

Mockingbird Times

Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth



March 2005

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak out Across the Nation

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Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-5437 (KIDS)

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Youth Advocacy Day Exceeds Expectations

DARIUS REYNOLDS

THE 2005 YOUTH ADVOCACY DAY, SPONSORED by Advocates for System Kids and Youth (ASK-Y) in Olympia, Washington was a great achievement. Over 90 young people and service providers came to support each other and meet their legislators. There are three bills ASK-Y is supporting. House Bill 2002, sponsored by House Representative Mary Lou Dickerson, extends services for youth in foster care until they are 21 (if they are in school). Senate Bill 5583, sponsored by Senator Debbie Regala, requires DSHS to provide better training to CPS employees who work with adolescents who have been abused and neglected. Senate Bill 5763, sponsored by Senator James Hargrove, is designed to improve the quality and quantity of services for homeless people needing mental health and chemical dependency treatment.

We started our day in the Cherberg building at 10am. House of Representatives Senior Staff Jon Hedegard explained to us how to talk to our legislators. We then watched a brief video presentation provided by Cocoon House, an independent living program that provides services for youth in Snohomish County, Washington.



During lunch the youth had a chance to talk about their experience with homelessness and foster care. While we were eating, State Representatives Ruth Kagi and Eric Pettigrew spoke to us. Representative Pettigrew said that he is constantly thinking of youth and encourages them to let him know what he should be doing to help. Pettigrew stated, "We are your legislators; we work for you."

This year youth read poetry and talked about issues that concerned them at an open mic session in the State Reception Hall. One of the youth, Robert Duff, spoke about the importance of drug and mental health counseling. Duff had this to say, "I am proud to be down here today advocating for our needs; we are not supposed to react to the system--it is supposed to react to us."

A few other youth wrote anonymously about their thoughts about Advocacy Day. One youth said, "It was empowering to see people fighting for equal rights today and it felt so good to be apart of that." All in all it was a great

day and I hope to see a lot more people there next year so we can make things better in this state.



Washington State Governor Christine Gregoire with Mockingbird Times Reporter Jamica Henderson. Photo by Robert Shackelford.

READ ECHO SPEED'S REACTION TO MEETING THE GOVERNOR ON PG 4

Mockingbird Presents: Exploring the Dream

Mockingbird is proud to feature a new series celebrating the contributions that African-American and other under-represented citizens and cultures have made to American history.

In this installment, Mockingbird Reporters Anthony Guess and Ashley Grant recognize the contributions of African American historical figures who made a difference, but whose lives aren't often discussed in the history books, and Contributing Writer Emile Redmond explores the impact of Malcolm X. Next month, read Mockingbird Reporter Princess Hollins' in-depth look at the Black Panthers. In addition to the articles our reporting staff is busy preparing, we want to challenge you out there to send us articles, poetry and artwork that illustrates the many contributions made and obstacles overcome by people and cultures who are so often unrecognized in our textbooks and media coverage. Is there an important figure or event in your community or culture that you want more people to know about? Do you have a personal story or account that you would like to share? Contact us at newspaper@mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437) to find out how to get your story heard.

Unsung Heroes of Black History

ASHLEY GRANT



MARTIN LUTHER KING, MALCOLM X, HARRIET TUBMAN, AND SOJOURNER TRUTH are most frequently mentioned when discussing Black History. But there were many other figures who played key roles and deserve to be recognized for their deeds.

Blacks faced many problems in the struggle for equality in this society. Some people who played significant roles in this struggle include Ruby Bridges, Medgar Evers, John Mercer Langston, and Ida B. Wells.

Ruby Bridges: As a six-year-old girl Bridges was the first student to integrate New Orleans public schools. She was escorted to school everyday by United States Marshals for the entire year. Even as a young girl, Bridges prayed for those people who swamped her chanting and screaming because they did not want schools to integrate. Bridges is a special person because she showed people that you can make a difference no matter how old you are.

