Mount Washington Alliance launches campaign

The following article was written by Eagle Tribune writer Kiera Blessing and was published in the Eagle Tribune on April 26

The Mount Washington Alliance believes that to raise a neighborhood in need up to its full potential, the neighbors have to be involved. It’s the neighbors who live there, who know the community, who care about the quality of life in Mount Washington — and the Alliance plans to bring them together to exchange thoughts and ideas through weekly Neighbor Nights, held every Wednesday evening throughout the months of May and June, as part of the group’s Quality of Life Campaign.

“The goal of the campaign is simply to get residents to meet one another,” said Kat Hobbs Everett, executive officer of POSE and a governance committee member for the Mount Washington Alliance. “Once people become more familiar with the neighborhood, they’ll see what a gem it is, and I think once you realize the worth in something, it makes you want to improve it,” she said.

Two employees of the Alliance — Initiative Director Christine Soundara and Project Coordinator Abigail Perez — and volunteer Mirca Mejias spoke to the Haverhill City Council Tuesday, where they announced their Quality of Life Campaign and spoke about the Alliance’s mission.

The Mount Washington Alliance was formed in 2015, when its leaders applied for a grant from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston’s Working Cities Challenge, which is designed to help people living in urban areas. The group was awarded a $475,000 grant in 2016, which is administered through Community Action, Inc.

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May is Community Action Month! #BeCommunityActionMA
Head Start/Early Head Start Staff Thank All Who Supported Annual Literacy Event

CAI Head Start/Early Head Start held their annual literacy event on April 12 at the CAI Fox Center in Haverhill. This year’s theme, Leap into Literacy: Kids Who Read Succeed, showcased the work and learning of children in the program around literacy and pre-reading development. We thank the children, parents, teachers, staff and community members who came together and made this a successful evening.

CAI would like to thank the following local businesses and community members who donated food for the evening: Lucky’s in Haverhill, Uno’s, Romano’s, Giovanni’s, Flatbread Pizza in Georgetown, 110 Grill, Starbucks (Methuen, Loop), Not Your Average Joes (Methuen) and Bob Paronich.

We would like to thank the generous individuals who donated books for the family book fair held during the event and also the Haverhill Education Coalition for helping to spread the word. A big thank you to the Haverhill Auxiliary Police who directed traffic, the Haverhill Public Library for providing information and library card applications to families and to Northern Essex WIC for providing information and reusable shopping bags.

Head Start will continue accepting donations of new or gently used books for their onsite lending library for families. Books for all ages, infant through adult, are needed. To make a donation, please call 978-372-5052 and ask for Tiffany or Amy to arrange for pickup or drop-off.

To learn more about the Head Start/Early Head Start program, please visit: https://www.communityactioninc.org/programs/children/headstart or call 978-372-5052.
Adult Education

Budget Buddies Financial Coaching Offered to Head Start Moms

CAI is proud to partner with Budget Buddies, a local nonprofit based in Chelmsford, to provide financial coaching to low-income women with children who participate in CAI’s Head Start/Early Head Start program in Haverhill.

CAI Head Start Family Engagement Coordinator, Amy Morello said Budget Buddies helps low-income women become more economically self-sufficient and transforms their lives by teaching them core money-management skills and pairing them with personal financial coaches.

Ms. Morello recruited nine moms to participate in the initial 6-month long program at the CAI Fox Education Center in Haverhill. The program is offered in the evenings. She explained that after an initial meeting with coaches, moms alternate every other week with either a group meeting or a meeting with their personal coach. Each group meeting features a new guest speaker and covers a different financial topic including: applying for a loan; repairing credit; and identifying needs versus want. A graduation ceremony is planned for June 12.

Even though the first session has not closed, positive feedback is being shared from participants. Head Start mom, Kristina, said “Budget Buddies has been a fabulous experience, building my self-esteem as well as teaching me how to use different tools to save money.” Janissa, an aunt of a child in the Early Head Start Child Care Partnership program said, “My experience with budget buddies has been very informative. I feel like I will be able to use everything I’ve learned and better my credit and better my life. My coach is amazing and very supportive”.

CAI Deputy Director of Early Learning Services, Deborah Linett, said, “the coaches have the energy of doing something meaningful, everyone is engaged and happy to there. I have never seen so many people excited and full of energy to come to a 6:30 p.m. meeting at the end of the day”.

CAI is grateful for funding from the ECCF Women’s Fund that will allow CAI to continue to partner with Budget Buddies and offer this important program to moms. Financial Literacy and economic self-sufficiency are key goals of Community Action, Inc.’s strategic plan and the Budget Buddies program is an important piece in building confidence and financial knowledge for low-income families, said Ms. Linett.

