

MCRC NOTICIAS



The Groundhog saw his shadow!

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Erie Symbolizes “Freedom and Autonomy” for Recently Arrived Cuban Artist

The impact of immigration is often told in economic terms – the number of businesses started, the positive effect on local and national economies, and the rise in real estate values as neighborhoods are repopulated.

Sometimes, though, the story of immigration is told with brushstrokes and bright colors.

MCRC has the pleasure of serving a persevering and talented artist from Cuba who arrived in Erie to succeed as an artist.

Only living in Erie eight months, Ms. Daisy Ricardo has described herself as a “woman fighter” and her art as a source of her passion. Her goal is to be able to offer her children a successful future and become a professional artist. To Ricardo, Erie symbolizes freedom and autonomy, a place where it is possible to earn a living by accomplishing a dream.

Erie and the United States as a whole have had a positive impact on her future. In Cuba she needed legal approval and a university education to sell her paintings. This was not possible for her, as after she turned 25 years of age she could not study medicine or art. Further, if you do not have a bachelor’s degree it is illegal to sell your art in Cuba.

“There I felt like I was pushing a wall because they would not let me do anything; I tried to make progress but it was useless,” recalls Ricardo.

“There is nothing harder than not being able to feed my children or buy them shoes and I always wanted what was best for them.”

As such, Ricardo resolved to move to the United States and was successful after a lengthy seven-year application process.

Upon arrival, Ricardo, along with MCRC’s Latino Services and Education Departments, have put her talents on display throughout the Erie community.



Daisy Ricardo

Coming Events

February is Black

History Month

- February 2—Ground Hog Day
- February 12th—Lincoln’s Birthday
- February 14th - Valentine’s Day
- February 17th—President’s Day (MCRC Closed)
- February 22nd—Washington’s Birthday
- **Wellness Events throughout the month—Please contact MCRC for details**

Multicultural Community Resource Center of Erie

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Diversity Training Reaches More Than 1,200 Participants in 2013, Poised for Growth in 2014

As Erie's neighborhoods and institutions change and become more diverse, MCRC has been at the forefront of providing services to New Americans and longtime Erie residents alike.

One way MCRC provides service to longtime residents is its Diversity Training program, which supports Erie-area organizations with workshops on the cultures and customs of the new Americans arriving in Erie every day from five continents. Knowledge gained from these workshops can be used by social service providers to better meet the needs of their client base, and by businesses to better understand their marketplace.

"Before the workshops start, people look like they would rather be somewhere else, but within the first five minutes, eyes light up, interest is piqued, and participants become very engaged," says program manager Sahana Rajiyah, who has lived in Sri Lanka, Russia, Egypt, Brazil, Canada, and the US.

"At the end of the workshop, invariably, they come and tell me how eye-opening and informative it was. They develop a greater understanding of diversity issues and begin to feel much more culturally competent in their ability to serve their clients."

The program enjoyed a very productive 2013, reaching more than 1,200 participants. In its second year, the program provided a variety of workshops to a wide range of community organizations, including Stairways Behavioral Health, the Erie School District, Harborcreek Youth Services, Erie County Office of Children and Youth, Perseus House Charter School of Excellence, the JFK Center, and Family Services of NWP. A.

The workshops have been met with overwhelmingly positive responses from participants, who value the trainings as a unique and worthwhile learning opportunity. Comments have included: "Very interesting and informative." - Stairways Behavioral Health, January 2013, and "This was the best cultural diversity training I have been to" - Harborcreek Youth Services, May 2013.

In 2014 the program is proud to unveil its newest additions to the course list: "Getting to Know the Congolese Community of Erie" and "Getting to Know the Burmese Community of Erie." Additionally, this spring MCRC will be proud to provide an extended series of workshops to the Erie Police Department.

"As more and more people participate in these workshops, Erie is quickly becoming a more tolerant city that celebrates differences and values the variety of culture, traditions and skills that our new Americans bring to this community," says Rajiyah. "As demand for the training grows, we hope to expand our curriculum options and also play a vital role in promoting greater cultural cooperation and coexistence in Erie."