Medgar Evers: Medgar was an educated man who served his country. He began working as a salesman, and also providing services for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

People (NAACP). While working for the NAACP, Evers was passionate about equal rights in education in Mississippi. He advocated for this cause until the day he passed. On June 12th, 1963 Evers was shot down in front of his residence. Evers showed true aspiration for what he did. He was aware of the consequences that could occur and he still went forth with what he believed in. He was a true "soldier."

John Mercer Langston: Langston was born a free slave in 1829. By the time he was five years old he was already an orphan, growing up in both black and white households. At fourteen he was enrolled in Oberlin College, where he received his Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Arts. Langston actively advocated for equal treatment of Blacks who were soldiers in the Civil War. He was also a professor of Law at Howard University. While at Howard he was also the Dean of the Law Department, Vice President, and Acting President of the college. Langston was the first black man elected in public office in the United States. Langston ran for Congress in Virginia and he accomplished that dream. Langston was recommended for Vice President of the United States twice on behalf of the Republican Party. John Mercer Langston is important because his accomplishments illustrate that you do not have to follow someone else's footsteps, you can make your own.

Ida B. Wells: Born in 1862 Wells was the eldest of eight children. Wells faced many obstacles, from being the eldest child to being a black woman trying to become something in life. She graduated from

UNsung HEROES CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Quote of the Month

"It is often easier to become outraged by injustice half a world away than by oppression and discrimination half a block from home."

Carl T. Rowan

UNSUNG HEROES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Rust College. She then became an educator in Memphis, Tennessee. Wells was also the editor of a newspaper called *The Free Speech and Headlight*. While working for their corporation, Wells began advocating for equal rights. In 1909, Wells was asked to become apart of a committee called "Committee 40." This group is now known as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). The NAACP is the oldest civil rights organization in the country. Wells exemplifies human endurance, meaning that she could adapt to any situation and make the best of it. She is also of importance because she passed her knowledge to others.

I would like to say to you as the reader to look more into your history. Black History shouldn't be just celebrated in February it should be celebrated everyday. I also believe that other cultures and histories should be celebrated everyday as well. Isn't our country called The Great American Melting Pot?

Sources: www.ikwdpl.org/iwhohio/barn-ida.htm, www.afroamhistory.about.com/library/weekly/aa12003.htm, www.rubybridges.org/story, www.brightmoments.com



Letter from the Editor

JIM THEOFELIS

This issue of the *Mockingbird Times* gives our readers a good sense of how busy the youth and staff have been over the past month. February 6th was our annual fund raiser in which we raised over \$20,000 and also provided our guests with great food and entertainment. The week following the fundraiser, The Mockingbird Society, through our **Advocates for System Kids and Youth (ASK-Y)** Advocacy Coalition sponsored an **Advocacy Training Day** on Thursday the 10th and the annual **Youth Advocacy Day** in Olympia on February 11th. Several legislators took the time to meet with youth regarding the issues and barriers facing homeless youth, youth in foster care and youth who are exiting foster care. It is so rewarding working with the amazing professionals from community organizations who work to put this day together, including Curtis from **Youthcare**, Valerie from the **City of Seattle**, Sara and Laura from **Friends of Youth**, Sola from **Cocoon House**, Robert from **Partnership for Youth**, Charland and Lisa from **Central Youth and Family Services** and of course Shannon, Lauren and Erin from **Mockingbird Society**. Additionally, there were several youth who accepted leadership roles in the planning and coordination of Youth Advocacy Day. A special treat for Mockingbird youth included being invited by the **Commission of African-American Affairs** to

participate in an afternoon meeting with **Governor Gregoire**. It really was a fabulous day that involved so much extra work by so many folks. Empowering young people to be active in positively shaping their own lives and their communities is a critical component to Mockingbird's mission. I am so appreciative to the legislators, community organizations and the young people themselves for their commitment, passion and expertise.

