

SANKOFA

Sankofa - A publication of
The African American Advisory Board
Issue 4 Summer 2007

Andrew J. Spano, Westchester County Executive

Tracey Mitchell, Westchester Office of African American Affairs

Human Rights Commission Gains More Clout

Westchester County recently took another step toward promoting justice and equality by expanding its human rights law.

The seven-year-old Human Rights Commission protects individuals from discrimination based on race, color, religion, ethnicity, creed, age, national origin, alienage or citizenship status, familial status, gender, marital status, sexual orientation and disability. In 2005, the law was expanded to protect victims of domestic vio-

lence, sexual abuse or stalking from discrimination in employment and housing.

The latest amendments, signed into law on June 7, authorize the executive director of the Human Rights Commission to seek an award of monetary damages where there has been a pattern and practice of discrimination.

Cont'd page 6



Childhood Obesity on the Rise

WESTCHESTER STUDY SAYS
ONE IN THREE CHILDREN
ARE OVERWEIGHT

According to a newly released report by the Westchester County Department of Health, 34 percent of kindergarten, second grade and fourth grade children in surveyed Westchester schools are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight, compared with a national average of 32.2 percent.

The study confirms what County Executive Andy Spano has been saying since 2003 when the county began its Fit Kids program to fight childhood obesity. A year later Spano initiated the Be Fit Westchester program to encourage



County Executive Andy Spano enjoys a day with kids at the "Soul food goes healthy cookout" held at Yosemite Park in Greenburgh on June 10, 2007.

people of all ages to eat smarter and become more physically active.

"The findings of this study are not a surprise to me," said Spano. "We have been saying all along that this is a growing problem, but before this study local statistics on childhood obesity did not exist. While we knew that Westchester was not immune to this national

epidemic, we now have hard data that confirms this and will help us as we move forward in initiating new programs to fight obesity."

From September 2006 through May 2007, the Health Department analyzed data for 8,600 elementary school children in 19 of the 40 Westchester school districts. Among those children, 17.2 percent were found to be overweight and an additional 16.8 percent were considered to be at risk of becoming overweight.

Cont'd page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

"Soul Food Goes Healthy"

Get Fit in Parks

2

Events

3

Resources

4

Faces & Places

5

SANKOFA

“Soul Food Goes Healthy”

Westchester County’s first annual Soul Food Cook-Out was a success. The June 3 event at Yosemite Park in Greenburgh promoted health screenings in the African American community while offering a fun day in the park and lots of free healthy food.

Participants had pre-screenings done for body weight intake, glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure. Once completed, they moved on to enjoy the free cook-out. As a result, nearly 200 screenings were conducted. Monroe College and Union Baptist Church prepared the food using recipes from a healthy soul food cookbook and free copies were given to everyone who attended.

“The event showed everyone that you don’t have to change the way you eat, just make what you eat



County Executive Andy Spano, State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Health Commissioner Joshua Lipsman attend the Soul Food Cook-Out in Greenburgh.



healthy” said Tracey Mitchell, director of African American Affairs. This event will take place twice each summer in different communities.

**Next Soul Food Cook-Out
Sept. 22 in Port Chester.
Location to be announced.**



Get Fit in Westchester Parks

Getting fit doesn’t have to take a lot of time or cost a lot of money. Thirty minutes of moderate physical activity five days a week is recommended to help keep adults in shape. Walking, biking, hiking, cross-country skiing and swimming are all activities that can be done right here in Westchester County parks. Many of these activities are free of charge.

There are more than 17,000 acres in the county’s system of 50 parks, offering some of the most beautiful scenery in the country. Each week-end throughout the year, a wide range of recreational programs and sporting events are offered for people of all ages and interests.

For a complete listing of parks and activities visit us on-line at www.westchestergov.com/parks.

Child Obesity

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Of all the schools participating in the study, 13 had a rate of overweight significantly higher than the national average. The students at these schools comprised 32.8 percent of students surveyed. Ten of the schools, representing 25.4 percent of students surveyed, had a rate significantly below the national average. Schools that did not participate in this project but are interested in joining should call the Health Department at (914) 813-5000.

“We see this report as a call to action and hope that more schools will become involved in the County’s Fit Kids to promote increased physical activity among students,” said Health Commissioner Joshua Lipsman. “We encourage school officials to visit our Fit Kids website at westchestergov.com/health/FitKids.htm to learn about some of the great activities that many schools have already initiated in partnership with Fit Kids.”

Be Fit Westchester was established in 2004 to reinforce the message of Fit Kids with adults.

