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# The Voice

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Articles translated  
into six languages

The newspaper of Neighborhood House

## One phone call can answer many needs

By MORRIS MALAKOFF  
King County Housing Authority

2-1-1 is the new number to call for information on a range of services from rent assistance to where to find a competent babysitter in your community.

"We are the next to last call anyone has to make," said Tom Page, executive director of Washington Information Network 2-1-1, the nonprofit group leading the 2-1-1 effort.

The line is a comprehensive resource for people seeking social services such as food assistance, English language courses, career training and almost any other non-life-threatening need.

"We have a database of more than 13,000 programs and contacts," Page said. "By the end of the year, we expect that our statewide database will contain more than 30,000 sources."

Since going live in February, extensively-trained 2-1-1 operators have been taking calls from King County residents seven days a week between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. Eventually, there will be eight call centers around the state.

"By the end of the year, we hope to have the funding to be available 24 hours a day," Page added.

Currently, the 2-1-1 number cannot be reached by a cell phone, but cell phone users can call 1-877-211-9274 for the service.

The call center can also handle calls in most languages.

"We have some staff members with multilingual skills, particularly in Spanish," he said. "(And) we can get someone on the line through our tele-interpreter service within a minute or so. They have the ability to help us in about 130 different languages."

The call center will soon be equipped to directly handle TTY calls from hearing impaired callers, but for now, Page advises them to contact the service through 7-1-1, the number for the relay operator.

Eventually, the database used by operators will be available online as well. General information on 2-1-1 in Washington is now available at <http://www.win211.org>.

Within hours of going into service, 2-1-1 was already serving people in need.

"We had a number of people referred to us in the first days," said Richard Jump, executive director of the White Center Food Bank.

Page wants people to know that 2-1-1 isn't just for finding critical services.

"We can help people find a reliable babysitter referral or let them know where there might be a public gym or pool to go to," he said. "We also can help people who are looking for volunteer opportunities in the community through the United Way Volunteer Bank."

But 2-1-1 cannot do everything, Page cautioned.

"We just aren't the place to call to find out where the nearest pizza delivery place might be."

## Park Lake tutor gives back—for almost a decade



PHOTO BY SARA FARINELLI

Tutor Sandy Bui (left) helps Khadija Hassan, 11, solve a problem while third-grader Senait Tekle looks on.

By SARA FARINELLI  
Voice reporter

At 2:30 in the afternoon on any given weekday during the school year, the first wave of children arrives at the Neighborhood House Park Lake Youth Tutoring Center. There are currently 21 children who come regularly for tutoring, mentoring and socializing, so work space is tight in the small building. Nevertheless, they are, in the words of volunteer tutor Sandy Bui, "one big family."

Program Coordinator Nina Burgess works with two AmeriCorps members—one full-time and one part-time. Otherwise, she relies on a dedicated group of volunteers, including a Seattle Pacific University student, five students from Evergreen High School and long-timer Sandy Bui.

When Bui walks in, all the children look up and shout greetings.

"Hi, Sandy. Are you tutoring today?" they ask.

Bui, 20, is a fixture around the center. She has been tutoring in the program since she was in the seventh grade, when, under the auspices of a special program for children from immigrant families, she was selected for a tutoring job for which she received a small stipend. At first, it was just the excitement of having a little cash in her pocket.

"You know, it wasn't easy for a 14-year-old to find a paying job," said Bui, who has lived in the Park Lake area since coming to the United States from Vietnam when she was 9 years old.

However, what started as a job has since become a labor of love.

When funds for the program dried up in Bui's sophomore year of high school, she continued to tutor during her junior year to fulfill her service learning requirement for graduation.

After a pause in her senior year, she resumed volunteering while studying at South Seattle Community College, picking up work study credits along the way.

Bui is now studying biology at the University of Washington and plans to become a dentist. Her studies at the UW make it a bit difficult to continue tutoring, but she still reserves term breaks and the summer for special programs at the center.

For Bui, tutoring has been as much a learning experience for her as it has been for the children.

"I like being around people of other cultures and to learn about them," she said. "The kids are very talkative and open. We are really like a family."

After over eight years tutoring and working with three different program coordinators,

Please see "Tutor" on page 2

## State testing underway for high school students

Legislature approves test alternatives

By ALYSSA MARTIN  
Voice reporter

Sophomores in high schools across the state dug into the first two sections of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning last month. They will complete the final two sections on April 17, when their third- through eighth-grade counterparts will also take versions of the test.

This year's sophomores are the first students required to pass the WASL in reading, writing and math in order to graduate.