Jim Theofelis
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Making Your Path

RICO EVANS



GOING TO SCHOOL AND WORK WHILE WORRYING ABOUT MY HOUSING is something I don't think someone my age should have to stress over. Sometimes I feel like giving up, but then I look back at my mom and dad, and I just think in my head that I want my life to be more successful. I look at what they did, and I don't think either one of them graduated from high school. They could not take care of any of their kids--me being in foster care is proof of that. This is my fuel for living my life and accomplishing as much as possible, to be the opposite of my parents. My grades may not be the best, but I have not quit yet. I work at a job that is helping me a lot with my writing, school and social life.

Right now I'm going through what they call "senioritis." This is when you don't feel like doing work, and you feel like no one can tell you anything. Being 18 (an adult), also doesn't help me focus on school. I run my own life and having this attitude is part of the reason why I'm not doing so good in school. Maybe I'm not ready to run my own life, maybe I still need help with my responsibilities. I just wish I felt that way in the beginning of the year. Now the best thing for me to do is own up to my mistakes and fix them.

I don't think that kids should blame foster care for them not doing good in school. I think that we should use that as motivation to be successful so that we can get good jobs that provide for our own kids, so they don't live a life with as many obstacles as we have had. In some people's minds, foster kids have a bad name. By doing good in school foster kids can set an example for other kids in the system, which will improve the percentage of kids graduating for high school who are in foster care. That way kids in the future will do good in school because that is what is expected of them. Some people choose to follow in other people's paths and others choose to make their own. I started a new path where others may have stopped to take a break.

Thanks For Your Support!

The Rusty Pelican Café, Bryan Holloway & Pyramid Alehouse, Dan Salvatora & Clipper Vacations, The Cheesecake Factory, Serni Reeves & Pacific NW Ballet, Michelle Deanda & Whole Foods Market, Starbucks, Seattle City Councilman Peter Steinbrueck, Treehouse, The Wizard of Oz, Cheryl Naeseth & CJN Design, Russell Stevenson, Sam Throm, Bennett & Doland, Pete Guzzo & the Jefferson Park Golf Club, Thea Sand & Emmanuel's Oriental Rugs, Meredith Ouelette & Educational Tutoring & Consulting, Ted Baseler & Ste. Michele Winery, Paper Daisies, Melissa Newbill & Chihuly Studios, Susan Kaufman & Serafina Country Italian Restaurant, Rob Carroll, Erika Carter, Anderson, Patterson, & Schmitz Group, David Bennett & Bennett Glass, Anne McGowan & Coupe Rokei, Silvana Bruxel & Sephora, Detlef Schrempf Foundation, Captain Larry Kerner & the Seattle Ferry Service, Rodney Hines & the Microsoft Corporation, Kathy Evans Look, Carmen Palmer & the Seattle Center Foundation, Ross Mickel & the Ross Andrew Winery, Michael O'Neill & Salon Towl, Kristin Bushnell & Mariners Care, Joe Fugere & Tutta Bella Neopolitan Pizzeria, Adam Slapin, Brad & Kristi Hartman, Heather Peel & the Pacific Science Center, Joan Cseslaw & Joan of Arts, Kisaku Sushi Restaurant, Beth McCaw & Book-It Repertory Theatre, James Weimann & May Thai Restaurant, Virginia Mason Medical Center, Barbara Leuty, Bess Heintschel, Constance L. Gold, Florence K. Manos, George & Bev Theofelis, Jean Roberts, Kathy Kingery, Sandy & Dan Kraus, Goldman Sachs Philanthropy Fund, The Seattle Foundation, Donna Mathus, Robert Beishline, Mike Throm, Maryel Duzan, Sherry Barello, Lisa Dobson-Gould & Mark Gould, Stephanie Garlich & Jeffrey Ried, Marie Westermeier, Dr. Maggie McKenna, Sandra Everlove, James & Toni Theofelis, Anne Fortun, Davidson Dodd, Judith Mitchell, Juanita Frankovich, Carol Sue Janes, Leslie Richardson, Susan O'Brien, John & Cindy Angiulo, Carolyn Kelso, Anna Trombley, Robert & Erin Shackelford, Kimberly Mills, Lynn Jorgensen, Ron Kaplan & Patty Lyman, David & Toni Richardson, Beverly Deckelmann, Lois B. Sohn, Arlee B. Barello, Betty Jean Williams, Andrew Stephens & Jean Morse Stephens, James & Erica Keblas, Maria Switalska, Eric Steiner & Victoria Scott-Steiner, Steven Gelb & Laura Lippold, Tina Petesch, Annemarie Youngkin, Caleb Baker, Pamela Keller, Lisa Stuebing, Jamie S. Schmitz, Thomas Baker, Felicity Wilson, Eva Hennings, Siri Throm-Saxe, Grace Evans, Lisa Machette, Glen & Teresa Alger, Violette Franz, Karen Haggard, Stacey Globerman, Rick Frederick, Wendy B. Marlowe, PhD, John Reinke, Representative Eric Pettigrew 37th District, Representative Ruth Kagi 32nd District, Representative Mary Lou Dickerson 36th District, Representative Shay Schual-Berke 33rd District, Representative Ed Murray 43rd District, Uma Ahluwalia Assistant Secretary Children' Administration, Governor Gregoire, Regina Jones, Commission on African-American Affairs, Jo Anne Anderson and the 2100 building staff.