Benefiting the Multicultural Community Resource Center



Saturday, March 29, 2014

Rolling Meadow Bowling Lanes

3304 Zuck Road, Erie

**The 5th Annual
MCRC Roll with
Diversity Bowling
Tournament**

Registration: 12:30 Noon—Sharp! • 1:00 PM to 4:30 PM

For registration or Info Contact:

Nathan Koble

MCRC • 554 East 10th Street • Erie, PA 16503

814.455.0212

Fee: \$100 per team includes 2 games of bowling, shoe rental and lunch! Don't want to bowl? Sponsorships available!



Sponsor a Team!



Education Department Update

As we have moved into the new year, the education department has seen a few changes.

We bid a fond farewell to both Rodney Fry and Ron Fye, both of whom remain with MCRC, in other positions. We have welcomed Tracy Short and Karen Tuminello to our team. Tracy taught in Korea for a year, and has experience with adult refugees as well. She has taken on several roles here at MCRC. She will serve as an ESL instructor and Tutor Coordinator for PDE programming. Karen Tuminello has a strong background in adult education. As our Transitions Support instructor, she will be working with the evening class. The purpose of the class is to prepare students to take the GED® 2014.

Attendees hope to use this knowledge to: gain employment, retain employment, or enter job training/post-secondary school programs. We are proud to recognize, and thank, all of these staff members for their dedication to MCRC's learners!



Mercyhurst University students and members of MCRC's Elder Program discuss community issues.

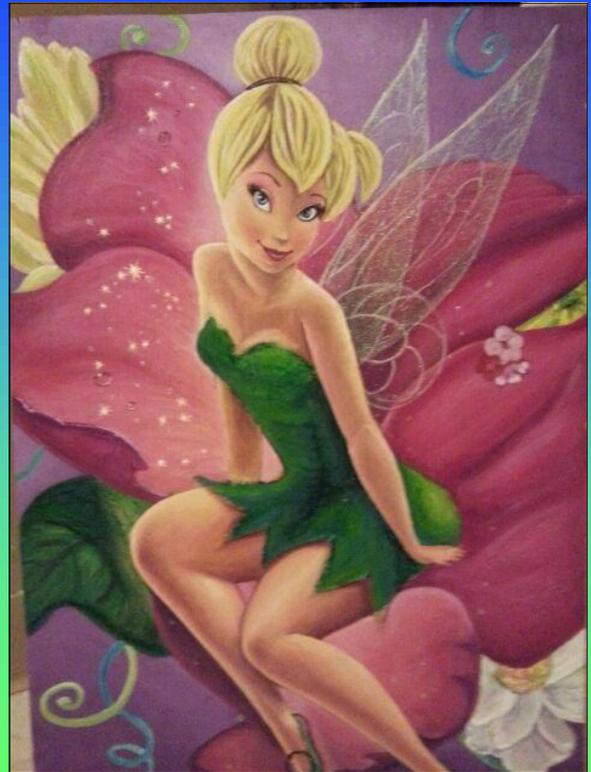
We're All Students Together

Our students at MCRC believe that they come to learn English, life and employment skills, Civics and community integration. They do not realize how much they have to teach others in the Erie community. This was evident January 15th and 16th as two groups of Mercyhurst University students took time out of their J-Term classes to gain some interactive experience with our Life Skills students and our Elder Program participants.

A group of 18 students in various majors from Dr. James Teufel's "Medical/Legal Partnerships" class spent a Wednesday morning with our Elder Program getting to know our elders and participating in conversations about life, family and the experience of being refugees. The students asked questions that challenged the Elders to practice their English in order to communicate the answers and the Elders shared some words in their native languages with the students. A few Elders even wrote student names in the Nepali alphabet for students to take home. Authentic interaction on this level helps create confidence in our Elders for when they go out into the community and are forced to communicate in English.

A second group of 11 students enrolled in Dr. Natasha Duncan's immigration class "U.S./ Mexico Border Expedition: Humanigration" joined our Life Skills students for two days in order to interact with both the beginning level and higher level English speakers. This allowed the MU students to get some exposure to people who have gone through the immigration process before traveling west, and gain some background knowledge that applies to the current immigration issues happening in the American southwest.

