



Community Action Solutions

March - April 2005

Community Action honors supporters at conference

State Rep. Susan Winchester (R-Chickasha) was recognized as Legislator of the Year for her support of community action during OKACAA's Legislative Conference held March 28-30 in Oklahoma City.

OKACAA presented Friend of Community Action awards to the Internal Revenue Service and six staff members for assisting member agencies that help low-income individuals complete and electronically file their tax returns. IRS staff members recognized were Karen O'Neill, Bonita Birdsong, Shirley Raymond, Steve Halpern, Carolyn Thorsen and Linda Evans.

The association recognized Washita Valley Community Action Council board member Derrick Thornton, Chickasha. Thornton, who owns a computer technology company, has twice helped the agency restore lost

data when its computer systems crashed.

Carthel Means, superintendent of schools in Marietta, was cited for supporting Cookson Hills Community

Action Foundation for more than 35 years. He currently serves on the advisory council for the Foster Grandparents program.



Washita Valley Community Action Council executive director Charlotte Key (left) presented the Legislator of the Year award to State Rep. Susan Winchester and a Friend of Community Action award to Derrick Thornton.



Cookson Hills Community Action Foundation board chairman Cleon Harrell (left) presented a Friend of Community Action award to Carthel Means.



Internal Revenue Service representatives receiving Friend of Community Action awards were, from left, Linda Evans, Shirley Raymond, Carolyn Thorsen, Steve Halpern and Karen O'Neill.

OKACAA's Legislative Conference



More than 200 people attended the OKACAA Legislative Conference.



Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency's Larry McCroskey (left) chats with Rep. Dale DePue.



Rep. Percy Walker joined Linda Tarpley (right) and Mary Whitman from Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group at a dinner sponsored by OKACAA.



Newly elected state Sen. Charles Wyrick met with Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency staffers, from left, Mary Ann Overall, Kathie Bergmann, Debby Foreman, Jean Cooper, Patti Stump, Diana Behm, Shirley Adams and Candy Watson.



Rep. Mike Jackson chats with Georgia Forthum, executive director, Opportunities, Inc.,



Sen. Richard Lerblance (right) met with KI BOIS Community Action Foundation executive director R. Carroll Huggins outside the Senate Chamber.

Big Five Community Services aids low-income tax filers

Early one Monday morning in April, people were beginning to trickle in to the Durant office of Big Five Community Services to get their tax returns prepared and electronically filed.

Beth Parker, administrative programs coordinator, was helping an elderly couple in her office while Kerry Manning, who normally works in the workforce investment program, helps another man complete his return.

Most of the chairs in the waiting room are vacant -- but it's early. With the Apr. 15 filing deadline less than two weeks away, Parker is gearing up for a final surge.

Seven Southeastern Oklahoma State University accounting students will join Big Five staffers that afternoon to complete returns.

Parker's goal is to complete returns for 800 clients out of the Durant office. Already 780 have been done. During one day earlier in the filing season, state and federal returns for 70 low-income clients were prepared.

She expects another 700 returns to be filed in Ardmore where Paul Hallan, county coordinator, and Rubye Gates, intake clerk from the Big Five office, are assisting a group of volunteers at a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance site located in a library. By early afternoon, all six volunteers were helping clients.



Kerry Manning, workforce development specialist at Big Five Community Services, assists a client with his tax return.



Big Five Community Services placed signs in Durant, Coalgate and Ada to publicize the tax return preparation service. Pictured are, from left, Kim Harkey, Natalie McGee, Beth Parker and Kerry Manning.

Parker, who has been preparing tax returns for Big Five clients for 20 years, promoted the service in a variety of ways.

Large signs proclaiming "We Do Free Taxes" were erected in Durant, Coalgate and Ada.

Parker told of an elderly man who came into the office after seeing the sign and asked, "What's the gimmick? There's nothing free." She assured him there was no gimmick and no charge for completing and filing the federal and state returns.

She created a challenge between Head Start programs in all counties served by Big Five. The Head Start teacher referring the most parents received a

\$100 voucher for supplies and parents were given a ticket that was put in a drawing for a \$25 Wal-Mart gift card.

Posters were placed near time clocks in local businesses and she even took a crew of tax preparers to one major employer to do returns in the break room.

Big Five is one of 17 members of the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies (OKACAA) providing tax preparation assistance without charge to income eligible clients.