Through this initiative, residents are encouraged to become more active through a Mall Walk program at The Westchester and through the local travels of the Be Fit Mobile.

The county has also reached out to Westchester restaurateurs to eliminate the use of cooking oils that contain trans fats in their establishments. To date, over 400 restaurants have signed on as “Be Fit Restaurants” by pledging to use healthier cooking oils.

For more information on the Be Fit initiative, please call the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000 or visit www.westchestergov.com/health.



What's happening in Westchester County!

Sisters Beating the Odds & Claiming Wellness Campaign "07"

"KNOWING YOUR STATS IS WHERE IT'S AT!"

Through September 16

Sister to Sister International, a non-profit Yonkers-based group, is conducting a summer-long campaign to encourage black women to have basic screenings that are good indicators of their health status. Call the hotline at (1-888) 403-4878 or e-mail stsi@onebox.com to request a Wellness Booklet and enter a raffle drawing to win fun, valuable prizes.

Summer Breeze Concerts

Tuesday, July 3 through Saturday August 25, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Mount Vernon City Hall Plaza
(914) 665-2420

Consecutive Tuesday and Saturday evenings – 8 weeks of jazz, r&b, gospel, reggae, salsa, classical and more, performed by some of Westchester's finest talent.

8th Annual Arts on Third Street Festival

Sunday, September 23,
For more information please call (914)699-7230

Ben Gordon Family Unity Day

Saturday, August 25
9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Mt. Vernon Hartley Park
(914) 665-2420

Yonkers Riverfest

Saturday, September 8
12 noon to 8:30 p.m.

Downtown Yonkers
(914) 377-6425

Open-Mic Poetry Slam at Body & Soul Essentials

Every 2nd and 4th Friday throughout the year
20 North Broadway, Yonkers
(914) 375-7133

Jazz Night in the Park

Wednesdays, August 8-22
7 p.m.
Riverfront Green Park, Peekskill
(914) 734-4228

Jazz Concerts at the Waterfront

Wednesdays, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
Through August 22
Dobbs Ferry
(914) 693-2203

Jazz at Untermeyer Park

Sundays in August
4 to 6 p.m.
North Broadway, Yonkers
(914) 377-6425

Jazz at Pierson Park at the Hudson River

Fridays in August
6:30 to 8 p.m.
Pierson Park, W.Main St., Tarrytown
(914) 631-8389

Yosemite Park

Thursday, August 2
6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Greenburgh
(914) 989-3600

The Blues Brothas and Sistas Festival: featuring Kenny Lee, Butch Jones, and Fred Smith.

Thursday, August 9

6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Greenburgh
(914) 989-3600

Jazz Legends: featuring Kenny Lee, Butch Jones, and Fred Smith.

Admission is free. All invited to attend. For more information call 989-3600. Free parking at Yosemite Parking lot, just off Rt. 119.

Come to the Summer Movies

Come see a movie under the stars this summer!

Once again, Westchester County will offer several family films in a free outdoor film series this summer called "Screenings Under the Stars."

Offered in conjunction with the Jacob Burns Film Center, this year's remaining films are *Happy Feet* on Thursday, August 23 at the Kensico Dam Plaza in Valhalla. and *Charlotte's Web* on Friday, August 24 at Tibbett's Brook Park. Residents are encouraged to bring blankets, folding chairs and a picnic.

For seasonal information, log on to www.westchestergov.com/parks or call 914-864-PARK.

Want Hundreds of Dollars In Property Tax Rebates?

If you are a homeowner who is already receiving Basic Star*, you may now be eligible for the new Middle Class Star rebate from the state. The state will be sending you a mailing with information needed to apply. If you live in Yonkers, you should get this mailing by Sept. 1, elsewhere in the county, by Oct. 17. The deadline to apply is Nov. 30.

If you need help filling out the form or have not received your rebate materials, please call United Way's 2-1-1 line (Cable phone users please dial 1-800-899-1479 for 2-1-1 services), visit westchestergov.com OR call the state at 1-877-6-STARNY.

*The Basic STAR exemption is a property tax exemption program available to all homeowners who live in their residences. If you are unsure if you are receiving the Basic Star Exemption, call 2-1-1 for information on how to find out, or go to westchestergov.com for phone numbers and links.

If you have not applied for the Basic STAR exemption, you should go to <http://www.orps.state.ny.us/ref/forms/index.htm> for form RP-425. While you will not be able to get Middle Class STAR this year, it may make you eligible for Middle Class STAR in future years.

Note: Seniors who receive Enhanced Star do not need to apply for Middle Class Star. The rebate will be automatic.

