HOLYOKE PUBLIC LIBRARY TO DIGITIZE PUERTO RICAN AND LATINX VIDEO COLLECTION
In our June 2019 edition we published a story about Armanis Fuentes, a Puerto Rican student raised in South Holyoke who attended and graduated from the city’s public schools. Fuentes is now a 21-year-old Springfield resident, a history major, honor student, award winner, scholarship recipient, and recent graduate of Holyoke Community College.

During his college years, he became interested in learning about Puerto Rican history and culture, enrolling in course that reinforced his quest for information. While taking the course The Immigrant City,” a political and historical study of Holyoke held jointly with Amherst College, he discovered the Holyoke History Room at the public library. Discouraged by the “thin scholarship” on Puerto Rican history in the archives, he interviewed his Holyoke friends for an oral history project. Fuentes wrote an independent study “Networks of Puerto Rican Power: Building Bilingual Education in Holyoke Schools, 1960-1990.”

earned him first place this year in the HCC Library’s annual BUILD research competition. Armanis Fuentes’ experience is not unique. The lack of resources in our regional public libraries about Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican experience is well known among teachers, researchers and those who are looking for information about this topic.

The recent donation of valuable book and video collections (La Familia Hispana, Inc., and Vecinos/Neighbors) about Latinx, Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans to the Holyoke Public Library could open the door and become the foundation upon which to build a much needed resource center in the History Room. (More information about the book collection appeared in our February 2019 edition.)

It is time to move forward and make sure that we have a wide variety of books and other sources of information about Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans readily available in our regional public libraries.

weeks after this event, one of the only two teachers of color in the program received a non-renewal notice.

On June 23rd, shoestring.org published the following: On the last day of school, June 19th, dozens of students and teachers gathered outside of Holyoke High School’s North Campus to protest the firing of Alicia Thomas, a beloved teacher in the school’s ethnic studies department. Ms. Thomas is one of only two teachers of color of the seven teachers in the department, which teaches history from a culturally relevant perspective that incorporates race, ethnicity, and people’s history.
Holyoke Public Library Receives Grant to Digitize Puerto Rican and Latinx Video Collection by MANUEL FRAU RAMOS

The Holyoke History Room of the Holyoke Public Library has received a Recordings at Risk grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR). The award of $14,644 will be used to digitize more than 100 video recordings of the bilingual Vecinos/Neighbors community access television program, filmed in and around Holyoke in the early 1990s, and portions of the VHS recordings of La Familia Hispana, Inc. collection in the History Room.

Recordings at Risk is a national re-granting program aimed at preserving historically-valuable recorded material endangered by deterioration and format obsolescence. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funds the grant program.

Holyoke History Room Archivist Eileen Crosby, Holyoke History Room Archivist

Members of CLIR’s independent grant-review panel noted that the project was “timely and urgent.” As one scholar noted in a letter of support, “These are important cultural, educational, historical, and political stories, told through the perspectives and voices of those who experienced them.”

The Project was one of only 20 selected from a pool of 77 applicants to receive this competitive grant.

Among the other grantees are the Preservation of “Seeing Red”, Kent State University Commissions, Committees, and Commemorations: Preserving Audio and Audiovisual Responses to the Kent State Shootings, KUT Radio at University of Texas at Austin - In Black America: Preserving African-American Culture and Achievement in American Society, and the William Way LGBT Community Center Reformatting of the Gay and Lesbian Coffeehouse of Philadelphia cassette tapes and continued reformatting of the Tommi Avicolli Mecca cassette tapes on LGBTQ history.

Vecinos/Neighbors began recording in 1991 and soon started airing weekly on Channel 22, Continental Cablevision’s public access channel. Continental Studio was located on East Mountain Road in Westfield. The program was broadcasted in Holyoke, Westfield, Granby, and maybe Southwick. The show aired Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays at 3pm and 9pm, and again on Saturdays at 8pm.

