

# GWC NEWS



George Wiley Center, 32 East Avenue, Pawtucket, RI, 02860 [www.georgewileycenter.org](http://www.georgewileycenter.org) 401-728-5555

## You Are My People

On a sliding income scale, Florence Colton, a Liberian immigrant, is one of our largest donors. She has donated over 3 weeks pay to the Wiley Center. While this is an extraordinarily generous donation, it is so much more.

When Florence found the Wiley Center, she was unemployed and in danger of utility shut-offs. She had hope, but the seriousness of the situation was truly daunting. She'd been denied unemployment benefits and her employer had fired her without just cause.

The organizing effort managed to keep Florence's utility services, and we went to work on her unemployment problem. First came the hearing -- she lost, but her attorney, Wiley volunteer Michael Marran, was convinced that the decision was unjust. He decided to take the case to Superior Court.

A lot of time passed, and Florence was without income and quite discouraged. But since she was looking for a job, she joined the Wiley Center Jobs Committee in addition to the local St. Michael's chapter.

We heard of an employment opportunity and advised chapter members...Florence among them. One member took a friend to the employer's location and he got a job. But when Florence and other members called the

place, they were told there were no jobs.

A sting operation involving Grace Ita, a Nigerian immigrant, and Florence, resulted in their being told there were no jobs, though they were offered a franchise - for a price they could never have afforded. Enter member Erminia Garcia, five minutes later, and she is offered a job. One racial discrimination complaint later and the issue was resolved -- financially and handsomely.

But that did not happen quickly either, and before the end result was achieved, Florence was told she'd won her unemployment case. She was astounded. When she won the racial discrimination case she was simply flabbergasted.

By that time, Florence had landed herself a job. The days of wondering where the next penny would come from were over. But Florence didn't just vanish into a more comfortable life - she is still in touch with the Wiley Center, and comes to our most important actions. She has also donated the most whopping widow's mite. She refers other people to us, and they in turn bring others.

Being shy by nature, she just dropped those donations off... "You are my people," she says.

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*Florence speaks to the Providence Journal outside the Department of Labor and Training.*

To our members, friends, and supporters:

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of our mission as we have traveled through 2010. As you know, the year began with a setback when our founder and director, Henry Shelton, suffered a stroke last December 28<sup>th</sup>. On a happy note, Henry is doing very well and remains the heart and the brains of our organization, even as he works equally hard at his physical therapy. The 2011 softball season remains a goal that looms almost as large as the goal of passing affordable energy legislation this year.

We hope you enjoy this issue of our newsletter. We recognize that it serves as both our first and our last newsletter of 2010, and hope you will forgive us our tardiness. While it has been a challenging year, it has also been a very busy time - with changes in staff; board members and volunteers stepping up to cover chapter meetings and other duties that Henry used to make look easy; and always always always phones ringing with calls from decent, hard-working people who are having trouble making ends meet.

While Julie Silvia is no longer on staff, we are thankful for her continued strong commitment and her volunteer efforts on behalf of the Wiley Center. We wish Liz Marsis a very successful future in her new position with Interfaith Power and Light. We appreciate that we have found, in our new administrator Debbie Clark, a capable and dynamic jack-of-all-trades, capable of reprioritizing at a moment's notice. Bob Toppa, our SER Jobs volunteer, remains a calm voice of reason for many who are at wits end when they reach out to us. Pam Jennings, our former volunteer and current bilingual organizer, has been a godsend - and we will be sorry to see her go in January. Erin Guyette, a senior intern from URI, has been instrumental in drumming PIPP into the heads of general assembly members. Lisa continues to keep the media files updated and the coffee hot. Amanda Bombadier has been invaluable in updating the website. Jack Colby and Sandra Morra seem always able to work their busy lives around food stamp meetings and utility hearings. In short, it would take an entire newsletter just to name all the people who have shown so much dedication and we cannot thank them enough - but we are deeply grateful for their efforts.

Sincerely,

Maggi Rogers, Acting Operations Manager

## Historical Society to Archive Wiley Center Records

With great pride, we announce that The Rhode Island Historical Society will become the keeper of our historical records, beginning in 1981 with the founding of the George Wiley Center. Included are records of actions, meetings, accomplishments, recognition, press reports, objectives, and ongoing struggles of the Center, our director Henry Shelton, the Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty, and our community chapters. These records will be archived and available to activists, scholars, and students who wish to learn about organizing for social justice in Rhode Island.