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a private non-profit organization dedicated to building a world class foster care system and improving the other systems that serve children and adolescents involved in homelessness and foster care. The *Mockingbird Times* is a monthly newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth employees of Mockingbird Society are paid between \$7.50 and \$8.50 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, poetry and are compensated up to \$25 per published piece. The *Mockingbird Times* has a monthly circulation of 60,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the U.S.A, through a private distribution list and as an insert in *Real Change*, *South Star* and *Seattle Sun* community newspapers. Youth involvement is the key to the philosophy, values, and success of The Mockingbird Society and, as such, youth are involved in all aspects of organizational development and decision-making. Donations to The Mockingbird Society may be tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated. No part of the *Mockingbird Times* may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright 2005 The Mockingbird Society.

A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox

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Donations may be tax deductible and all donors receive the *Mockingbird Times*. Enclosed, please find my check made payable to Mockingbird Society in the amount of: \$ _____

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Exploring the Dream: Soldiers in the Fight for Equality Malcolm X Has Lasting Impact

EMILE REDMOND

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY IS VERY IMPORTANT for African-Americans all around the nation. It is a reminder of how far we've come as a people, and it honors the many African-Americans who went out of their way to make a difference in society. One of the people who stands out in my head is Malcolm X. Malcolm X is arguably the most important figure in the civil rights movement aside from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., yet he doesn't seem to get the appreciation he deserves. Both of these great men set a high standard for African-American people, and both of their lives were taken by assassin's bullets. I believe that Malcolm X doesn't get the proper respect he deserves because of his aggressive take on life; his "militant" state of mind seems to eclipse the major role he played in getting us African-Americans to where we are today.

Malcolm X was Muslim, and sadly some people who observe him from the outside looking in let that be one reason he doesn't get as much respect as Dr. King. One reason for this might be because America was built on Protestant Christianity, and when people see leaders who aren't Christian they use it as a flaw against them. Just like when John F. Kennedy was running for President, many Americans looked right pass the fact that he was trying to make the world better, and focused on his religion.

What many people don't understand is that both Dr. King and Malcolm X were looking for the same thing: equal opportunity for African-Americans. The difference between the two men was their outlook at life and how they handled certain situations. Dr. King believed in achieving equal opportunity through a non-violent approach. Malcolm X, seeing how blacks were being treated by going by that approach, like still being manhandled by law enforcement and not getting equal rights, figured that if they weren't going to give us equal opportunity, then they would have to take it by force. Many blacks were looking for a leader with this stance; someone who showed no fear and was educated. Malcolm fit this role perfectly. It was like African Americans needed a coach to lead them through rough times.