The community action agencies are providing the services as part of the Oklahoma Asset Development Project. OKACAA members have joined forces with the Internal Revenue Service and Oklahoma Department of Commerce to help low-income residents file their returns, increase their financial literacy and begin developing assets.



Paul Hallan, Big Five county coordinator, and Rubye Gates, intake clerk, review client profiles at the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance site in Ardmore.

Wheelchair accessible house is first for Deep Fork Community Action

Deep Fork Community Action Agency's Self-Help Housing program has constructed its first wheelchair accessible house, Jeff Schuman, executive director, reports.

The house in Bristow was designed to eliminate stairs and make doorways larger.

The house was completed only

months after work began with help from family and friends, according to news reports.

U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Division acted as funder for the project with Deep Fork serving as the contractors.

The homeowners are required to work on the project.



U.S. Rep. Tom Cole (R-4th) met with Oklahoma Community Action staff members attending the National Community Action Foundation conference in Washington. Pictured are, from left, Jessie Rae Stone, Debbie Morey, Brent Morey, Sherri Snider, Rep. Cole, Karen Nichols, Rosa Lee Conner and Tina Battiest. (Photo provided by Delta Community Action Foundation)

Kelly Thomas wins national Head Start award

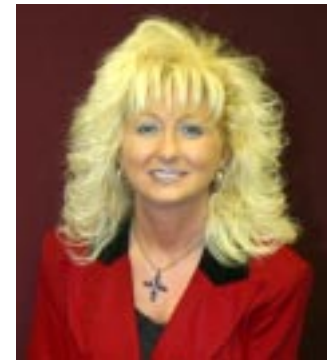
The Nation Head Start Association has announced that Kelly Thomas, Early Head Start director for Little Dixie Community Action Agency, has won the 2005 Helen Hollingshed Taylor Memorial Scholarship – an award that is presented to only one person nationally each year.

Each state selects one scholarship application to forward to national competition. Thomas' application was selected by the Oklahoma Head Start Association to compete nationally for the award. This scholarship program was established in honor of Helen Taylor who served as Associate

Commissioner of the Head Start Bureau from 1994 until her death in 2000. A few of the historic changes made under Taylor's leadership include the creation of Early Head Start and the first performance standards for children under age three.

The National Head Start Association presents the annual scholarship to a Head Start or an Early Head Start director currently enrolled in an advanced degree program. The \$3,000 scholarship will be presented to Thomas at the National Head Start Association's 32nd Annual Training Conference in Orlando, Florida on May 26, 2005.

Thomas plans to apply the scholarship toward the cost of completing her master's degree. Thomas is currently enrolled in the



Kelly Thomas

Masters Degree program at the University of Oklahoma and expects to complete her Masters Degree in Leadership and Management by December 2005.

Thomas has worked for Little Dixie Community Action Agency for nearly 20 years and has served as the agency's Early Head Start director since 1999.

OWHAC announces scholarship winners

Latt Jeffrey, a Wilburton High School senior, has been selected to receive the \$1,000 Ted Allen/David Walker Scholarship, John Jones, KI BOIS Community Action Foundation housing director, announced.

He will be presented the award during the Oklahoma Weatherization and Housing Advisory Council's (OWHAC) Housing and Energy Conference on Aug. 18 in Oklahoma City.

A \$250 scholarship will go to Sara Bryce and Morgan Miller.

One hundred dollar scholarships are being awarded to Lauren Knighten, William Behm, Michael Horton, Arin Crabb and Kerri Horschler.



In order to get fathers more involved in their children's education, Little Dixie Community Action Agency's Early Head Start and Head Start programs have begun a monthly "Dad's Day." Fathers and father figures, such as grandpas, big brothers and uncles, are invited to come take part in fun activities with their children. This dad is helping his daughter with hand paint. (Photo provided by Little Dixie Community Action Agency)



Jim Sconzo, executive director, Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties, speaks at the dedication ceremony of the agency's new headquarters.



Municipal officials, state lawmakers, business leaders, state and federal agency officials and Community Action representatives participated in the ribbon cutting ceremony at the Jim Sconzo Community Action Center in Oklahoma City.

Community Action Agency moves to historic Capitol Hill area

The Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties has moved its offices into the former John A. Brown department store building in the Capitol Hill area of Oklahoma City.

The renovated building was dedicated as the Jim Sconzo Community Action Agency Center of Oklahoma City.