## Henry Turns 80

If you missed Henry Shelton's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party on June 10<sup>th</sup> at the RI Food Bank, you can still go to our website [www.georgewileycenter.org](http://www.georgewileycenter.org) and see the pictures. Unfortunately, we cannot recreate the great dance tunes of The Gnomes, the heartfelt songs of Joyce Katzberg, or the charming performance by The Raging Grannies (with a special parody written just for Henry). Suffice it to say, it was a happy and momentous occasion. We can't wait to see what kind of encore Henry's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party will bring!



*Henry and Carol Shelton celebrate.*

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## Wiley Center's First Annual Quiz Bowl Awards "Brightest Bulb" to Wild Colonial Team



*The Wizards strategize.*

September 10<sup>th</sup>, the Pawtucket Armory hosted the first annual Wiley Center "Quiz Bowl" fundraiser - a chance for our members, friends, and supporters to match wits and have fun at the same time. Many thanks to our emcee, Marc Joel Levitt, and to all the teams who were so closely matched. If you would like to see the trophy up close (maybe to inspire you to win it next year) it is on display at the Wild Colonial Pub on South Water Street in Providence, from whence the winning team hailed. Pictures from the event can be seen on our website at [www.georgewileycenter.org](http://www.georgewileycenter.org).

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## Turn Out To Get Turned On

On September 25, 2010, over 65 of the Wiley Center's statewide members, political candidates and experts converged about the dire need for Percent of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) legislation in Rhode Island. Wiley member Jack Colby and John Howat, of the National Consumer Law Center in Boston presented attendees with all the fact and figures in support of PIPP. Members came away with a call to action to call the General Assembly candidates in their districts to solicit their support for the legislation when it comes time to vote. The Cape Verdean American Development Center in Pawtucket generously donated their space for the meeting. Breakfast was provided by the Pawtucket Soup Kitchen, Sodexo and Country Kitchen.

After the event, the Wiley Center office buzzed with calls to hundreds of our members across the state. We asked them to continue to "Keep the Pressure On" the candidates to get pledges of support for affordable energy. So far, 28 elected Assembly members have confirmed their support, with many other members requesting further information. Please call our office to get your Representatives and Senators contact information. We still need to keep the pressure on to get our legislation passed in 2011. Visit our website to find out where your elected officials stand - [www.georgewileycenter.org](http://www.georgewileycenter.org).

## Wiley Center SNAPS into Action for Nutrition Assistance

What for years we called the food stamp program, the Department of Agriculture now calls SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Whatever it is called, the program to assist families in need is central to a healthy population and a focus of the George Wiley Center.

When the recession began in early 2008, about 80,000 Rhode Islanders received SNAP benefits. As times got tougher in 2009 and unemployment skyrocketed, DHS failed to meet the burgeoning food crisis in our state. Worse, DHS rules and procedures hampered SNAP participation.

In response to DHS failures, Wiley Center members pressed for procedures that dramatically increased SNAP participation. At the same time, the U.S. Department of Agriculture revised eligibility rules eliminating several road blocks to food stamp eligibility.

While the federal government was doing its part to respond quickly to the growing food crisis in 2008 and 2009, RI DHS sputtered and failed to make the needed adjustments to help RI families get access to food stamps. Things got so bad that legal action was brought against DHS for failing to meet federal mandates to enroll eligible Rhode Islanders in the SNAP program within 30 days of receiving an application.

The Wiley Center was a key player during this period, keeping pressure on DHS to meet federal nutrition mandates, hire more SNAP application technicians, shorten forms for senior citizens and otherwise increase SNAP participation. Our persistence, along with the pressure brought by URI's Feinstein Center for a Hunger Free America, the RI ACLU, and other agencies, led to a dramatic increase in SNAP participation in just a year and a half. Today, more than 152,000 Rhode Islanders in more

than 81,000 households receive food stamps benefits.

This record number of RI SNAP participation was accomplished by expanding the number of DHS workers who process SNAP applications and by eliminating time-consuming and unnecessary reporting requirements for SNAP recipients. Soon, additional efficiencies will be realized as DHS replaces its current 28 page SNAP application with a new eight page version. This one change alone, pushed by Henry Shelton for at least three years in the face of DHS resistance, will greatly reduce the burden on non-seniors seeking to participate in SNAP. Also in the works is a DHS/SNAP office in Wakefield which is scheduled to open in mid-December, the only the only such facility south of Warwick. In January 2011, a "Food Access Program" will kick-off, making it possible for SNAP recipients with limited cooking facilities to purchase hot meals at approved restaurants.

A lot of this progress resulted from our membership's somewhat raucous actions at the Governor's office and at DHS headquarters. Members of the Wiley community have shown that focused advocacy and persistence is an essential part of an overall strategy to redirect the priorities of an administration that too often ignores the needs of low-income families.