Budget Buddies Volunteers Needed

An hour a week of your time can start a woman in your community on the road to financial independence. You do not have to be a financial wizard to be a coach. All you need is the desire to help someone in your community by providing ongoing, one-to-one support. Interested in learning more? Join us for an upcoming Volunteer Information Night: Monday, May 7 or Thursday, May 17.

For more information, or to RSVP for one of these sessions, contact Katie, Budget Buddies volunteer coordinator, at 978-703-0820 or k.neville@budgetbuddies.org

http://www.budgetbuddies.org

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First Time Home Buyer Training Offered

The Community Action Inc. (CAI) First Time Homebuyer Education Program will offer first time homebuyer education classes for area residents beginning Thursday, May 31 from 6 to 9 pm in the Presidential Gardens Community Room, 140 Evergreen Drive, Bradford.

Participants receive: Comprehensive information offered by housing professionals including bank lenders, buyer/seller real estate brokers, housing attorneys, insurance agents home inspectors and credit counselors; Individual household mortgage pre-qualification; Information regarding foreclosure sales and more.

A Massachusetts Homeownership Collaborative approved certificate is awarded after completion of the three-night course. The program is also approved by MassHousing. The dates for the course are Thursday, May 31, Tuesday, June 5 and Thursday, June 7. The cost is $60 per household. There are no income requirements to take the training. For more information contact Richard Lynch at 978-373-1971 or Susan Collins at 978-317-8998.

Adult Learning Center

The CAI Adult Learning Center will hold registration sessions for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and High School Equivalency (HiSET) Preparation classes on the below dates/times.

Registration is held at 3 Washington Square, 3rd floor in Haverhill. Please arrive on time for registration, late arrivals are not permitted. You will receive more information, a placement test and an interview. Please plan to stay until noon.

- **May 8 (10 a.m.)** – ESOL Class Waitlist Registration
- **May 22 (10 a.m.)** - High School Equivalency (HSE) Preparation Class Registration

For more information contact: Alisa Povenmire, Career and Education Advisor, apovenmire@communityactioninc.org or (978) 373-1971 ext 216.

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www.communityactioninc.org
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The group’s mission is to improve the quality of life in the Haverhill neighborhood and expand opportunities for education and employment for its residents. The Quality of Life Campaign, or the “Q Campaign,” as Hobbs Everett called it, is the “first big kickoff of really reaching out to neighbors and residents,” said Soundara.

“Residents have been receptive so far and really welcoming, and really feeling the sense of pride,” Soundara said. The goal is “to empower neighborhood residents to come together, to build communities where they can thrive. We believe everybody deserves the quality of life they are willing to work for and aspire to.”

Mount Washington was identified by the Alliance and Community Action as the neighborhood of Haverhill with the greatest need. It has struggled in recent years with street crime and gang violence, including the shootings at Swasey Field, and is where local, state and federal authorities have recently cracked down on illegal guns. According to Hobbs Everett, the “overall quality of life decreased in the Mount Washington neighborhood while it increased everywhere else.”

The Quality of Life Campaign and the Neighbor Nights are intended to foster a sense of community and awareness among the Mount Washington residents.

“We hope that by having a weekly, consistent gathering every Wednesday evening, we’ll be able to build those relationships and identify and work on the talents that the residents possess in the neighborhood, and the assets of the neighborhood,” Soundara said.

Mejias, a volunteer with the Alliance, spoke at the City Council meeting Tuesday about how the group has helped her to gain confidence and self-esteem, and encouraged her to work toward a better future. A mother of three, she said her children were struggling in school, and she was struggling to see a way out of the shelter she is living in.

“I started believing in myself. When I first went, I felt less than,” she said. Today, Mejias is an active component of the Alliance and says she’s working toward her GED.

Soundara said Mejias is “passionate about this work” and that the Alliance hopes she will “be that sort of voice for us in inviting other residents to come out of their comfort zones and do more for the community.”

Mejias said she has heard others in the neighborhood ask about the Alliance and express a curiosity for what the group, which still doesn’t have much name recognition around the city.

“They tend to want to be involved, but they’re scared. They’ll just say comments like, they don’t believe it’s really going to happen, or Haverhill’s just going to stay the same,” Mejias said. “But now that they’re seeing the shirts, and they’re seeing us getting out there, we’re getting a very good response.”

The City Councilors praised the Alliance for its work Tuesday night, and commended Mejias for her involvement. Councilor Timothy Jordan called her “a real success story,” while Council President John Michitson said he’s seen her at community events and knows she “walk(s) the walk.”

“I think the Quality of Life portion of this campaign is important,” said Council Vice President Thomas Sullivan, “because now you’re going to hear from the residents themselves.”

The Mount Washington Neighbor Nights will be held from 6-8 p.m. every Wednesday night in May and June at 409 Washington St.