

#### **Heritage**

President – Georgia Schipani  
Vice President – Leah Swindle  
Treasurer – Theresa Roper  
Secretary – Arnold Howe  
Alternate – Cody Cannati

#### **Patricia White**

President – Daniel Lestrade  
Vice President – Anthony Dorato  
Treasurer – Nathan Freeman  
Secretary – Lisa Freeman  
Alternate – Pedro Pizzaro  
Alternate – Helen McNamee

#### **Pond Street**

President – Luba Gluckhovsky  
Vice President – Joseph Britto  
Treasurer – Fearn Martin  
Secretary – Carol Leary  
Alternate – Bill Kondroski

#### **Codman**

President – Josie Bishop  
Vice President – Inez Chambers  
Treasurer – Louisa Rose-Thompson  
Secretary – Vivian Brantley  
Alternate – Roslyn Bingham

#### **Pasciucco**

President – Barbara Slavin  
Vice President – Tom Deary  
Treasurer – Frank Ray  
Secretary – Christine Sutton  
Alternate – Jim McLaughlin

#### **Peabody/Englewood**

President – William Heathman  
Vice President – Willie Paige  
Treasurer – Lucille Brown  
Secretary – Dorothy Murphy  
Alternate – Jean Patterson

#### **Spring Street**

President – Leo Murphy  
Vice President – Maria Bunuan  
Treasurer – Constance McDonough  
Secretary – Rose Marie Fitzgerald  
Alternate – Donald Leary

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