Due to his actions, Malcolm X quickly became a feared force to racial groups like the Ku-Klux-Klan and

many other racially segregated communities in America. He began to recruit strong African American men to the Nation of Islam, and became a household name in the African-American society. Malcolm believed strongly in self defense. He encouraged blacks to defend themselves at all costs if they felt threatened. Though many people chose Dr. King's, "turn the other cheek" strategy, a large number of blacks chose Malcolm's way. Malcolm would constantly speak to teenagers around New York, telling them to defend themselves' "by any means necessary." He later became famous for that saying and became a national hero. Malcolm went from state to state, demanding his rights, whether it was in a school or at government buildings. He showed no fear at any point and time in his life. Malcolm would go up to government buildings, bringing a large number of Nation of Islam members with him, and make civil rights the main topic in meetings. Federal agencies and FBI units were so intimidated by Malcolm they would put microphones on his clothes and tap his phone lines so that they could follow his every step. Malcolm knew that what he was doing to make a difference was a constant threat on his life, but he believed so strongly that we should get the same rights as anyone else he never gave up.

"Look at yourselves. Some of you teenagers, students. How do you think I feel and I belong to a generation ahead of you - how do you think I feel to have to tell you, 'We, my generation, sat around like a knot on a wall while the whole world was fighting for its human rights - and you've got to be born into a society where you still have that same fight.' What did we do, who preceded you? I'll tell you what we did. Nothing. And don't you make the same mistake we made...."

—Malcolm X

Some people say that Malcolm had too much power for an individual person. They thought that his military stand point was too violent and wasn't setting an example for young blacks. But really if you look into it, he paved the way for civil right groups like the Black Panthers, who also took what some call a militant approach to eradicating racism, and demanding equal rights. If we sit back and think about it, where would we be if it weren't for Malcolm X? If it weren't for him taking matters into his own hands and fighting for equal rights, would we be where at today? Yes we might have more rights, but we probably wouldn't be viewed as a force now if it wasn't for his bravery and courage. I'm not here to say that Malcolm X was the most important person in African-American history, but for the price he paid for us to be where we are at today, I think that he should get more recognition from everyone else.

Sources: <http://www.malcolm-x.org/>, *Autobiography of Malcolm X as told by Alex Haley*

Homeless Youth Benefit Rocks

ROBERT TEMPLE DUFF

ON JANUARY 28, 2005, there was a benefit for Seattle's 45th Street Homeless Youth Clinic at Neumo's, on Capitol Hill. Four local bands came together to support a free clinic that serves homeless youth and young adults: Merdock, The Chinese Finger Cuffs, ZEKE, and the Super Suckers.

Jen Briar-Bonpane, Youth Clinic Coordinator for the 45th Street Clinic, stated that the benefit came about, in part, because the clinic has been suffering major cutbacks in the last couple of years. One consequence is that they cannot afford malpractice insurance anymore. This means that the clinic can no longer cover the volunteer doctors on staff, and now can only let doctors with their own insurance volunteer. It is hard to find doctors with their own insurance because most hospitals and doctor office's only cover doctors in their employ while they are at the hospital or in the office.

The result has been that the amount of volunteer doctor's on staff at the 45th Street Clinic has dropped drastically in recent years. Without their continued help, the clinic would be forced to shut down.

Around the time the clinic started seeing the impact of this decision, some of the volunteers had an idea to hold a benefit concert to raise money for the clinic. The clinic was offered a night at the EMP and is currently working on trying to recruit some major acts.

One of the Naturopathic Doctors, "Doc P" as he is fondly called by the patients of the clinic, just happens to sing in a band "The Chinese Finger Cuffs." Doc P heard of the concert idea and ran with it.

