



### "Where would Providence be without the International Institute of Rhode Island?"

Mayor David Cicilline addressing the 84th Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors, Friday, October 14, 2005



Above: Keynote speaker Antonia Hernández addresses the attendees of the Annual Meeting.

The 84th Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors was standing room only with more than 100 people in attendance. Master of Ceremonies Dr. Pablo Rodriguez, opened with, "I've been with the Institute for 18 years and this was the first board I ever joined ... Plan to be involved for the rest of your life."

Board President, Ralph Posner, proclaimed, "I love the Institute and what it stands for ... The sheer numbers of families that the Institute helps is amazing. In the past year, 17,214 services were provided to more than 5,000 clients from 108 countries AND

19,000 walk-ins came thru our doors to ask for on-the-spot immigration counseling and received it!"

Last year we were awarded a record \$2 million dollars towards program funding from private and public sources. Special thanks to: United Way of RI, RI Bar Foundation, RI Department of Education, City of Providence, RI General Assembly, Partnership Foundation, and the Ida Littlefield Trust. "We continue to need your support to change lives and build a better Rhode Island for all."

Senator Jack Reed, just back from Iraq, said that the Institute embodies "the essence of what we believe America is all about - wanting a better life and country from generation to generation. It is not simply enough to be here, you have to be part of the broader community of America." He went on to introduce Ntaganda Ntizarwa, IIRI staff member, who he had previously met in Iraq. Ntaganda, who came to Rhode Island as a refugee in 2000, provided an account of his

personal journey from Burundi, to Egypt, to Providence, to Iraq, and finally back home to Rhode Island. He joined the National Guard to show gratitude toward this country and spent 16 months defending it. "I'm just paying back." Ntaganda, who recently became a U.S. citizen, thanked the community, his family, IIRI staff and board, and all of those in uniform.

Keynote speaker, Antonia Hernández, President and CEO of the California Community Foundation, stressed the need for broader conversations about immigration. "We have to see through our biases and our prejudices and have honest talks about the benefits and challenges ... Race used to be black and white in the U.S. but today's immigrants are every shade. America is not comfortable with its diversity." Antonia went on to say, "That is why the International Institute of Rhode Island is so important ... Our connections to the world are stronger by tapping into our immigrants and there is no better investment in our workforce." (continued on page 4)

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## How are women preserving the rich cultural heritage of Rhode Island?

Attend one meeting of the International Women's Club of Rhode Island and you will see.

Women who came from around the world to the United States through the International Institute of Rhode Island founded the club in May of 1959.

These pioneering women wanted a way to come together to not only share and learn about one another's cultural heritage, but to give back to the organization that helped them in their transition to a new life in the United States.

The founders created the club with the objective of fostering a deeper understanding of mixed cultures and backgrounds among foreign and American born women.

To continue achieving this objective, current club President Ellie Weston explained, "the club's monthly programs are centered on an international theme and include lectures, exhibits, demonstrations, and music."

Women in the club come from diverse countries including Italy, Estonia, Hungary, Dominican Republic, Portugal, Germany, Armenia, Russia, Lithuania, Ireland, England, and India.

They share their journeys from their birth places to the United States. They also share stories and pictures from their travels back to their home countries. The club has welcomed Rhode Island historians, guests from the League of Women



Above: Club President Ellie Weston (front right) with other members during a monthly meeting

Voters, the Rhode Island National Guard, and returned Peace Corps Volunteers.

The women are committed supporters of the Institute and models for the agency's clients. They give back by assisting with special events such as the annual Spring Carnival Ball, helping with bulk mailings, and donating money and necessities to new refugee arrivals.

Everywhere members go they spread the word about the International Women's Club. Ellie laughed stating, "I was at the beach when someone told me about the club!"

The club is always looking to expand its ethnicity and membership. Any woman who wants to share their cultural heritage, learn more about other cultures, and share their gratitude for the Institute is welcome to join. For more information please call 461-5940.

## Special Announcement: eNEWS from IIRI

Do you want to receive timely email alerts and news including newsletter highlights, special announcements, upcoming

events, and much more? Sign-up for IIRI's E-news by visiting our website at [www.iiri.org](http://www.iiri.org)

## Students learn about Ramadan while sharpening English skills

Francesca Gould's top level English as a Second Language Class was a buzz with chatter on the morning of October 5th. That marked the beginning of Ramadan and students were eager to learn about the traditional month of fasting that impacts Muslims throughout the world. Fostering respect and understanding among all has been a goal of the Institute's since 1921 and what better place than a classroom to learn about one another's cultures and religious practices while sharpening one's English skills.

Students, Aicha Conte, from Guinea, and Rachida Aboulfath, from Morocco, both devote Muslims, led the discussion of the day focusing on Ramadan. It is a month of prayers, sharing, humbleness, coming together, celebration, and fasting that includes obligatory abstinence from food, drinking, smoking, and physical relationships from sunrise to sunset. The tradition is a pillar of Islamic faith and essential religious duty for all adults

who follow it.

Ramadan serves as a reminder of the importance and value of "discipline, and remembering those who are less fortunate than you by giving generously to the poor," explained Aicha. Ramadan is also a



Above Students Rachida Aboulfath and Aicha Conte

month of prayer, Rachida added, "Prayer builds one's inner strength, and by the combination of prayer and fasting, one shows their dedication to God."