This fact is worrisome for schools with a higher percentage of low-income students, because they generally contend with lower test scores than schools with fewer low-income students.

Please see "WASL" on page 2

### In this issue

- Katrina evacuees adjust **Page 2**  
MIXED MESSAGES FROM FEMA
- One to grow on **Page 2**  
TIPS FOR DEALING WITH COOL SPRING
- East Africans want answers **Page 3**  
MEET WITH POLICE OVER GANG ISSUES
- Translations **Page 4**  
TAX ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

### Quotable

"There have been gangs in this country for years; never before have we called them terrorists. Why now?"

— Abraham Araya from the East African Youth Advisory Group on his dismay over media coverage of arrests of East African gang members

See story on page 3

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## Adjustment doesn't come easy for Katrina evacuees



PHOTO BY VIRGINIA FELTON

New Orleans evacuee Marcus Moody (on right) learns about Seattle neighborhoods from John Manning, the Seattle Housing Authority's evacuee coordinator.

By VIRGINIA FELTON  
Seattle Housing Authority

Six months after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, the more than 2,000 evacuees who have found their way to King County are still coping with the losses—both material and emotional—that continue to complicate their lives.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's programs to assist evacuees have been characterized by shifting priorities and changing requirements.

Evacuees have sometimes found themselves in limbo as they attempt to make decisions about their future. Some evacuees say they have been "FEMA-tized" to the point of being weary of applying for one more program or filling out yet another form.

Officials from FEMA met with Seattle-area evacuees last month, apologizing for the unclear information some have received and promising assistance.

"We really didn't have a script, a plan, for how this was going to run," said Joan Rave, an official with FEMA's local individual-assistance program.

The most recent confusion has come as FEMA transfers evacuees from the "Public Assistance Interim Housing Program," also called the "403 program," to a new "Individual Assistance Program" called the "408 program."

The Seattle Housing Authority has learned that as many as half of the 160 Katrina families it serves in the Seattle area may be found ineligible for the new program. However, specifics on who has been found to be ineligible (and why) have not been shared because of privacy issues.

"We don't yet have a good idea of the scope of the problem," said SHA Deputy Executive Director Andrew Lofton.

FEMA has notified some people that they will receive ongoing housing assistance, he said, but many have not yet heard from the agency.

"We are working under the assumption that FEMA will give every evacuee at least 30 days' notice, so we plan to subsidize rent

for evacuees...(as long as) they have not yet heard from FEMA," he added.

John Manning, SHA's evacuee coordinator, has been surveying households to learn more about their situations.

"After talking with over 80 households, I have yet to talk with one who plans to go back to the Gulf Coast anytime soon," he said.

Manning added that most evacuees have yet to find jobs in the Seattle area, though many are pursuing them.

These trends were validated in the real-life stories of two Katrina evacuees who attended an information session hosted last month by SHA.

### Art helps teacher reflect on lost life

Justin Orvold is a 32-year-old graduate of Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts.

Originally from Portland, he entered the "Teach for Greater New Orleans" program several years ago and has been teaching kids with special needs while working on his professional credentials.

When Hurricane Katrina struck, Orvold was teaching at Carver Middle School in the Ninth Ward. He said that working with kids embroiled in deep poverty was a significant culture shock.

"It was one of the hardest things I have ever done," he said, "getting used to being surrounded by crime and drugs—the school's neighborhood was rough."

Still, Orvold found the experience rewarding, and the kids he taught affected him deeply.

"These were kids who were submerged in poverty, yet they were rich in what they got from each other in the social relations they established."

Orvold's most recent assignment involved teaching eighth grade pre-algebra to special education students aged 14 to 17.

"I had to deal with a lot of difficult stuff in the classroom," he said, "But I tried not to let it interfere with what I was there for. I was trying to make a commitment and really make a difference, but now that's all gone. It just feels like it ended prematurely."

Orvold evacuated to Seattle because he still has family in the area, though he

Please see "Katrina" on page 3

## Legislature adjourns, passes housing funds bill

By VOICE STAFF

State lawmakers wrapped up a 60-day legislative session last month, passing bills that increased funding for affordable housing, health care and education, established an alternative energy plan, extended foster care benefits for some youth and created landmark gay rights legislation.

The affordable housing bill will direct up to \$100 million in real estate excise taxes to the Housing Trust Fund over the course of the next four years.

"The legislature finds that Washington is experiencing an affordable housing crisis and that this crisis is growing exponentially every year," the bill reads.

The Housing Trust Fund is part of the state's Capital Budget and is used in part to pay for the construction of affordable housing. In King County alone, there are 12 projects representing 341 units of housing waiting for Housing Trust Fund dollars.