Resources

Yonkers Center Offers Free Career Training

The Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) of Westchester in downtown Yonkers provides tuition-free academic and vocational skills training, counseling, job placement and post-employment assistance to eligible adults. Administered by Westchester Community College, EOC prepares students to obtain the credentials they need for employment, career advancement, and advanced educational training.

Program offerings include nurses' aide, home health aide, medical coder and biller, emergency medical technician, a general equivalency diploma, and a "college preparation academy." The center also helps with resume and computer skills, counseling and internships.

For more information, call (914) 606-7621 or stop by at 26 South Broadway, Yonkers.

Fund Helps Business

Do you have a business idea? Want to know how to get started? The Westchester Enterprise Fund can help.

The Enterprise Fund, a division of Community Capital Resources, is Westchester County's preeminent micro-loan program for small and emerging businesses. The fund has several programs that provide access to capital and technical assistance to businesses that can't get commercial bank loans.

The Enterprise Fund, which has a grant specifically for women- and minority-owned businesses, loans up to \$5000 for a start-up business and \$10,000 for an existing business. The Fund also provides technical assistance to borrowers. For information, call: (914) 747-8020

Helping Fathers Become Better Parents

"Fathers Count" is a voluntary 12-week program conducted by Family Services of Westchester.

The program is free of charge to men ages 18 to 30 who are on probation, or about to be released from the county Department of Correction or recently released and who want to become better fathers. The program includes parenting skills workshops, as well as financial literacy. For more information call (914) 964-6767 extension 14.

First Hudson Valley Safety and Health Fair

Learn about keeping safe on the job and have a day of learning and fun activities for the whole family at the first Hudson Valley Safety and Health Fair.

The free event will be at the Westchester County Center in White Plains on Sunday, September 16, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sponsored by the Rochester Institute of Technology-OSHA Education Center, the Voluntary Protection Program Participants Association, and the OSHA Tarrytown Area Office, the fair aims to help stop worker injuries, illness and fatalities (239 in 2005 in New York State) by improving awareness of on-the-job safety and health hazards and promoting safe work practices.

Safety and health workshops will cover topics such as scaffolding; falls; electrical safety; excavations/ trenching; machine guarding; restaurant, retail store and supermarket safety; landscaping; fire safety/emergency preparedness; chemicals; and personal protective equipment.

Booths will address fire hazards, seat belt use, and bike safety. Police will provide free child car seat exchange and free bike helmets.

Participants will also be able to check their blood pressure, heart and breathing, cholesterol, and eyes.

My Sister's Place Opens Mount Vernon Office

My Sisters' Place has opened an office in Mount Vernon, in collaboration with Legal Services of the Hudson Valley and Westchester Hispanic Coalition. The new location is at 100 East 1st Street, Suite

810, and serves Mount Vernon, New Rochelle and Pelham residents. My Sisters' Place offers legal counseling for domestic violence issues, as well as individual crisis intervention, supportive counseling, advocacy for social support, and legal advice, counsel and representation.

My Sisters' Place has two emergency shelters and a 24-hour hotline: (1-800) 298-SAFE (7233). People can see an attorney on a walk-in basis or by calling for an appointment at (914) 813-6883.

Join a Winning Team... Become a Westchester Correction Officer

Correction Officer
Starting Salary - \$46,562
Salary after 4 years - \$73,200.
Exam Date:
Saturday October 27, 2007
Filing Deadline:
Monday August 27, 2007
For more Info:
Captain Wanda Smithson
(914) 231-1370
wvs2@westchestergov.com or
www.westchestergov.com/hr.

Getting Tough on Home Contractors

Due to an increase in complaints about abuses by home improvement contractors, Westchester County is clamping down on licensing regulations and proposing new ones.

All home improvement contractors must be licensed by the Department of Consumer Protection.

To make sure more contractors follow the law, a new bill is being proposed that would allow the seizure of vehicles and equipment used in connection with unlicensed contracting. The bill would also increase the fines for unlicensed contractors who continue to violate the law.

The Consumer Protection Department posts lists on its website of both licensed contractors as well as ones who have a history of complaints. For more information and/or to obtain a license application, go to: www.westchestergov.com/consumer.

Faces and Places



A MESSAGE FROM
THE DIRECTOR

Make a Difference: Join a Board

Tracey Mitchell

Businesses, community organizations, and non-profits all have one thing in common - they all have a "board of directors." The boards make decisions relating to policy and procedures, and serving is a voluntary but rewarding position. **Helping shape the designs of needed programs for youth, affordable housing, and healthcare are some of the areas where you can make a difference.**

My office has received requests from companies to help diversify their boards and will be serving as an informal clearinghouse. If you are interested in serving on a board, please forward your resume and your area of interest to me at: tqm2@westchestergov.com.

