



For Carolyn Gary of East Trenton, a healthier home began with a call to Isles' REHEET. She wrote to Isles' CEO Marty Johnson recently:

*"The kitchen floor was falling in, actually I was afraid to walk in there. But now! I can walk around in there. The roof was leaking. It rained Sunday. I was pleased that I saw no leak. The windows are so beautiful! I'm sure I won't be feeling air coming through these windows this winter!"*

## Healthy Homes Meet Energy Efficiency

*Continued from page 1*

REHEET tackles these problems comprehensively. Isles replaces inefficient light bulbs, upgrades appliances, and fixes leaky windows. It also assesses homes for lead, mold, and structural hazards. "It doesn't make sense to replace only light bulbs when the whole house is falling down around you," Moore said. "It would be a waste of money."

REHEET has now completed work on more than 15 homes in Trenton, working with private contractors as well as Isles E4, Isles' new energy efficiency and weatherization venture. Funding for REHEET comes from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs' Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit Program, Environ, New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance Group, the Wachovia Regional Foundation, and the Halpern Family Foundation.

The challenge is to develop cost-efficient strategies to perform this work. REHEET spent \$13,000 to retrofit Gonzalez's home. Workers replaced the roof, installed new windows, and repaired walls and ceilings. Insulation and air sealing greatly improved the

home's energy efficiency. The house still needs work, but it is now a much safer and healthier place to live. Crucially, the repairs completed so far ensure it will not get any worse.

REHEET's reputation is spreading. "I've been calling people!" said Julie Lawrence, a recent customer. "I tell everybody I know about Isles."

Lawrence's East Trenton home received new insulation, new windows, and an energy-efficient heating system. Before REHEET's efforts, the two-story home had just one heating vent. "This house was so cold," Lawrence said. "Ice cold. I lived here for 26 years and I never had heat upstairs. Now I'm going to have it. This is a blessing."

Just down the street, Carolyn Gary's home had no kitchen floor—her roof leaked so badly that most of the floor had rotted away. REHEET came in and replaced the roof and floor and installed new windows. "It felt so good when it rained the other day," she said. "It didn't rain in the kitchen."

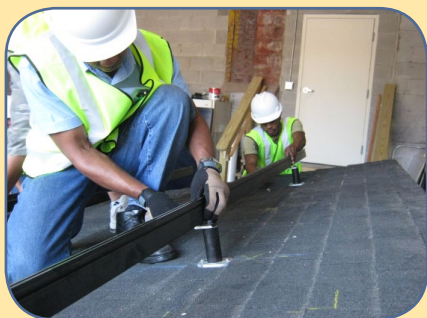
For more information about REHEET, contact Prince Moore at 609.341.4700.



# IslesWorks

The newsletter of Isles, Inc.

## Spotlight on CEET



Isles Center for Energy and Environmental Training held two Solar Panel Installation courses this fall. Working with Master Trainer Gay Canough, president of ETM Solar Works, 14 students learned the basics of solar energy and how to install solar panels.

*Learn more about CEET on page 5*

## Rethinking Light Bulbs and Leaky Roofs

**A**ida Gonzalez's home was literally falling down around her. The roof leaked, ceilings and walls were crumbling, mold was everywhere—and she didn't have the money to fix it.

"The city probably would have taken the house," Gonzalez said. Its condition was condemnable, but Gonzalez had no option other than to stay. "Where am I going to go?" she asked. "I'm 62."

Gonzalez's fortunes changed this summer when she responded to a flyer about Isles' Residential Health and Energy Efficiency Testing (REHEET) service. Prince Moore, REHEET's case manager, visited Gonzalez's home in the Old Trenton neighborhood to conduct an assessment. He was not terribly surprised by what he saw. Unfortunately, many homes in the area are equally dilapidated. "Most of the houses I have assessed thus far are close to this condition," he said.



Carolyn Gary has a brand new roof and windows to smile about, thanks to REHEET.

REHEET started in 2009 with an ambitious mission: to become a new model for home energy efficiency work. Although the federal government is pumping five billion dollars into building efficiency efforts, older homes in places like Trenton are often ineligible for this aid. Typical weatherization programs can't insulate an attic if the roof leaks, and it's hazardous to human health to seal a home that's contaminated by high levels of lead or mold.

*Continued on the back cover*

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# MESSAGE FROM MARTY JOHNSON



Dear Friends,

At this time of year, we reflect and give thanks for the harvest. Our 34 Trenton-area community and school gardens produced tens of thousands of pounds of food in 2010. Beyond fresh food, urban agriculture brings other benefits—exercise, improved soil and air quality, nutrition, safer streets, and more opportunities for communities to work together.