The new funds will be used to clear this backlog, pay for housing vouchers for farm workers, victims of domestic violence and the homeless, in addition to funding other programs. The amount will represent just over 3 percent of funds generated by the real estate excise tax, which is imposed upon the sale of property.

After 30 years of political maneuvering, the legislature finally passed a bill making it illegal to discriminate against gays and lesbians in Washington.

It also passed an alternative energy plan promoting the use of ethanol and biodiesel

by requiring that these fuels make up at least 2 percent of a dealer's total gasoline and 2 percent of total diesel sales, respectively. The rules will go into effect in late 2008.

The legislature also extended foster care benefits for youth who want to obtain higher education.

Rather than stopping benefits when youth complete their high school diploma or GED certificate, the new law will allow benefits to continue for a certain number of children seeking higher education or a vocational certificate until they turn 21.

Lawmakers also eliminated the \$5 daily fee for parking in state parks, provided \$28.5 million for remedial help for students struggling with the WASL and authorized 6,500 additional enrollments in the Basic Health Program for the working poor, boosting the total client base to 106,500.

Another affordable housing-related bill that would have, among other things, created an affordable housing database died in the House appropriations committee.

This bill provoked a brief debate over an amendment that would have prohibited housing authorities from using state and federal dollars to redevelop public housing communities.

Other bills that died were those calling for a simple majority approval of school bonds and plans for the renovation of Key Arena for the Seattle Sonics.

The legislature will meet again at the end of the year.

## WASL

Continued from front page

Zelda Mendard Ramirez, academic development specialist for SafeFutures Youth Center in High Point, works with low-income youth to help raise their WASL scores.

"Reading is the best thing students can do," she said. "If they can become proficient, efficient readers they will be able to tackle and comprehend more of the test."

The WASL was created to ensure each student in the state is getting a good education, but critics say a state-wide standardized test leaves too many students behind.

Mollie Seng, a sophomore living in the Rainier Beach neighborhood, is very critical of how the test will affect low-income students like herself.

"Barely half the students from my school passed the WASL last year," she said. "I feel like they are trying to set me up for failure."

Seng added that she thinks the decision to make the WASL a graduation requirement will lead to a higher drop-out rate among low-income students who are already struggling to form a connection with

their teachers at school.

As an after-school tutor, Ramirez knows that many low-income students and their families are dealing with other issues that make school less of a priority.

While hypothesizing why lower-income students perform poorer on exams, she points to a lack of resources in early education.

"Even the governor's plan to infuse large amounts of money at the grade levels where the WASL is taken will not completely make up for all the years of lower quality education," she said.

Last year, 59 percent of the students at Rainier Beach High School qualified for free and reduced lunches, making it one of the poorest schools in Seattle. Only 7 percent of the students there passed all three required sections of the WASL exam.

While most standardized tests measure student's performance against other students, the WASL just measures the students' scores against a set of standards. If the students meet the standards, they pass the test. The results from this spring's WASL will be released to the Class of 2008 this June.

Students who do not pass all three sections will have an opportunity to re-take the WASL in August. If they do not earn a passing score of 65 after at least two attempts, recent legislation has provided them with alternatives.

For instance, if a student fails one portion of the WASL, but his or her grades in that subject are comparable to those of fellow students who passed, the student will pass that part of the test.

The state will also allow college entrance exams, such as the ACT or SAT, to be used in place of the math portion of the WASL.

Students can also provide work samples to be approved by the state-appointed Board of Education for credit, or they can submit work portfolios from approved career and technical programs.

## Tutor

Continued from front page

dinators, Bui is practically the institutional memory of the program. She has seen the children come and go and takes pride in having contributed to their academic success.

These days Bui's younger sister, Maika, 10, comes to be tutored because their mother thinks highly of the program for what it offers both academically and socially.

Burgess is enthusiastic about all her volunteers, but thinks Sandy Bui is a wonderful role model for the other children.

"She keeps giving back to the community."

### The Voice

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The Voice, the newspaper of Neighborhood House, is published monthly with the support of the Seattle and King County Housing Authorities. Neighborhood House helps diverse communities of people with limited resources attain their goals for self-sufficiency, financial independence and community building. The Voice contributes to that mission by providing low-income people, immigrants, refugees and other concerned parties with timely, relevant news. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, Neighborhood House, SHA or KCHA. We welcome articles and tips from the community and reserve the right to edit all submissions.