The show was sponsored courtesy of the Bastyr Naturopathic Clinic, Neumo's, Piccora Pizza and all of the bands playing. The show was sold out by 10pm. They made around \$5000, and the money is going to fund blankets, hygiene supplies, eye exams and bus tickets for the homeless youth clinic.

Murdock was the first band to play. They were high energy and really got the crowd started. They were followed by Doc P's band, The Chinese Finger Cuffs, who really put a lot of work into this show both on stage and off. They sounded like a combination of late 70's rock and some early 80's glam rock. Halfway through the set Doc P stopped to say a few words about how important it is to take care of each other. He then thanked everyone for their support.

Next up was ZEKE, a punk rock band with high energy and a fast pace, had the crowd roaring for more and more. When the Super Suckers took stage, the place was lit up and filled with cheers and screams of approval. Their set started off slow and eventually got it going but was nowhere near the fast-paced guitar solos of Mark from Zeke.

At the end of a great show everyone came out on top—the youth got money for their clinic, the crowd got to see a great show, and the bands, well they got the best thing of all, the applause.

Father of Black History

ANTHONY GUESS



DR. CARTER G WOODSON SOUNDS LIKE A NAME that everyone should know. However, many people don't realize what he has done. Woodson is known as the father of Black History; an intensely dedicated soldier in the cause of African-American freedom. Dr. Carter received a PhD from Harvard and later became a contributing writer for the Journal of Negro History Bulletin and author of more than thirty books. As time went on, Woodson noticed that African-Americans weren't included in text books. In response, Woodson initiated the annual February observance of Negro History Week in 1926. Woodson chose February because of two men who made a huge impact to end slavery: Abraham Lincoln, whose birthday is on the February 12th, and Frederick Douglass, whose birthday is on February 14th. By the 1970's, Negro History Week was expanded to become Black History Month. According to Carter, "If a race has no history it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world and it stands in danger of being exterminated." Dr. Carter initiated Negro History Week

to preserve the history of African Americans. His act was as important as Rosa Parks deliberately sitting in the front of the bus to earn respect for all blacks, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of equality for all African American people.

As senior in High School, I don't think that schools show how important Black History is. Throughout the year the only time we go in depth about African American History is in February. And every year it seems like I learn the same things over and over again. Racism is still rising and becoming an issue, but a lot of people act like it doesn't exist and try to throw a white sheet over it. I believe that in order to end this epidemic that our society ignores; Black History should be part of the school curriculum throughout the entire year, just like European History. Without an equal focus of both subjects we're never going to be at a comfortable state of mind for either blacks or whites. To hear only about European American's contributions to history, it empowers whites and makes the contributions and actions of other cultures and figures disappear. As an African American I understand the importance in learning the history of my people. For example, knowing the past can help prepare your future and making sure that it does not repeat itself. It feels good knowing that your ancestors fought against something they felt was unfair and it inspires you to do the same.

Source: <http://www.chipublib.org/002branches/woodson/woodsonbib.html>



HEY YOU!

We are looking for articles, poetry, artwork and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or homelessness. If you want to be published in the *Mockingbird Times*, call us at 206-323-5437 or email newspaper@mockingbirdsociety.org. Check out www.mockingbirdsociety.org for more information.

Mockingbird Fundraiser a Lively Event

DARIUS REYNOLDS

ON FEBRUARY 6TH 2005 THE FOURTH ANNUAL MOCKINGBIRD Society Fundraiser was held in our new offices off of Rainer Avenue in Seattle. The fundraiser was quite a lively event. We had a silent auction with some really nice items for bid, like a beautiful horse head made of all glass and an Xbox game console. The Rusty Pelican Café provided some delicious food. Rob Carroll and band played some lovely music for everyone. Over 100 people attended this event. *Mockingbird Time's* Satellite Reporter Rico Evans co-facilitated the event with Executive Director Jim Theofelis. Evans and Reporter Anthony Guess told their stories in front of the guests about their work at Mockingbird. Guess stated that "Mockingbird is not a job where you come to work and just start working; it's a job where you can build relationships and your boss asks you about your day." Reporters Courtney Konietzko and Echo Speed provided a short