But this year's "harvest" is plentiful in other ways as well. This newsletter highlights the growing number of tools in our self-help toolbox that students, families, and groups increasingly seek. These tools deliver powerful social and economic benefits, and they save taxpayer expense. In these times, they are more needed and important than ever.

Over the past two years, we've taken some risks. When others were contracting, we expanded. Green jobs training, a weatherization and energy efficiency business, Isles' Financial Fitness Club, foreclosure counseling and mediation, community outreach around energy and healthy homes, and numerous other new activities make us excited about the future.

At the same time, we are in uncharted territory. While demand for Isles' work grows, revenues are uncertain. That is why we rely increasingly on private donors like you.

Our 2009 Annual Report and a list of contributors is included in this newsletter. It underscores the importance of your donations and why we need your investment. This holiday season make sure your gifts keep on giving.

Visit us at [www.isles.org](http://www.isles.org). Thanks!

In community,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marty Johnson".

Marty Johnson,  
President

celebrating 30 years

Next year, Isles turns 30 years old! To celebrate, we're gathering favorite memories and stories from staff, volunteers, donors, and those we work with in the community. We will print these reminiscences in future issues of IslesWorks. Please send your best stories to [Isles30@gmail.com](mailto:Isles30@gmail.com).



# 2010 Highlights

## Live Green & Healthy

- Isles' urban agriculture projects expanded to include 26 community gardens and 10 school gardens.
- Isles launched YouthGrow, a large garden addition to the Isles YouthBuild Institute.
- Isles founded and convened the Mercer Food Council, which launched a mobile farmers market.



## Build Wealth

- Isles Community Enterprises (ICE) became certified as a Small Business Administration Microlender.
- ICE provided one-on-one consulting sessions to more than 100 local microbusiness owners, helping create more than 20 businesses.
- ICE launched the Isles Financial Fitness Club and provided mortgage and foreclosure services to nearly 300 families.

## Revitalize Communities

- Isles acquired 57 Johnston Avenue, a six-acre parcel of land with 108,000 square feet of warehouse (currently leased to TerraCycle). It will also be the site for Mill One Organic Farm.
- Isles partnered with PSEG to enable more than 2,000 Trenton families to access energy efficiency services.
- Isles organized Community Action for a Renewed Environment, a citywide effort to identify, prioritize, and take action on local environmental health issues.
- Isles E4 retrofitted more than 100 homes to reduce energy bills and improve the indoor environment.

## Educate and Train

- Isles' Center for Energy and Environmental Training (CEET) developed new curricula and courses in residential energy efficiency, air leakage control, and duct systems.
- CEET placed an additional 41 unemployed or underemployed participants in jobs. The placement rate for job seekers now exceeds 95 percent.
- CEET trained and certified more than 500 individuals in the US EPA's new Lead Safe Renovation, Repair, and Painting regulations.
- Isles' YouthBuild Institute (IYI) expanded its services to include paid internships, mentoring, and community service opportunities.
- IYI and the Princeton-Blairstown Center partnered to provide adventure-based and in-class social and emotional learning curriculum to students.
- IYI enrolled 100 new students for the 2010-2011 academic year.

# Educate and Train

## Poets and Students Share Some Words

Three poets visited Isles' YouthBuild Institute (IYI) this summer. Their mission: Get students thinking about the power of words.

The poets were Dr. Ross Gay, an instructor in Drew University's Master of Fine Arts in Poetry Program, and two graduate students, Darla Himeles and David Crews. Their visit came as part of a three-day "Poets in Residence" course—a first-time collaboration between Drew University and Isles. The partnership was the idea of Ann Marie Macari, director of the program.

The poetry course started on a day when the temperature outside was 100 degrees and the students had just spent the morning hard at work on an urban gardening project. At the announcement of poetry, many of the students looked skeptical. Dr. Gay's first task was to get their attention.

"I have my Ph.D. in literature," he told the students. "But even I can go to Shakespeare plays and be like, 'What the hell are they talking about?' I know it, but it's hard work."

Dr. Gay explained that Shakespeare used the language of his time, including the slang of his time. "The poetry we make is just as valid," he said. "It's the language of our time."

Soon, students began offering examples of the specialized language they use to communicate: "Dish the rock" in a basketball game or "Word is bond" when making an agreement with friends. "For a minute" in their neighborhood can mean "For a long time."

The students' first assignment from Dr. Gay called for a short poem about



"a time you were misunderstood and it became dangerous." Some of the responses were serious, others lighthearted. One student recounted an incident when his mother was angry at him for leaving a CD player plugged in near the bathtub. He told his mother to "say no more," meaning—as his friends would know—"I understand." But his mother took his response literally. She was not pleased.