"If it wasn't for the city, we could not have done this," declared Jim Sconzo, executive director. The city deeded the building to the agency and provided funding for its renovation.

City Manager Jim Couch and other municipal officials joined state legislators, state and federal agency officials and business leaders for the official ribbon cutting ceremony on April 7.

The Capitol Hill area is undergoing an economic revival. The nearby Oklahoma River is being developed into a recreational area.

"We're in the Main Street program helping revitalize this part of town," Sconzo said.

The John A. Brown department store

was built in 1947 but closed in the mid-70s as the city expanded and modern shopping malls were built.

It was later given to the City of Oklahoma City. It served as storage for old furniture and equipment for about 15 years before being given to the Community Action Agency.

About \$3 million in city funds were used to fund the renovation to the 53,000 square foot building.

The Community Action Agency entered into a partnership with an adjacent church to provide parking for employees during the week. In exchange for making the lot available during the week, Community Action paved the parking lot.

About 65 employees moved to the new offices. The agency's prior home was an old school building that had served as the agency's headquarters for the past 20 years. Sconzo said the agency will continue to maintain the old building and park vans on the lot.

In addition to administrative offices, the newly renovated building is home for the community services, economic

development, Head Start, housing/maintenance, special projects, Turning Point and Weatherization programs.

Sconzo said he wants to make the facility a community building. A meeting room has been constructed on the ground floor which will be available for use by community groups.

"The agency now has a first class facility. Our presence on Main Street serves as an anchor to other business development and our employees have brought economic stimulus to the area," Sconzo noted.

Sconzo also praised the project partners Beck Architects and J.L. Walker construction company.

"It was a great team," he said.

The city also deeded the adjacent J.C. Penny building to the agency. Sconzo said the agency is currently looking for ways to use the building.

The agency has about 500 employees spread over more than 30 offices in Oklahoma and Canadian counties.

The new office is at 319 S.W. 25th St., Oklahoma City, 73109. The phone number remains (405) 232-0199.

'Road to Work' programs win award at Partners Conference

The "Road to Work" program, spearheaded by KI BOIS Community Action Foundation, received a "Best Practices Award" at the Partners Conference for Oklahoma Families.

The job access program was launched in 1999 with six transit systems serving 13 counties and has grown to include 19 transit systems with routes in 45 counties.

The primary purpose is to get low-income people to work, explained Roger Bartlett, grant writer/consultant to KI BOIS.

Over 3,000 people ride the transit vehicles to jobs over 165 routes in Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas and

Texas. Many of the biggest employers for rural Oklahoma residents are not in Oklahoma.

Routes are custom designed to meet the needs of employers. Normally there must be at least four people on the job route. If the vehicles are not fully utilized by low-income people, others can ride.

"Routes run 24/7," Bartlett said. Many of the job routes run during non-traditional hours, he added.

The program's primary funding

comes from a \$3.2 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration. Other funding comes from other federal programs such as Workforce Investment Act and private sources.

In addition, there are per ride fares that range between 50 cents and a dollar. In some cases employers pay the fare, according to Bartlett.

Some 770 people are employed by the various participating transit systems. Vehicles pile up a total of 235,000 miles monthly.

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Dr. Belinda McCharen, associate director, Career Tech (l), presented the Best Practices Award to Charla Sloan and Roger Bartlett, KI BOIS Community Action Foundation, at the Partners Conference for Oklahoma Families. (Photo provided by Oklahoma Department of Human Services)

Youth Service Day sponsored by Southwest Community Action Group

Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group hosted a Youth Service Day in Altus on April 16.

The event was a free sports camp for children that promoted fun physical activity. Youth from Jackson and Greer counties taught younger children the basis of soccer, basketball, break

dancing as a means of promoting physical activity.

With the number of children approaching 50, there was a lot of one-on-one interaction.

RSVP volunteers assisted with the event that was held in the Altus City Gym.

INCA Head Start hosts storytelling night

The INCA Community Services Tishomingo Head Start program hosted a family storytelling night on March 10.

Featured speaker was Patrick Mitchell, a nationally-recognized father-involvement speaker who is also known as the "Down to Earth Dad."

There were over 70 parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles who attended and participated in family activities.

The event was to celebrate fatherhood and teach a method of involving fathers in telling of true stories of their childhood as a tool to enhance early literacy.