presentation about a documentary project that is being produced by Wild Geese Productions. Konietzko and Speed are working with Wild Geese on this project. A two-minute clip of the film was shown at the fundraiser. Seattle City Council member Peter Steinbrueck talked about the importance of giving youth a chance to be heard. Degalle Cooper also spoke about her experience providing respite care to the Mockingbird Foster Family Constellation Project. About her speech, Konietzko stated, "Degalle gave a really moving speech about the need for a break...the need for foster parents to get respite too so they can continue to do a good job. Cooper talked about taking in a child with problems, a child labeled as difficult and the toll it took due to not getting a break when they both needed it. When she talked about that it reminded me of the struggle I had with my parents and how my mom needed respite."

This year Mockingbird made \$21,000. Thank you to all the Mockingbird Society supporters and we hope you all enjoyed the fundraiser. 



MBT Reporter Darius Reynolds and guest Robert Duff
All photos by Mockingbird Staff



Rico Evans and young guest



Seattle Post-Intelligencer staff Kimberly Mills and
Brad Wong

For Your Information: all incoming Letters to the Editor should be addressed to Mockingbird Editorial Staff and will be opened by Editorial Staff. All incoming correspondence to reporting staff under 18 years of age will be opened first by Mockingbird Editorial Staff.

Pet Therapy Changes Lives

SHAKURA FELDER



DO YOU KNOW OF SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN STRUGGLING with depression or an illness? Have you tried everything that you possibly could to help that person but nothing that you seem to do works? If you or a person you know has a strong interest in animals, consider getting involved in an animal-assisted therapy program. These programs, which are overseen by skilled professionals, rely on animals to help humans improve their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual skills.

Animal-assisted therapy programs have proven to have a long-term effect on participants. According to the Delta Society, children living in homes with an animal have more empathy than children without any pets. In long-term facilities, the presence of an animal is entertaining to everyone in some type of way. To find out more about the Delta Society and the Animal-Assisted Therapy Program, visit www.deltasociety.org or give them a call at (425) 226-7357.

Many group homes and other facilities use animal-assisted therapy programs. The Canine Connections program at Echo Glen Children's Center is one of these programs. Jo Simpson is the founder of the Canine Connections Program. This pet therapy program is for youth between 11 and 20 years of age who have committed felonies and are incarcerated at the facility. Youth in this program learn responsibility, patience, and communication, as well as other useful skills. I chatted with Jo Simpson about this program. Here's what she had to say:

Shakura Felder: How does this program meet specific goals for participants?

Jo Simpson: The program helps improve the lives of its young people, promoting mental growth and vocational development, and providing skill building as well as educational opportunities to the youth. The Canine Connections components include pet therapy, rescue and adoption, vocational and educational opportunities and a service dog program.

Felder: What is the outcome of most participants in the program?

Simpson: The students seem to have learned

compassion and patience. They are more accepting of others and can work better with their staff in the cottage. Several of the students have found a job working with animals either at a shelter, training facility, boarding kennel or veterinarian office.

Felder: Which success story were you most influenced by?

Simpson: I was deeply impacted by a story of a dog named Buddy and a 14-year-old gang member who'd been incarcerated. He had shown no empathy for the year that he had been here locked up. We wanted to reach out to him somehow and thought that the dog program would be able to help him. We hoped that the teen would become more social and develop a sense of empathy. Buddy was the last dog to be selected by a handler because of his obnoxious behavior and the fact that he was unattractive. The teen was paired with Buddy and was very upset because he felt that Buddy was not "cool." I pulled the teen aside and explained to him how this dog had great potential. I also told him that this dog would be a more loyal friend than any of his gang could ever be and that this dog would worship the ground that he walks on. That's when I saw a slight smile on the boy's face.