## East Africans discuss gang issues with Seattle police

By **BRENNA CASEY**  
Voice reporter

About 40 people crowded into a small conference room in Swedish Hospital's Providence Campus last month to take part in an East African Advisory Council meeting. The council, which has been meeting monthly since the late 90s, is run by the Seattle Police Department to "foster communication and education, and bring concerns," explained Mark Howard, the meeting's facilitator.

This particular meeting was slated for discussion of the "East African Posse," a gang that operates in the University District and has been the target of a federal investigation. The meeting took place after six gang members were arrested by federal agents in late January.

Attendees included members of the East African community and representatives from service organizations including Neighborhood House and the East African Youth Advocacy Group.

The meeting opened with welcoming remarks from Howard, who passed the presentation to Detective Sharon Stevens. Stevens identified herself as the department's East African liaison and took several questions about the case.

"What are these guys accused of?" asked one attendee. "We need to know information," another man stated sternly.

"I have limited information because I am not involved in the investigation," Stevens said. "Questions about particulars or how information came to be, I simply cannot answer. I am not representing the department in any official capacity."

Stevens' sentiments were echoed by John Brooks, a veteran police officer in the East Precinct. "I don't know specifics; I wasn't involved in the investigations or arrests." Brooks explained that the inci-

dents took place in the North precinct. No officers from the North Precinct were invited to the meeting.

"We were under the impression that we were getting information about these cases," protested East African community member Yohannes Hagos.

As discussion continued, attendees brainstormed ways to keep youth from becoming involved in gang activity.

"It's up to us to be active and proactive," urged Abraham Araya from the youth advocacy group.

"Prevention is a community responsibility," offered Michael Neguse, Yesler Terrace crime prevention coordinator for the Seattle Neighborhood Group.

In mid-February, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported that members of the gang had been "allegedly terrorizing" University of Washington students and others in the area. Attendees at the meeting were particularly concerned about the language that had been used to describe the East African Posse and the bearings it might have on the perception of the East African community.

"There have been gangs in this country for years; never before have we called them terrorists. Why now?" asked Araya.

Another attendant, Million Shiferaw, described the characterization of the East African community as "completely devastating."

Stevens responded that police officers understand that the gang members act as individuals.

"It does not reflect on the community," she said. "I can just about guarantee that."

At the meeting's conclusion, Howard apologized for the lack of information presented and encouraged people to attend the next meeting, which will take place on April 6. For more information, contact Howard at (206) 684-7727.

## Katrina

Continued from page 2

said he prefers to live on his own.

With no job to go back to, Orvold has been spending his time pursuing his artwork and trying to get certified to teach in Washington. He is still waiting for paperwork from the University of New Orleans that will verify the coursework that he completed.

Orvold said that he has lost contact with



Justin Orvold

most of the kids he taught in New Orleans. He made one trip back to the city to pick up some of his belongings, but doesn't anticipate moving back. While he works on his teaching certificate, he said he'll seek work as a paraprofessional.

The Seattle Housing Authority connected Orvold with a private landlord on Beacon Hill. In his apartment he has been making collages from some of the photographs he took of his students and reflecting on the path his life has taken.

He has received several contradictory letters from FEMA, but has most recently heard through a phone call that he will continue to be eligible for assistance.

### Friends help evacuee build new life

Marcus Moody is a lean six-footer with a gentle demeanor. He was living in New Orleans's French Quarter when Katrina struck, and he evacuated with friends to Dallas.

"I was lucky and blessed to be with some friends at the time who had a car, and they took me with them," he said. "Fortunately, we also had some friends in Dallas."

Moody ended up in Seattle because he had friends here too, and they let him know that housing was available.

He arrived in November and has been living in a studio apartment at Olive Tower, a property owned by Housing Resources Group. He said he hopes to stay in Seattle, particularly if he can pursue his ambition of becoming a casino dealer. He also hopes to eventually find a larger apartment.

"I went back down to New Orleans last month and most of my stuff was still there," he said. "I'd like to go back down to get it soon. If I can find a decent one-bedroom in Seattle, I'd rather stay here than go back."

But Moody was originally notified by FEMA that he would not be eligible for ongoing assistance. After an appeal, he was informed by phone that his denial has been reversed, and now he expects to continue receiving help from FEMA.

Seattle's Katrina evacuees tell stories of hope and confusion similar to those being experienced by Katrina-displaced people in cities and towns all across the country.



## One to grow on

Garden tips for community gardeners

By **ANZA MUENCHOW**  
Special to the Voice

As I write this column, we are having a cool spring, so consider warming your garden with the use of cloches.

A cloche is a small, temporary, removable plastic or glass structure that works like a mini-greenhouse to warm the soil and plants. You can use a cloche to establish your favorite crops and promote their early growth. We refer to this as "extending the season," manipulating our normal cool, wet springs so we can grow more warm-season plants.