The elder's remarked at the end of the experience that "this was good, good practice, good new friends" and the students echoed their sentiments. Both groups of MU students provided comments like "I didn't realize there were so many refugees in Erie" and "never done anything like this before; I'm grateful!" Some even expressed interest in returning to MCRC to volunteer and get involved. Creating cooperative learning opportunities like this partnership with Mercyhurst helps to spread MCRC's mission. Every time we are able to introduce new people to our students and clients, our community is better able to see the value in the changing face of Erie.



Painting by Daisy Ricardo

Cuban Painter Continued from Page 1

"I remember the first time I sold my paintings at the Hispanic Festival, I could not believe it and it was like a dream made into a reality," beams Ricardo. "In this activity university professors were informed of my paintings and they guided me on how to apply to a university. After this, MCRC scheduled a visit with the Erie Art Museum where museum staff was very generous."

Ricardo has continued to show and sell her art into the winter, exhibiting at events at Mercyhurst University and Center City Arts.

"For me everything is a dream made into a reality," she says. I trust that I have a world full of possibilities.

"If I become famous I will contribute to MCRC, because they were the ones that discovered me and motivated me to move forward. They believed in me, identified that I could evolve in my painting career, and they gave me their unconditional support.

"The first time I visited MCRC it was only to take English classes. I discovered that it was a good place and I will eternally appreciate it. I am starting my professional dream and I know I will be able to make it. I think I am taking firm steps in this regard."

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**Your Donation
is Appreciated**

To make a financial gift to MCRC, send it to **Joanna Cherpak, Executive Director**, 554 East 10th St., Erie, PA 16503 or donate online at www.multiculturalcrc.org.

MCRC volunteer opportunities exist for one-time or continuing activities.

Please visit the

Volunteer tab at our Website at

www.multiculturalcrc.org

or look for us on the Erie Chamber of

Commerce site at

www.eriepaconnect.com

To inquire, send an email to

MCRC@multiculturalcrc.org. Be sure to include your name and phone number in your message.

**Corner of
10th & Ash**



Winter Has Its Moments

January has always been known as the “Winter Doldrums” because it’s the month that follows the winter holidays of Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and New Year’s. These holidays bring a naturally high level of joy, happiness and all over good feelings. Once these end, people are faced with very cold weather and nothing to celebrate – except for maybe the Super Bowl. Hence, the doldrums set in and we eagerly wait for the first signs of spring to emerge. Maybe the bear has it correct. He hibernates all winter and then works and frolics continuously in spring, summer and fall. Makes sense to me! Unfortunately, I am not a bear, so I don’t think I could pull it off too well.

In mid-January I was fortunate enough to take a short vacation to Raleigh, North Carolina, to visit my brother and sister-in-law. I left single digit temperatures in Erie to spend time in 40, 50 and even 60 degrees weather. Being from the North, my body did not know how to react to such Southern warmth. Yet the Southerners thought this was cold! By the time I did adjust I was coming back home to single digit temperatures again.

While I was in Raleigh, I had a conversation with my sister-in-law in which I was sharing stories about the clients we serve at MCRC. I sometimes forget how much I have experienced here until I start talking about it, and I tend to get very passionate. Ten years ago I did not know the difference between a refugee and an immigrant. Now when someone asks me, “Where do you work?” and “What does MCRC do?” I find myself explaining the difference between a refugee and an immigrant, then, telling a story. One weather related story I always tell is about a client from the Sudan, who told me that she loved winter. Given that she came from a country that was very hot, dry and never saw snow, I assumed she just loved the beauty of the snow. When I asked her why she loved winter, her response was “Because I can breathe in the winter. I can fill my lungs with fresh air. I could not do that in Africa.” Wow! It certainly gave me a new perspective on the winter weather I have lived in my entire life. I will never take it for granted.

January in Erie was a very cold and snowy month. Please enjoy February !

Genuinely yours,

Joanna R. Cherpak
Executive Director



Proudly serving the needs of the Hispanic and refugee communities since 1975.