

# WASHINGTON BEECH

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<i>Construction Underway</i>	1
<i>Resident Hiring</i>	1
<i>Teen Empowerment</i>	2
<i>Youth Photo Contest</i>	2
<i>Focus on Health</i>	3
<i>Education and Careers</i>	3
<i>Summer at Washington Beech</i>	4

## CONSTRUCTION UNDERWAY

Phase One is well underway. In the last weeks of the summer, a new community has taken shape. Most dramatic is the steel structure of the midrise apartment building at the site's most prominent corner, the intersection of Washington and Beech Streets. This is where the new Washington Beech community center will look out onto the surrounding neighborhood.

Meanwhile, with the construction work humming along, community life at Washington Beech continues as busy as ever. Summer has brought exciting opportunities and activities for residents both living onsite and relocated.



The midrise building going up at the corner of Washington and Beech Sts.

## RESIDENT HIRING

Construction work at Washington Beech offers a valuable opportunity for BHA residents to secure well paying jobs.

**Cynthia Belcher** (pictured) landed a job with the general contractor, CWC Builders, by responding to a flyer seeking job applicants at a past BHA redevelopment project. Now two years later she is still on the job assisting low-income residents with finding jobs and helping CWC to meet its ambitious goals for resident hiring at Washington Beech. "I love my job," says Cynthia. With each hire, "I get to change a life for the better and it's a way to give back to the community."



## TEEN EMPOWERMENT

The organization **Teen Empowerment** brought its anti-violence message to Washington Beech, hosting a discussion with teens and their family members about gangs, conflict, how to walk away from a fight and to avoid negative influences.

Participants viewed a short documentary entitled *Voices from Within* featuring interviews with men currently serving time in local prisons. In the film, the inmates share their stories about life “in the streets,” the circumstances and personal actions that led to prison, and the effects of their incarceration on the people closest to them.

The video sparked a lively discussion about violence, drug dealing, and negative influences as well as positive opportunities for young people in our community. Washington Beech will host a series of similar forums in the upcoming weeks.

Youths who attended the program shared their thoughts:

**Quincy Lucas, 14 years old:**

*“I learned a lot. How hard it was for people growing up without their parents. I also liked learning about people’s different backgrounds.”*

**Robert Jamison, 10 years old:**

*“Yes, I enjoyed it because they said ‘don’t do drugs,’ even though I hear that every day.”*

**Pedro Marzan, 19 years old:**

*“It was good because I seen how real this stuff is. I said the other night, ‘To get to the top [sometimes] you have to start from the bottom.’ When asked why he said that: “Why? Because I’m living that right now.”*

## YOUTH PHOTO CONTEST

UMass and BHA sponsored a photo contest for Washington Beech youth, ages 13-18. Five youths signed up and were given disposable cameras and were asked to take pictures of what they like/dislike about the neighborhood, what makes them happy/sad living at WB and what new things they would like to see in the new development. Three youths followed up and returned to a meeting on June 3rd to discuss their pictures. The discussion was led by **Roger Hewitt**, a Visiting UMass Scholar from England who works with youth in low-income areas of London, and **Berna Kahraman** from UMass-Boston.

Discussion focused on the participants’ views of the past, the present, and the future. The demolition of the buildings was seen as sad, though the youth were aware that what they had was not ideal. One youth talked about the brick and dark paint as being like a prison. Still it was home. The current scene is viewed as a transition to something new, and these youths seem more open to change, but they want to have more of a voice now. They said would like a space they could call their own. They were aware of HOU and the resident services aspect of the HOPE VI program as a resource “where you can get jobs and stuff.”

**Christopher Barrios**, one of the photo contest participants, and one of the photos that Christopher took of Washington Beech.



For the future they talked about wanting more green areas in the development, more flowers, more community space where they could meet and mingle with others, and more sports and play areas, as well as sitting areas for elderly residents.

Gift cards to Dick’s Sporting Goods were given as prizes. Originally there were to be three different prizes—\$50, \$25, and \$15—but the three youths who attended the session decided that the total amount should be shared equally among them.

## FOCUS ON HEALTH



The Washington Beech Smoke-Free Committee has been working to promote the concept of smoke-free housing. In June, the Smoke-Free Committee staffed an information table and cook-out in conjunction with asthma screenings conducted by the Boston Public Health Commission. In July, the Committee hosted a dinner and a movie for over 20 Washington Beech residents. The video, *I Can't Breathe*, was provided by **Health Resources in Action** ("HRIA").

With the funding support of HRIA, the Smoke-Free Committee has been carrying out a survey of all Washington Beech residents, both those still living onsite and those who have relocated temporarily offsite. The survey seeks to measure the prevalence of smoking, especially among residents with small children and among residents with family members who suffer from asthma. The main purpose of the survey is to gauge Washington Beech residents' interest in living in a smoke-free environment at the new development.

Out of 151 surveys completed to date, 129 respondents—or 85%—support smoke-free housing. The next step is to formally explore options for creating smoke-free homes at Washington Beech.

The Smoke-Free Committee has also set their sights on another next step: bringing their message to the broader Roslindale community. They have plans to set up an information table at the farmers' market in Roslindale Square in the coming weeks.

Photos: Top, **Jackie Rodriguez** of the Boston Public Health Commission administers an asthma screening test to a young Washington Beech resident. Middle, **Amelia Smith** and **Westlyne Bruno** display a new banner advertising the Washington Beech "Smoke-Free" Committee. Bottom, Amelia provides information regarding the health effects of smoking.

## EDUCATION AND CAREERS

- **AO Security** hired three Washington Beech residents to provide security at the construction site: **LaPrema Dunn** (see "Resident Spotlight"), **Linda McFarland**, and **Yolanda Ramos**.
- Thirteen Washington Beech residents have registered for the Adult High School Program at **Boston Central Adult High School** in Roxbury.
- **ABCD** (Action for Boston Community Development) is offering GED Programs at its Downtown Crossing location at 19 Temple Place. Contact HOU for more information: (617) 323-3010

### RESIDENT SPOTLIGHT

LaPrema Dunn is an 18-year-old high school senior at Greater Egleston High School, who was recently hired by AO Security as a security officer here at the Washington Beech construction project.

LaPrema already holds a second job as a dietary aide at Laurel Ridge Nursing Center. When asked about her career goals, LaPrema said: "My long-term goal is to become a geriatric social worker."



# SUMMER AT WASHINGTON BEECH



## BASKETBALL LEAGUE

Washington Beech 14- to 17-year-olds played in the summer basketball league at the Roxbury Boys and Girls Club. **Emmanuel “Kwik” Jiminez** organized two Washington Beech teams, one coached by HOU case manager **Naquan Escort**. In addition to weekly basketball games, the teens participated in forums on gang violence and the effects of smoking, alcohol, and drugs. According to Naquan: “The young men and women enjoyed playing together, showed great team spirit, and displayed what defines sportsmanship.”



## PROJECT “RE-RUNWAY”

Nine young woman glided down a red-carpet runway displaying fashions they had designed and made themselves under the guidance of **Danielle Rayham** from the **Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts**.



## READ BOSTON



Mondays throughout the summer, story-tellers from **Read Boston** brought a new story to life using props and costumes. Kids ages 4 to 13 received a free book every week.

## AUGUST SCHOLARS

**Carlos Castillo** and **Julio Garcia** completed the August Scholars program at **The Learning Project** in the Back Bay, three weeks of rigorous academic work and fun-filled afternoons of sailing and other activities.

