Environmental Justice

Highland Community Technology Center

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Introduction

Welcome to the **Highland Addition Community Center**.

Living in the Highland Addition community presents challenges and opportunities. The challenges come from the fact that our residents must meet the demands of life without many of the basic needs of life that others take for granted. The opportunities come from the fact that we get to work with people to help improve their lives. We try to ignore or work with the challenges and work with the residents to make life better for all.

We are very thankful for the computers and other resources that we have received from the Department of Energy, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Howard University Urban Environment Institute. We were very doubtful when the Navy Yard first approached us about working together in their Walls to Bridges program. Every day, we see people coming here making promises and then leave. It happens all the time. We are happy and pleased that when the Walls to Bridges program changed, the Urban Environment Institute, DOE and EPA stuck with us.

Our community technology center has made life better for a lot of residents. We have training class of all sorts. We take trips and expose our residents to new experiences. We are forming partnerships with many organizations and agencies to make life better for our residents. This is only the beginning.

Gloria Thurman
Program Coordinator Highland Addition Community Center

Building Community Capacity

Melinda Downing, Office of Stakeholder Relations, Office of Legacy Management,
U.S. Department of Energy

The Department of Energy (DOE) is committed to environmental justice and public participation. Meaningful public involvement can lead to better and more just decisions. Some of the decisions that call for the public's involvement require consideration of matters that are highly technical and complex in nature. It is often where various segments of the population are unfamiliar with the multitude of issues, that there is a need to help build capacity for effective decision-making.

During 1998, we worked with Howard University's Urban Environment Institute to donate computers to communities around the country. The purpose of this effort is to facilitate community access to the necessary tools and information to increase their capacity for participation in agency decision-making. We have donated computers to cities, communities groups, public housing developments and an elementary school. Each donation was for a specific purpose. One of the very first communities we worked with was Highland Addition.

The Highland Addition Community Technology Center is a model for communities around the country. We want to work with this community to sustain a center that can improve community capacity for public participation in federal agency decision-making. This is one use of the process that works as follows:

- Create a community technology center with excess computers and Internet access.

- Conduct training workshops that consist of computer-based research, Internet research, geographic information systems, risk assessments and other subject matters; establish a series of training classes to enable community residents to use computer based tools and the Internet as information and communication resources; and present other workshops and forums relevant to DOE and EPA public participation efforts.

- Supervise community use of the training and tools received in the step above.

- Provide continuous technical assistance from Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other sources, in person and through Internet e-mail.

- Conduct a youth development program.

- Conduct an economic development activity to help make the community technology centers financially self-sufficient.

The last two steps above are being developed first at Highland Addition. The youth development program "GolfTech," that mentors youths through golf and academics, first appeared here at Highland Addition. We are proud to be a part of and supporters of GolfTech. In like manner, the economic development activity to make the center financially self-sufficient is being implemented first at Highland Addition. These two efforts distinguish the Highland Addition center from others. We are pleased to play a part in its success.

Capacity Building in Federal Facility Communities

Marsha Minter, Office of the Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The Federal Facilities Environmental Restoration Dialogue Committee was chartered to consider issues in federal facility cleanups. The Committee released a series of recommendations in its report, "Final Report of the Federal Facilities Environmental Restoration Dialogue Committee." Chapter 6 of the report focuses on capacity building. It states, "the basic premise of this entire report is that federal facility cleanups will be more effective and efficient if there is a working partnership between the regulated agency, the regulating agencies, and the vast number of other stakeholders that are affected by environmental contamination at these sites. However, the effectiveness of most of the recommendations in this report regarding community involvement, advisory boards, and including other stakeholders in the budgeting and priority-setting process are dependent on the various stakeholder groups having the capacity to participate effectively. The Committee believes that the provision of resources for this purpose, particularly if provided in a cost-effective manner, is likely to reduce overall cleanup costs in the long run."

While in EPA's Federal Facilities Restoration and Reuse Office (FFRRO), I really appreciated the opportunity to work with DOE and Howard University Urban Environment Institute to help build community capacity in federal facility communities. It was of particular interest to work with Highland Addition, a community located in the Nation's capital and a community experiencing the effects of environmental restoration projects at the Washington Navy Yard and Bolling Air Force Base. There are numerous opportunities for community participation in the restoration and reuse of federal facility properties. This project affords another opportunity to forge strong working relationships between community groups and federal facilities in the District of Columbia.

There are other reasons that make this project exciting. First, the effort to increase environmental justice and public participation through electronic access holds real potential for numerous community residents who would otherwise be unable to participate in environmental decision-making. Discussing local environmental issues at a local community technology center empowers citizens to make informed decisions. Ample community participation in agency decision-making has been, and continues to be, an EPA priority.

Second, it is also interesting to learn the non-environmental uses of the Highland Addition Community Technology Center. The GolfTech program and screen printing classes can provide valuable experiences for community residents, and bring new participants to the centers. Both reasons support federal actions to build capacity for meaningful public participation in agency decision-making.

For additional information, please visit the FFRRO website at: **www.epa.gov/swerffrr**.

Gone Fishing:
The Urban Internet Project is helping public housing residents tap the Internet

By Mark Baechtel

THE COMPUTER equipment piled on the coffee table in Gloria Thurman's Highland Addition apartment doesn't look much like fishing tackle, but if the old Chinese proverb is to be believed, that's exactly what it is. "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day," the proverb says. "Give a man a fishing pole and he eats for life."