Writing a poem in a matter of a few minutes is no easy task. To help ease the process, the instructors offered increasingly specific writing prompts, incorporating new concepts such as meter and metaphor with each assignment. Mr. Crews offered this prompt: "Write a poem that is 10 lines, uses both alliteration and 'oo' sounds, and it's got to be a love poem."

"There are no rules when you're writing poems," he added, "except that you can't use the word 'doodoo' in a love poem."

The three-day poetry course culminated in a poetry reading by the students and the creation of the *Isles Student Poetry Anthology*. In the introduction, Dr. Gay described the IYI poets as

"brilliant, playful, serious, rigorous, and committed to making these poems."

Ralph Rivera, manager of educational services at IYI, said the poets' visit was a great success he hopes to see repeated.

"The kids were engaged," he said. "It was fun. Once you have something that's fun, everyone wants to get involved."

### Untitled by IYI student Lamont Hilton

Like a new sports car  
riding fast, top  
down, I feel free,  
full of life, no stress  
riding on a road  
that's looking nice,  
like a beautiful baby  
born into a family  
where the word yes  
is abused, no  
existence of trouble,  
lies, hate, or getting  
confused



## CEET Ramps Up

Isles' Center for Energy and Environmental Training (CEET) is steadily expanding. CEET now offers the U.S. Green Building Council introductory course as well as classes in residential air leakage control, heating, building analysis, solar panel installation, and lead-safe renovation.

Since its inception, CEET has trained 850 people at five different New Jersey sites, including 260 unemployed or underemployed participants in the Green Job Training Partnership. Of the graduates trained in Trenton, CEET has placed 61 percent of job seekers in green jobs, while an additional 35 percent are working in other fields.

Under the leadership of Dr. Jeanne Oswald, CEET has also developed a new curriculum in Residential Energy Efficiency Basics. The eight-day course, including 30 hours of hands-on experiential training, covers the fundamentals of the house as a system and prepares graduates to work as entry-level employees in the energy efficiency field. The course will use CEET's four new learning laboratories, which feature duct systems, air sealing, insulation, and the "House of Pressure."



## A Classroom in the Woods

An exciting three-year project at Isles' YouthBuild Institute (IYI) kicked off this September as IYI students and staff headed to Blairstown, New Jersey.

At the Princeton-Blairstown Center's sprawling "campus in the woods," the IYI group participated in an adventure-based experiential learning retreat, which included nature hikes, canoeing, and teamwork-based challenges. The highlight was a night walk in the woods during which students felt their way in the dark without the aid of flashlights.

"It put me in a predicament where I had to depend on other people," said one IYI student of the night

walk. "It was uncomfortable at first, because I do everything myself. But I got used to it. It was different—a life experience."

The trip was the official start of IYI's Project EXSEL (Experience in Social and Emotional Learning). Project EXSEL develops emotional self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Its goal is to help students reflect on gang involvement, find alternatives to physical aggression, and avoid substance abuse. The project will continue throughout the school year with additional trips to Blairstown and weekly classes held at IYI.

"Project EXSEL will help our students become more socially and emotionally mature and ready to take on the world," said Dr. Gail Brooks, IYI's principal. "They will be better equipped to succeed at college and in the workforce."

## PROJECT EXSEL PARTNERS

*Isles is partnering with the Princeton-Blairstown Center, an affiliate of Princeton University. For 100 years, the Center has provided adventure-based experiential education programming to at-risk urban youth. What began as a summer camp for inner-city boys has evolved into a year-round program that addresses the challenges of today's urban youth.*

*Generous support for this program was provided by a three-year grant to Isles, Inc. in the amount of \$392,000 from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its New Jersey Health Initiatives program.*



# Live Green & Healthy



## A Garden Grows on Tucker Street

In October, YouthGrow celebrated the harvest from its first growing season with a barbecue. Fresh produce from the new 33 Tucker Street garden—from watermelon and potato salad to assorted vegetables and herbs—figured prominently in the meal.

Located adjacent to the Isles' YouthBuild Institute, the YouthGrow garden trains high school students to manage a mini-farm and, eventually, to sell the produce as a business. With guidance from Isles' Food and Environment staff, the quarter-acre garden was tended this season by a team of YouthBuild and college interns. The students also learned about Trenton's food system and took trips to local farms.

The garden generated enough vegetables for students, staff, and donations to a local food pantry. It also includes flowers and more than 20 varieties of culinary and medicinal herbs. Planning and planting for next season are already underway.

# Build Wealth

## A Fitness Club for Your Wallet

The Isles Financial Fitness Club (IFFC) helps its members eliminate debt and shape up low credit scores.

Started as a pilot project in 2009, IFFC now has 20 members. The results to date are impressive. More than half of the members saw their credit scores significantly increase. On average, members save more than \$2,000 per year as a result of reduced interest charges and late penalties, as well as the elimination of other unnecessary expenses.