There are plenty of ways to build your own cloches to get your gardens growing earlier. For ideas, visit one of the large P-patch gardens in our city and see what fellow gardeners have come up with.

One simple design is to construct a frame with wood or plastic tubing over which you can stretch a clear plastic film or attach glass.

Another idea is to use a couple of long recycled windows set like a tent over your bed of produce.

Attach each window to two long upright stakes. To make the tent, rest the windows lengthwise against each other with the stakes inside and sticking out of the top crack of the tent. Tie the stakes together for better stability. Tape or staple a plastic triangle at the ends of the tent if you want the cloche to stay warmer at night.

Cloches like this warm the soil for earlier planting and are great for heat-loving transplants in April and May.

Using transplants is another way to extend the growing season. Try starting your own tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers

or corn indoors in clean trays of sterile seed starting mix. I emphasize the clean and sterile materials because the indoor environment encourages the growth of bacteria that harm or kill little seedlings. Find a warm place to get the seeds to sprout and then give them plenty of light.

If you don't have time, materials or space to start your own transplants, there are several great local plant sales that sell the best Northwest varieties. In the north end of Seattle, shop at the Tilth Edible Plant Sale at the Good Shepard Center on North 50th Avenue and Meridian Avenue North on May 6 and 7.

The Master Gardener Plant Sale at the University of Washington Center for Urban Horticulture will also take place on May 6 and 7.

For those in the south end of Seattle, I recommend the Orca School plant sale on Saturday, May 13 at 3528 Ferdinand Ave S. just one block west of Rainier Ave. in the Columbia City neighborhood.

This spring, I am especially enjoying rhubarb and asparagus, a couple of perennial vegetables that grow up year after year in our vegetable gardens. If you plant these this spring, you'll be feasting on delicious baked rhubarb crisp and roasted asparagus for years to come.

To roast asparagus, wash and trim the spears and lay them in a shallow baking tray. Drizzle olive oil and a little salt on them and roast in a 450 degree oven for 10 minutes, or to your desired tenderness. Simple and delicious.

Happy eating and happy gardening.

Anza Muenchow is an avid gardener and a volunteer with P-Patch. You can reach her at mahafarm@whidbey.net.

## Save money—apply for Basic Food assistance

By **FREMONT PUBLIC ASSOCIATION**

Washington's Basic Food Program, formerly known as food stamps, can help you save money while still paying your grocery bill.

Although in most cases the amount you'll receive in assistance won't cover all your food costs, it will help you save money for other necessities.

Most people have heard of the program, but many do not know they qualify. It's estimated that only 47 percent of eligible Seattle residents are tapping in to Basic Food benefits.

Eligibility is based on family size and income. A single individual can have gross earnings of up to \$1,037 per month and still be eligible for benefits.

A family of two can have a gross monthly income of \$1,390 and still qualify. For a family of three the amount is \$1,744, family of four, \$2,097, family of five, \$2,450, family of six, \$2,803, family of seven, \$3,156.

You must also meet some citizenship or alien status requirements to qualify. A Social Security number is required, but undocumented parents may apply for their children born in the United States.

Keep in mind that owning a car or having a savings account or retirement fund are not barriers to obtaining help from the Basic Food Program.

Also, the Basic Food Program or food stamp assistance no longer comes to you as a paper coupon. Since 1999, the state has issued plastic cards that are used like a debit card, offering more privacy and convenience to users.

The first step to receiving Basic Food is to fill out a three-page application from the Department of Social & Health Services.

For help filling out the application or to have one mailed to you, contact Katie Schroeder, the Fremont Public Association's basic food outreach coordinator at (206) 694-6793 or by e-mail at katherines@fremontpublic.org.

You can also visit one of the local DSHS community service offices to pick up an application. Once you send in the completed form, you will be sent a letter with the date and time of a DSHS interview to determine if you can receive benefits.

If you are unable to make an in-person interview, you can request a telephone interview.

This was the preferred route for a homeless man who often uses the Familyworks Food Bank in Wallingford. With FPA's help, the man was able to arrange a phone interview at the food bank.

Later, the man commented that although he didn't have money for a thank-you card, he was very grateful for the help he received. It had really turned his life around, he said, adding that he's been considering other DSHS services to help him get off the street.

An in-person interview can be equally successful. Schroeder said one of her clients from the local food bank came to FPA after his interview to let her know he was happy she encouraged him to sign-up.

He qualified for the maximum amount for an individual, and he said that without FPA's help he would never have known about the benefit.