Within days, the teen became more involved with Buddy. He helped with Buddy's make-over and re-conditioning, too. They became very bonded. Soon, the boy's tough gang member image began to change into a more positive one. He went from being angry with his assignment to Buddy, to telling everyone that Buddy was the best dog in the class.

The teen benefited from the program because he began to change his behavior. He had more compassion and empathy than when he first started out in the program. He understood how his actions created a lot of pain and suffering in others. Before he didn't have any remorse for what he had done in his past. Now it was the other way around, and he learned how to deal with his remorse through the program. Buddy was given a second chance by the Canine Connections program at Echo Glen and by the relationship and commitment that was invested in him by his handler. Buddy was later paroled to a new adoptive home. On the day that Buddy left, the teen told me, "When I first was assigned to Buddy, I judged him by how he looked, not by what was inside. I have done this my whole life. People are just like me inside. I learned a lot from my dog." This is one story that I will never forget. 

Governor Meets Youth

ECHO SPEED



I AM PROUD TO SAY THAT A LOT WAS ACCOMPLISHED AT YOUTH ADVOCACY DAY, but the highlight for me was meeting our newly elected governor, Christine Gregoire.

After giving a speech on the second floor of the capital building, Gregoire held a private meeting with a large group of youth for the sole purpose of answering questions. Mockingbird staff was part of this group. I asked the governor what she was going to do about racial disproportionality in Washington State's Foster Care System. Her response was to direct the question to Regina Jones who is an active member in King County's Racial Disproportionality Task Force.

When the governor arrived everyone fell quiet waiting for her to speak. She was very easy to listen to. Gregoire didn't get all uptight or act hoity-toity like some politicians you see on TV. She seemed to be very interested in everything she talked about, including her answers to questions and the staff she was introducing to us. She seemed honest and clear; she explained what she was talking about. If she didn't have a real answer to give, she either admitted to not knowing and expressed the problem's importance, or she directed the question to someone on her staff who may've had the answer. After Gregoire finished answering questions, she gave everyone a tour of her very grand and fine-looking office, and then took a group picture with everyone she had met with. Christine Gregoire seems like a very nice person and it appears that she cares a great deal about issues to do with the state system. I was happy to get the chance to meet her. 

Canine Reflections

Amanda and Heather reflect on their experience with the Canine Connections Program

HELLO, MY NAME IS HEATHER. I have been in Canine for [a few months] and have learned so much. I've learned how fast you can bond with a dog you don't even know. I fell in love with my second dog. Her name is Pearl and she is a husky yellow lab. We named her Pearl when we couldn't find out what her name was because her coat is a yellowish white color. The first week I had her she was terrible she didn't know how to sit or even how to walk on a leash! It's been about 4-5 weeks now and now she is wonderful. She can sit, stay, come, heel, down, bed, she kind of knows shake if you put the treat in your hand close your hand and put your palm facing down. She can roll over, jump onto surfaces when told. She loves treats! She'll do anything for one. She'll even stand on her hind legs for one. Today (Feb. 2005) I had to walk down to the cottage to get this article and I had Jo hold my dog and about 5 minutes later the leash slipped out of Jo's hand and my dog started tracking me down to the office when I was at my cottage I heard security say that a canine had escaped. When I came back they told me the whole story and Mrs. Janet let go of my dogs leash again and she came running to me. I guess Pearl really loves me too!

MY NAME IS AMANDA, and I'm in the Canine Connections class. I help dogs find a good home, I train them to behave in basic obedience. In this class I have learned a lot about how to take care of dogs, although I have had a lot of fun, at the end of a quarter I do get upset about the dog I bonded with leaves to go to a home, but I do know that that dog is going to a great home, so in the beginning of the next quarter I start all over with a new dog with that same goal to find that dog a good home too. I love to know that I've saved some dogs lives, and it makes me feel extremely good about myself, and then I realize how important I am to canine connections. This class helps me with my patience, it helps me deal with the stress of leaving. 