Aicha and Rachinda further pointed out that in their countries of origin opportunities for prayer are incorporated

into the fabric of everyday life. It is easy to pray because work and school are stopped five times a day just for this purpose. Both agree that they have had to be a bit more creative in America especially when it comes to finding quiet moments at work to practice their religion. However, they are determined to keep their faith alive and still cherish the values that Ramadan continues to teach them. When asked if Ramadan was hard, Aicha and Rachida said no because, "you know why you are doing it - for God."

Ramadan ended on November 3rd with one of the most important Muslim holidays, the feast of Eid ul-Fitr.

On this special day, Aicha, Rachida, and other Muslim students and clients came to the Institute in their finest national dress. They congratulated each other on their accomplishment of making it through the month of fasting and encouraged others to help in promoting peace and tolerance in today's world.

## Hats off to RIDE for investing in our workforce!

The International Institute of Rhode Island is proud to announce a \$540,000 Adult Education and Training Award from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) for fiscal year 2006. The Institute would like to sincerely thank Johan Uvin, RIDE Adult Basic Education Director, Governor Donald Carcieri, the Governor's Adult Literacy Task Force, and the State Office of Adult Education for making this grant

possible. The Institute has a long relationship with RIDE and commends their support of adult ESL and workforce development in Rhode Island. What better way to train our state's workforce!

This grant will provide a continuum and expansion of ESL, Literacy, Citizenship, and Job Training classes directly benefiting over 500 non-native English speakers. 85% percent of these students are working in entry level jobs and want to enhance their

communication skills for career advancement or to find a better job. Learner-centered classes are held mornings, evenings, and Saturdays to accommodate students' busy schedules. In addition to serving more students, funding will provide for program improvements by focusing on increasing student proficiency levels and work place skills, and develop enhanced materials and resources.

## Thanks to the Rhode Island General Assembly for their \$140,000 Legislative Grant!

The Institute is honored to announce a \$140,000 legislative grant from the Rhode Island General Assembly to provide immigration and refugee resettlement services and programs. This award (which is \$44,000 more than the previous year) was made possible through the support of Senate Finance Chairman Stephen Alves, House of Representatives Finance Chairman Steven Costantino, Senator Juan Pichardo, and Representative Tom Slater. The Institute greatly appreciates their efforts to secure this important

funding. In addition to continuing to fund immigration services, increased funding will be targeted towards the establishment of the Institute's Refugee Resource Center, a physical entity within the Refugee Resettlement Program. The center will consolidate staff and materials to assist refugees with housing, social services, information and referrals, food, education and employment assistance. Newly arrived refugees receiving services through the Refugee Program are guided and assisted to find work within 180 days of arrival.

The program is currently being expanded to include career laddering and skills building to further advance refugees employability skills, allowing them to obtain better paying jobs and building a better trained workforce for Rhode Island.

More than 1,200 clients and 4,600 family members will benefit from this grant, which furthers the International Institute's mission: *to enable all area residents, especially immigrants and refugees, to become self-reliant, invested participants in our communities.*

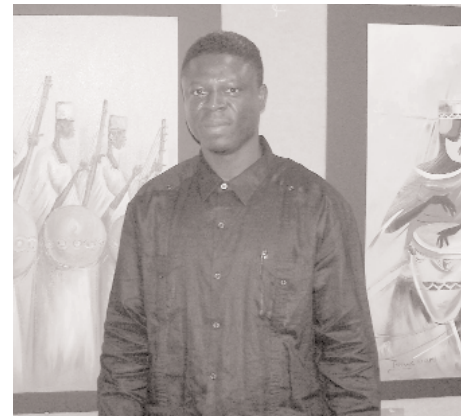
(Annual Board Meeting Continued)

Antonia reaffirmed the economic benefits the U.S. has received from immigrants. "The gardener, the dishwasher, the construction worker, and those that take care of our most precious children. These people risk their lives to get jobs and live the American dream - to get an education, to vote, and to live their faith ... What makes us American is our ideal and our state of mind."

This year's Nelly Ayvasian Award went to Charles (Chuck) Champagne, Chief Financial Officer at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital and outstanding member and Treasurer of the Board of Directors. Ms. Nelly Ayvasian, a refugee from Soviet Armenia, was a former Executive Director of the Institute who made exceptional contributions to

citizenship while inspiring immigrants and refugees to become invested and active members in their community. The Community Leadership Award went to Senator Juan Pichardo, Deputy Majority Leader of the General Assembly and strong supporter of the Institute for many decades. Representative Steve Costantino was presented with a gift for his service on the Board (he is moving to the Advisory Board).

Executive Director Bill Shuey praised the agencies' key workers - the backbone of the organization. "I am very grateful and proud of the work of our outstanding staff, board, and volunteers, who make the Institute such a wonderful organization - an organization still strong and growing after 84 years."



Above: Liberian artist, Tony Reeves, stands in front of two of his paintings; both were sold at the Annual Meeting.

Thank you to the contributors of our Donor Newsletter:

Pam Pomfret  
Lisa Marie Cramer  
Sarah Parrott  
Rebecca Churt  
Bruno Sukys  
Nazneen Rahman  
Susan Sweet  
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Visit us:  
International Institute Rhode Island  
645 Elmwood Avenue  
Providence, RI 02907

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