Organizations will have the opportunity to come and view resumes for possible appointments to their boards.

Black Scholars

About 400 black students from 38 Westchester schools were honored June 10 at the Black Scholars Recognition reception at Manhattanville College in Purchase. This event was coordinated by the Black Scholars Community Partnership, Urban League of Westchester and Manhattanville College.

Among the many outstanding youngsters was Jason Bond, a Stamford University graduate who became the youngest high yield salesman in the history of Banc of America Securities in New York City. The former Woodlands High School student now covers a \$25 billion dollar account.

Bond returned home to be part of this event and to tell an audience of high school seniors to dismiss their detractors and doggedly pursue their interest.

The African American Heritage Celebration

brought a day of gospel singers, reggae bands, drum corps, choirs, dance and other forms of creativity to **Kensico Dam Plaza on June 24**. Hundreds of people enjoyed the annual "Celebrating Kumba" festival.



Human Rights Commission Gains More Clout

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The amendments add the possible award of punitive damages and civil fines and penalties in all cases. In addition the amended law now provides for reasonable attorney's fees to be awarded to a successful complainant.

In cases of "pattern and practice," the discriminatory conduct affects several individuals. Previously, in such cases, the law only provided the remedy of a cease and desist order and slap on the wrist. However, in many instances, not all of the individuals affected by the discriminatory conduct are willing to come forward because they fear repercussions. If the executive director files the complaint, the action will encompass all individuals affected and pro-

tect the names of the complainants. To now have the ability to award monetary damages in these complaints is a significant accomplishment.

Previously, punitive damages were only available in housing cases. Under the amended law punitive damages may now be assessed in all types of cases, up to a maximum of \$10,000, if it can be shown that the discrimination was malicious, willful or wanton. Civil fines and penalties may now be assessed in housing discrimination cases only. Generally, these fines may not exceed \$50,000. However, in cases where the discrimination has been found to be willful, wanton or malicious fines may be assessed up to a maximum of \$100,000.

Prior to the amendment the law did not provide for the award of attorney's fees. The amendment allowing for attorney's fees to a pre-

vailing complainant will now make it easier for complainants to obtain legal representation when needed.

"These amendments to the law are a major accomplishment for the Human Rights Commission and we hope that it will be more of a deterrent and give potential respondents 'food for thought' before they engage in discriminatory conduct," said Delores Scott Brathwaite, executive director of the commission. "It also reinforces our long-standing message that this county supports and encourages diversity and does not tolerate discrimination."

Anyone who believes they have a case of discrimination should contact the Human Rights Commission at (914) 995-7710 or visit 222 Mamaroneck Ave, Suite 205, in White Plains. Complaints can also be submitted online at www.westchestergov.com/human-rightscommission.

In an emergency we want to contact you

Sign up and you will receive information by e-mail, text message and/or phone before, during or after a major storm or other disaster.

Go to www.westchestergov.com and click on "Subscribe to our news bulletins."

YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL AND ONLY USED IN AN EMERGENCY.

Healthy Recipes from the American Stroke Association

Sweet Potato Muffins

Makes 24

- 1 18.5 oz. package spice cake mix
- 2 13 oz. cans sweet potatoes packed with no liquid or in light syrup, drained if necessary
- 1/2 cup uncooked quick-cooking oatmeal
- 1/2 cup egg substitute
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 T. grated orange zest
- 1/2 cup fresh orange juice
- 1 T. ground cinnamon

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly spray two 12-cup muffin pans with vegetable oil spray or put paper muffin cups in the pans.

In a large mixing bowl, stir all the

ingredients together. Using an electric mixer, beat according to the package directions. Spoon the batter into the muffin cups.

Bake for 22 to 24 minutes, or until a cake tester or wooden toothpick inserted in the center of a muffin in the middle of the pan comes out clean. Transfer the muffins from the pans to a cooling rack. Let cool for 15 to 20 minutes before serving.

Per serving: Calories 115, Total Fat 1.5 g, Saturated Fat 1.0 g, Polyunsaturated Fat 0.0 g, Monounsaturated Fat 0.5 g, Cholesterol 0 mg, Sodium 159 mg, Carbohydrates 24 g, Dietary Fiber 1 g, Sugars 12 g, Protein 2 g

Dietary Fiber: 1½ Other Carbohydrate, ½ Fat

Tip: These muffins will stay fresh for several days in a re-sealable plastic bag. They also freeze well.