It is all analogy that John Rosenthall understands as he watches Thurman trying to worm the hook, so to speak, of her new computer. Rosenthall is executive director of the National Urban Internet Project, which is trying to show public housing residents like Thurman how the vast global network of computers can improve their lives—help them learn employment skills, find jobs, complete their education, maybe create thriving small businesses. "If this "Early adopter" Gloria Thurman and National Urban Internet head John Rosenthall is a fishing pole," says Rosenthall, "then the whole world is her ocean."

Thurman is one of earliest adopters at Highland Addition, a town house and apartment complex in Southeast Washington. While she sees the huge body of possibilities before her, for now she'd settle for something more modest—like getting her freshly loaded shareware communications package to run. She tweaks as she talks.

"For a person in public housing, going on-line means that the means to better yourself aren't out of reach anymore," she says. "If someone came up to you today, out there in the courtyard, and said, 'OK, I'll send you to school for free'—how are you going to do it? You leave your job, who's going to pay your rent or take care of your baby? But this," she says, patting her monitor, "This is right here. It's just like I can walk right around the corner and get my education."

The corner in this case leads to the Highland apartment unit designated as the computer training center, where, today, six donated and reconditioned AT clone computers have arrived. A group of volunteers is waking them up and installing software. Sure, these old rigs are a far cry from the leading, edge, but they're only a first step. Before Highland residents do any serious surfing, they must learn the basics: Using a keyboard. Writing a letter on a word processor. Re-booting. "Giving someone a computer is a cruel joke unless you give them training to use it," says Rosenthall.

Upgraded computers and Net access are in the master plan, but their arrival depends on the generosity of donors. Rosenthall stresses that the future of the Urban Internet Project—which has the backing of 14 groups, including the in-the-neighborhood Washington Naval District, Howard University's Urban Environment, the Bureau of Land Management and the Riddick Bowe Foundation—is in the hands of those who will benefit. It's been an easy sell to partner organizations, but it's tougher to sell at Highland Addition.

"A lot of adults are afraid of computers," says Thurman. "There are some resistant people here who've been saying they're going to hold their kids out of the computer center and all. They're afraid to get involved and learn because they're afraid to feel dumber than their kids are."

It is a familiar problem with the Internet and computers: Going on-line is intimidating and preposterously complex, and perhaps even more so for those who have had fewer years of schooling. But Thurman remains enthusiastic.

"I think if we give the ordinary person access—if we take them to the computer center and show them places they can go, people they can talk to—it's going to change them, empower them. People have been calling me at home—'Gloria, when are the computers coming?' It's going to open a lot of doors, and there are people here who know that. They do."

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Chronology of Events

Highland Addition Community Center
916 Wahler Place, SE, Washington, DC 20032

- Initial meetings with Washington Navy Yard "Walls to Bridges" program started in November 1995.

- Series of six weekly meetings at Highland Addition to discuss "Walls to Bridges" and the desired relationship between the Washington Navy Yard and eleven public housing developments in Anacostia commenced in December 1995.

- The idea of a community technology center was developed and designed in the December 1995 - February 1996 time period.

- Highland Addition Community Technology Center opened in February 1996, with donated computers from
U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

- Initial computer class offered at Highland in March 1996.

- Washington Post article about Highland Addition Community Technology Center published in June 1996.

- Walls to Bridges ceased operation in June 1996.

- Howard University Urban Environment Institute started working with Highland Addition Community Technology Center in July 1996.

- Highland Addition Community Center formally opened doors for operation in September 1996. Initially, the Center was opened to give young people a safe place to think, relax, do homework and play. The Center has sponsored numerous workshops. Some of the topics covered are:

  Sex/Physical and Emotional Health
  Manners and Behavior
  Crime Prevention/Safety
  School/SAT/Preparation for College and Trade Schools
  Parenting/Stress and Anger Management
  Black History/Afro-American Contributions
  Wasting Electricity, Soil Pollution and Anacostia's Water Supply

- By December 1996, the Center started feeding children hot meals, doing referrals for families to get clothes, food, assistance with paying utilities, job applications, job training referrals and aiding parents in finding day care.

- In 1997, the Center started regular computer classes and working with the youths on environmental issues in Ward 8.

Highland Community Technology Center (continued)

- In 1997, Howard University Urban Environment Institute helped the Center prepare a proposal to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to conduct a youth environmental project. EPA funded the project and Howard University Urban Environment Institute provided record keeping and reporting assistance.

- In 1997, the Center applied for and received a grant to purchase screen-printing equipment. The Center started conducting screen-printing classes. The class prints custom designed tee shirts, bags and other items.

- In 1998, the Center added a new youth development program called "GolfTech." This youth development program mentors youths through golf and academics. In the initial session, ten youths from the Center attended a week long golf and GolfTech camp. They attended computer and Internet classes at Howard University Continuing Education in the mornings and golf classes at East Potomac Golf Course in the afternoons.

- In 1999 the Center continued to offer computer classes and the other family assistance programs that started in the previous years. Approximately fifty youths participated in GolfTech '99.

- In May 2000, the Center formed a relationship with Howard University School of Business. The Howard University School of Business will help the Center develop a business plan that will transform the screen printing class to a screen printing business in an effort to make the Center financially self sufficient.

- In June 2000, the Center participated in GolfTech 2000. More than twenty youths and adults will join other youths and adults from around the metropolitan DC area for a week long golf and academic camp at Massanutten Resort in Virginia. The youths will stay on the resort, attend a three-hour golf class and academic training each day.

- In July 2000, the Center participated in a week long GolfTech camp where the youths will stay on the Howard University campus and take golf lessons at GolfZilla Driving Range in Temple Hills, Maryland.