

NLI NEIGHBORHOOD LEADER

Neighborhood Leadership Institute *Greater Cleveland's Connection to Neighborhood Leadership and Community Engagement*

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NLC Grads Build Bridges Through Collaboration by Shelley White (Class 19)

In the summer of 2005, a friend of mine invited me to a community open house display of the work of artist Richard Howell (Class 15). Richard, a resident of the Buckeye area, is a renaissance folk artist who creates art using recycled and economically sustainable materials.

When I saw Richard's work at the open house, I was immediately struck by the soul, brilliance and energy of his pieces. It was like walking into a world where everything was alive. . . technicolor images of Africa, each one telling a story about the different parts of our history and the many journeys we take.

I had first met Richard in 2004 during a trip to the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild in Pittsburgh. We were part of a delegation of NLC graduates who were researching the possibility of creating an artists' guild here in Cleveland. My NLC classmate Tammy Kennedy had organized the trip.

The idea of an artists' guild continued to interest me, and in August 2005—not long after I had attended Richard's exhibit—I traveled to Brazil as part of an effort to form a new entity called the International Collaborative of Cultural Artists (ICCA).

My travels in Brazil took me to Salvador in the state of Bahia. Salvador has Brazil's largest African and Afro-Brazilian population. During the trip I found myself in conversation with Brazilian jewelry artist Beth Mattos. Beth was talking about mermaids and their connection to the Orisha deity *Yemanjá*, Goddess of the Saltwater. She showed me photo depictions of *Yemanjá* as a mermaid by world-renowned photojournalist Pierre Fatumbé Verger.



Artist Richard Howell (Class 15) poses next to a mermaid sculpture he created and gave to a gallery in Brazil.

Photo by: Shelley White

When I saw Verger's photos, I thought of Richard Howell's work. The artistic and cultural connection was immediate in my mind. I told Beth about Richard, and she made me promise to bring pictures of his work the next time I visited Brazil. I knew then that the collaborative could definitely move beyond being a dream.

Instead of sending photos of his work, Richard volunteered to create a mermaid for Beth's gallery in Salvador as a gesture of goodwill and as the first official act of the collaborative.

Between November 2005 and February 2006, Richard and I consulted on everything concerning the mermaid. We talked about the type of hair she should have, whether she would be offering something to the world (cupping the hands), what color would best represent her, her physical form, her spiritual make-up—everything down to the jewelry that she would wear and the platform that would support her.

Richard called me several nights before I was scheduled to leave on my return to Salvador, saying that we could create a box to accommodate the mermaid's travels. Richard painted the

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Grassroots Leadership



Don Slocum
Executive Director

Leadership Link

To map NLI's network of grassroots leaders, we are teaming with Valdis Krebs, a nationally recognized expert in social and organizational network analysis.

Mr. Krebs is the developer of InFlow, a set of software tools that can be used to map and analyze networks. NLI staff members are receiving training in the use of InFlow.

To learn more about InFlow and social network analysis, visit Krebs' Web site at www.orgnet.com.

Mapping the NLI Network

Dear Neighbor,

In this issue Shelley White (Class 19) tells the wonderful story of her collaboration with fellow Neighborhood Leadership Cleveland graduate Richard Howell (Class 15). Though they were not from the same NLI class, they met through NLI's efforts to bring together grassroots leaders with similar interests.

As I have said many times, the true power of our leadership development programs lies not in what happens during the class but in what happens *after* the class. Do the graduates put their new skills to use in service of their communities? Do they continue to work with their classmates? Do they tap into NLI's network of more than 600 grassroots leaders?

We know that Shelley and Richard collaborated because Shelley took the time to write down their story and send it to the NLI office. Other graduates call in or stop by the office to tell us what they are doing. We know of many other stories that are every bit as inspiring as Shelley and Richard's.

But what about the people who don't call and the stories that we don't hear? If we want to understand the full value of our network, we have to develop a clearer picture of it. We ought to know—to the extent possible—who is connecting with whom and around what issues. And we should find out who is not currently connected, so that we can make it

our business to help re-connect those grassroots leaders to a network of their peers.