The next RI Food Stamp (SNAP) Advisory Committee meeting will be held on December 13th at 9:00 a.m. in the Louis Pasteur Building at the Pastore Center in Cranston. The meetings are open and participation is encouraged.

**"Soon, additional efficiencies will be realized as DHS replaces its current 28 page SNAP application with a new eight page version."**

## Temporary Rule Change Helps Households Get Turned On

The Wiley Center successfully lobbied the General Assembly leadership this fall to encourage the Public Utilities Commission to enact emergency utility restoration rules to help low-income households who were without service, or facing termination, this fall. The rules allow for lower down-payments and longer repayment terms for arrearages. The rules were set to expire on December 1, 2010. Due to a request from the Wiley Center, spurred by delays in the implementation of RI's LIHEAP program this fall, the PUC will be voting on November 24 at 10:00am to extend the temporary rule change to January 1, 2011. Please contact us for more information.

## Wiley Center makes inroads for Universal School Breakfast in Newport

Thanks to years of hard work and perseverance, Wiley leaders Pauline Perkins-Moye and Betsy Dees led a successful effort to introduce free breakfast to all students at the Sullivan Elementary School in Newport beginning this September. Although an effort to expand the pilot program to Rogers High School fell short, our battle is far from over. With the commitment of school committee members Becky Bolan and Bob Leary, both parents in the system, as well as other parent and student leaders, we are encouraged and believe we will see the program expanded this year. Our thanks go out as well to Share Our Strength, a leading national non-profit organization which mobilizes individuals and industries to fight hunger. Their belief in our mission and their generous support will help us to organize around this issue in Newport and help remove obstacles to education for its children in the public schools.

## Plea for PIPP Continues

34,498 utility shut-offs this year, and counting. 440,000 shut-off notices sent out so far this year. Hundreds of budget payment plans set up, hundreds broken. Thousands of Rhode Islanders are expected to pay as much as 50% of their income to keep the electricity and heat on each year. The utility payment system is broken for low-income, fixed income and elderly Rhode Islanders.

But we have a solution: Percentage of Income Payment Plan - commonly referred to as PIPP. In many other states, PIPP is funded by a Universal Service Fund of very small contributions from residential ratepayers, and has been working for years. It's time for Rhode Islanders to prove that we value universal service; households should not go without heat or electricity!

Legislators must step up for the common, struggling households of RI. Remember "deregulation" in 1996? Remember Deepwater wind and decoupling that sailed through the 2010 legislative session? Those bills have made or will make it harder for everyone! How about a bill that will actually help thousands of consumers? How about PIPP?

And to those opponents that say they don't want to contribute to keep other's utilities on, all arrearages are already charged by National Grid to all ratepayers at the end of each year. So we ask you, would you rather pay at the back door in a shady alley, or would you rather knowingly contribute to a fund that will help fellow Rhode Islanders - children, elderly, disabled, and unemployed - stay warm and illuminated. Furthermore, children who live in energy insecure homes are more likely to have health problems, have a harder time in school, and are more likely to be hungry - all problems which cost society in the long run.

Call us at 728-5555 to learn more and to help us make affordable energy a reality in the New Year!

George Wiley Center  
32 East Ave  
Pawtucket, RI 02860  
Return Service Requested



**Would you prefer to get the same info with less paper?**

**Please let us know if you would like to be on our e-newsletter list.**

**Send an email to [debbiec@georgewileycenter.org](mailto:debbiec@georgewileycenter.org) with subject line e-newsletter and your full name.**

**Stay up to date with Wiley Actions-Attend our meetings!!**  
Aquidneck Island-1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday  
South County-2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday  
Blackstone Valley-1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday  
Providence (bilingual)-2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday  
Woonsocket- 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday  
West Bay-4<sup>th</sup> Monday  
East Bay- 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday  
**Call our office to confirm locations, times and dates.**

## **Get ready, get ready!**

We are planning a strategy retreat to win passage of our PIPP bill in 2011!

On January 8, 2011, Chapter leaders and active members from each chapter will come together to get this done.

One utility shut-off is too many!  
No one should be left in the cold or in the dark!

When: January 8, 2011 10 a.m.-2 p.m.  
Where: Providence Presbyterian Church  
500 Hope Street, Providence, RI 02906

Please call our office if you are interested in attending:  
401-728-5555

*We're on the Web!*

*Visit us at:*

*[www.georgewileycenter.org](http://www.georgewileycenter.org)*