One IFFC member began the program with \$24,000 in credit card debt at interest rates from 13 to 25 percent. Because she could only afford to pay the monthly minimums, it was going to take her 25 years to pay off the debt.

After working with Kit Patel, an asset building coordinator, she was able to restructure the debt and increase the pace of repayment. With an average interest rate of 10 percent, she will save thousands of dollars in interest charges and be debt free in five years.

"Being a part of IFFC really helps me be more conscious of my spending and

distinguish my wants versus needs," she noted. "It's comforting to have a judgment-free place to discuss my personal financial situation."

Another member joined the club to tackle a \$925 payday loan with an annualized interest rate over 300 percent. To settle the payday loan, IFFC provided a Springboard loan. Patel also identified ways to reduce her cell phone bill by \$600 per year.

Looking forward, IFFC is talking with employers interested in enrolling employees in the club. For more information, contact Kit Patel at 609.341.4740 or [apatel@isles.org](mailto:apatel@isles.org).

# Corporate Volunteers Get Their Hands Dirty

Increasingly, corporate managers and their employees want to bring diversity, team building, and a sense of meaning to their jobs. Many come to volunteer at Isles with these goals in mind.

In August a team of new financial analysts from the Plainsboro offices of BlackRock, Inc. spent the afternoon in Isles' YouthGrow Garden. Working alongside students and interns, the crew edged the garden with reclaimed brick and planted herbs, flowers, and berries.

"I want our new employees to see the importance of community service and make sure they always make time for it throughout their careers," said Monique Le, a BlackRock marketing analyst who coordinated the visit.

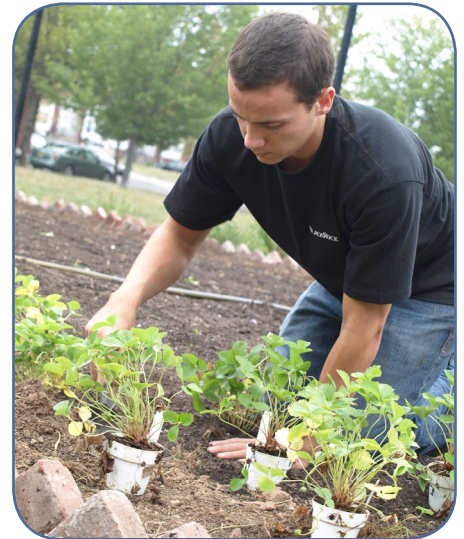
Many of the newest BlackRock employees were delighted that BlackRock supported this work in their professional lives. "I think it's really important that they set aside this time to get us out into the community," said

analyst Alissa Eisenberg. "It's valuable as a learning experience, and it shows you the values of the people you'll be working with."

Employees from Princeton-based NRG Energy, Inc. also put in some dirt time. In September, 15 volunteers landscaped and planted flower bulbs outside Isles' YouthBuild Institute. The visit allowed NRG's employees to view firsthand the impact of their company's philanthropy. In 2008, NRG made a generous million dollar donation to renovate the building, creating 20,000 sq. ft. of training and classroom space.

Earlier in the summer, Tyco International introduced 40 visiting Chinese students from Shanghai Jiao Tong University to Isles' work by organizing an effort to clean up trash and repair picnic tables at a Trenton playground.

For the volunteers, the visits seemed to make an impact. Several reported a new desire to do more community service and



to start gardens of their own. "Vegetables taste so much better when you grow them yourself," remarked one BlackRock employee.

For more information about corporate community service opportunities at Isles, contact Corey Hribar, Manager of Institutional Giving, at 609.341.4726 or [chribar@isles.org](mailto:chribar@isles.org).

## DONOR PROFILE



**Yves Marcuard** teaches French and coaches soccer at the Princeton Day School (PDS), with which Isles has enjoyed a long-term relationship. Every September the PDS senior class donates a day of community service to Isles. And for the last ten years, Marcuard has been one of Isles' reliable donors.

"Isles' focus on local habitat and environmental issues, their work towards self-sustainability, and their educational components all have a strong appeal to me. The combination of this work into one organization is remarkable," says Marcuard.

Recently Marcuard signed up for Isles' new automatic giving program, which makes donating to Isles monthly, quarterly, or yearly even easier. "I don't have to do anything," he says. "It's automatic."

In return, Marcuard receives a newsletter that keeps him up to date with Isles' work, as well as the satisfaction of knowing that his support makes a difference.

Donors interested in automatic giving can sign up by visiting [www.Isles.org](http://www.Isles.org) and clicking "Donate" in the top right corner. Questions? Contact Yuki Laurenti, Managing Director of Resource Development, at 609.341.4721 or [ylaurenti@isles.org](mailto:ylaurenti@isles.org).