With those aims in mind, we have begun the process of creating an actual map of our network of grassroots leaders. We are teaming with Valdis Krebs, a nationally recognized expert in social and organizational network analysis (see the Leadership Link on this page). Using specially designed computer software, we will be able to draw a visual map showing the links among the members of our network.

To gather the information needed to create the network map, we are surveying the graduates of our leadership programs about their interests and connections. By now you should have received a copy of the survey in the mail.

Please take some time to complete the survey. You can fill it out and mail it in; you can call our office and answer the questions over the phone; or you can visit us here at the NLI office and have someone interview you.

As we continue to build and strengthen our network, I am confident that we will hear many more stories involving collaborations such as Shelley and Richard's.

Warmest regards,

Don

The Neighborhood Leadership Institute exists to develop grassroots leadership that will contribute to rebuilding the bonds of community and improving the quality of life for neighborhood residents throughout the Greater Cleveland area

Leadership In Action

NLC Grads Build Bridges Through Collaboration

Continued from page 1

background of the box, I painted unity symbols on the outside of the box, and my mother outlined the symbols in black paint.

I returned to Salvador in February 2006, mermaid in hand. When I presented the gift to Beth, she was speechless. She laughed, jumped up and down, and eventually cried what she said were “happy tears.”

Watching her open the box was the best part for me. Even though I knew what was inside, I felt I was seeing it for the first time. It was the pure essence and beauty of the mermaid that touched everyone.

As a gesture of friendship and collaboration among artists, the mermaid is now on display in Beth’s Y’aba Sisters Jewelry Gallery among the gallery’s permanent collection of paintings, jewelry, and jeweled sculptures.



With Shelley White (left) at her side in Brazil, gallery owner Beth Mattos holds Richard Howell’s mermaid sculpture.

It sits between paper-weight-sized cowrie shells and a hand-painted tray depicting the likeness of a mermaid surrounded by large deposits of amethyst crystals—all in honor of *Yemanjá*.

This was exactly what I envisioned when I created the concept of the collaborative: a cultural exchange that would foster

creativity among artists and build bridges among people.

In the true spirit of the Neighborhood Leadership Institute, Richard and I—two artists and grassroots leaders—put our talents together and built a bridge that spans not only our two Cleveland neighborhoods but also the 5,000 miles between Cleveland and Salvador.

NLC Graduates 22nd Class



Photos by Lee A. Gleason-Kay

On May 11, thirty people joined the ranks of grassroots leaders who have graduated from Neighborhood Leadership Cleveland. Cleveland Ward 8 City Council member Sabra Pierce Scott (pictured above with NLI executive director Don Slocum) delivered the keynote address at the graduation ceremony.

Congratulations to the members of Class 22!

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Abdul Ameen | Josephine Evans | George Neff, Sr. |
| Sarah Beiderman | Bruce Holmes | Ilinda Reese |
| Constance Blair | Donna Johnson | Nicole Robinson |
| Diane Coates | Erik Johnson | Lisa-Jean Sylvia |
| Tory Coats | Marie Jones | Elise Tompkins |
| Eddie Dancy | Leonard Killings | Maxine Tutstone |
| Tim Davis | Melran Leach, Sr. | Deitri Villarreal |
| Brian Draper | Alfred Leak | Ric Wilberg |
| Judith Drost | Roberto Leon | Charles Willis, Jr. |
| Amy Emery | Bruce Martin | Tangela Woods |

What's Inside

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NLI NOTES

Neighborhood Connections proposals are due August 11. Grantseeker Orientations are scheduled for July 10, 18 and 27. For more information go to the Neighborhood Connections Web site at www.neighborhoodgrants.org. If you would like some help in applying for a grant to support your neighborhood project, please contact Lee Gleason-Kay at NLI.

Collinwood High School is hosting a special summer session of NLI's **Schools As Neighborhood Resources** program. The high school will be open for educational and recreational activities through August 18. Open to Cleveland residents of all ages, the program runs from 12:30 to 7:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. For more information, contact Jason Lewis at NLI.

NLI's **SUMMER NETWORKING EVENT** will take place aboard the Goodtime III on August 25. If you would like to attend, please contact Jacquie Gillon at NLI.

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