Producers Carlos Vega, Sylvia Galván, and Gary O’Connor sought to connect viewers with reliable information. According to Galván, “The idea of producing the Vecinos/Neighbors one hour weekly show came from our concern about the pervasive negative reporting in the news and newspapers about Latinos in the area. Our show only presented positive aspects and activities from the communities around us, but mostly about Holyoke, and never about crime. At that time there were no bilingual newspapers or television programs accessible. We were interested in informing the Spanish speaking community about issues relevant to heir lives, i.e., education, voting rights, housing, health, the arts, and youth programs.”

In addition to Vega, O’Connor, and Galván, Chris Landry, Julie Kumble, and Juan Rivera were also part of the production team. “All shows were presented in Spanish and English. Important interviews were carefully scripted and filmed twice –once in Spanish and once in English,” said Galván.

By featuring local artists, performers, and community projects, they hoped to counter-balance the negative perceptions of Latino communities in the region that were often portrayed in the media. Some of the artists who appeared Vecinos/Neighbors were José González y Banda Criolla, the salsa band La Perfecta, Los Amigos del Merengue, Orquesta Clase Aparte, Grupo Quetzal, duo José González and Claudio Ragazzi, Los Pleneros del Caribe, and La Familia Cabrera, among others.

Many episodes featured guest hosts or interviews with community members, including Orlando Isaza, Diosdado López, Gladys Lebrón, José González, Magdalena Gómez, Betty Medina Lichtenstein, Lilian Santiago, Yolanda Nogué, Juan Rivera, Will Echevarría, Martin Espada, Jim Lescault, and Peter Negroni, among others.

Vecinos/Neighbors interviewed two recognized national figures - Cesar Chávez, farm labor leader and civil rights activist who co-founded the National Farm Workers Association (later the United Farm Workers union, UFW) in 1962 with Dolores Huerta, and Sandra Cisneros, short-story writer, poet and novelist best known for the bestselling novel The House on Mango Street published in 1984.

The show was on the air for over 5 years. Galván explained that it ended for a combination of reasons: “Continental Cablevision was being bought by Media One and they didn’t want to follow the same model; we needed a break; and the Holyoke mayor’s office decided to move “Public Access” into City Hall where it remained until recently.”

After Vecinos/Neighbors ceased production, Carlos Vega and others continued to film community events, activities, and performances related to his work as a community organizer and member of La Familia Hispana, Inc. Both tape collections (Vecinos/Neighbors and La Familia Hispana, Inc.) were donated to the Library in July 2018. Once the collections are preserved and made publicly accessible, they will provide sought-after primary source material for students and scholars seeking to understand the political and cultural dynamics of urban life in the 1990s.

The donation of both of these collections was the result of years of conversations and negotiations between Diosdado López of La Familia Hispana, Inc. and Manuel Frau Ramos of The Puerto Rican Cultural Project of the Holyoke Public Library.

Holyoke History Room Archivist Eileen Crosby will oversee the grant, which will involve inventorying the collection and working with a digitization vendor. After digitization, the grant will fund a part-time bilingual intern during the winter months to assist with creating descriptions for each tape and sharing as much content with the public as possible through an online platform. The intern will also be involved in planning a community event and screening in the Library’s Community Room in early summer 2020.

For CLIR’s announcement of funded projects, see “Claiming Place: Preserving the History of Puerto Rican and Latino Culture and Politics in Western Massachusetts through digitization of the Vecinos/Neighbors and La Familia Hispana, Inc. video collections” (https://www.clir.org/recordings-at-risk/funded-projects/). For more information about the project, contact the Holyoke History Room Archivist at (413) 420-8107.

The Puerto Rican Cultural Project (PRCP) was organized in July 2012. In November of that same year, it became an unincorporated group of volunteers associated with the Holyoke Public Library (HPL). The mission of PRCP is to support the Library’s outreach efforts to the diverse demographic groups in the Holyoke area, especially the Puerto Rican community.
El Puerto Rico, The Rich Port 2 Concert Held in Holyoke by MANUEL FRAU RAMOS

MIFA Victory Theatre presented El Puerto Rico 2, The Rich Port 2, the second in a series of concerts celebrating Puerto Rico’s rich cultural heritage through contemporary classical music. The concert included the world premieres of three commissions by Tony Solitro (Canción), Christian A. Quiñones (What My Mother Wrote), and Omar Surillo (Isla Verde). In addition, the public had the opportunity of hear excerpts from this year’s composers in residence - Carlos Carrillo, Iván Enrique Rodríguez, and Liliana Ugay.

The concert was the culmination of a two-week residency by the Victory Players, a project of the MIFA Victory Theatre International Arts Academy. Under the musical direction of Artistic Director and Conductor Tian Hui Ng, the Victory Players featured Giovanni Pérez (Flute), Eric Schultz (Clarinet), Elly Toyoda (Violin), Clare Monfredo (Cello), Nathan Ben-Yehuda (Piano), and Robert Rocheteau (Percussion).

The residency ran from May 28 through June 9, 2019 and consisted of rehearsals, composer residencies, school workshops and concerts, and two public performances.

The concerts were held on June 8 and 9 at El Mercado in Holyoke. El Mercado is part of the Holyoke based community organization Nueva Esperanza.

On Wednesday, June 5 the community had the opportunity to meet Victory Players’ Composers-in-Residence at the Holyoke Public Library: Christian A. Quiñones (Puerto Rico), Tony Solitro, Carlos Carrillo (Puerto Rico), and Iván Enrique Rodríguez (Puerto Rico) at the Holyoke Public Library. The Puerto Rican Cultural Project (PRCP) sponsored this event.

Last year, 2018, MIFA Victory Theatre presented “El Puerto Rico, The Rich Port,” the first production of contemporary classical music featuring “Caprichos” by Puerto Rican composer Roberto Sierra, as well as a piece by Puerto Rican composer Omar Surillo.

The debut concert, under the musical direction of Tian Hui Ng, the MIFA Victory Theatre International Arts Academy unveiled the six–member musical ensemble, The Victory Players, chosen from around the world to be in residency here in Holyoke. In addition to the ensemble, composers were also chosen to be in residence to work with the Victory Players and create MIFA-commissioned music about Puerto Rico.

Christian Quiñones is a Puerto Rican composer, winner of the 2015 PROARTE composition competition. His music has been performed by the Trio Sanromá, Cuban virtuoso René Izquierdo, Orquesta del Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico, and Young Artist Concert Orchestra (YACO). His music has been performed at the Sala Sinfónica Pablo Casals, at the Cannon Gallery by the Puerto Rico Steinway Society, Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico and the prestigious Ateneo Puertorriqueño.

In 2019 he obtained his BM in Music Composition at the Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico, studying composition and orchestration with Alfonso Fuentes. He also studied conducting with Rafael Irizarry III and theory with Pedro Segarra Sisamone and Noel Torres.

Born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Carlos R. Carrillo Cotto is an Assistant Professor of Composition-Theory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Dr. Carrillo is the recipient of numerous awards including the Béarns Prize, the Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, BMI and ASCAP awards. He has been commissioned by Music and the Anthology for the Da Capo Chamber Players, the New York Youth Symphony, Concert Artists Guild and the Pennsylvania Music Teachers Association. In 2004 he received a commission from the American Composers Orchestra, the second such work commissioned for ACO by the BMI Foundation, Inc./Carlos Surinach Fund.

Recent performances include The Gathering Grounds, commissioned by the Casals Festival and a performance of selections from the opera in progress La Pasión segun Antígona Perez at the Pregones Theater in the Bronx.
International Composition Competition Maurice Ravel award. He also won 2015’s American Composers Orchestra EarShot Program, with maestro Rossen Milanov and Columbus Symphony giving the U.S. premiere of his piece Luminis.

Named in 2018 a Puerto Rican Heritage Ernesto Málave Scholar of the Arts by Comité Noviembre in N.Y.C., Rodríguez’ music is inspired by the factual human experience. His orchestral piece, A Metaphor for Power, has the current Latinx experience as well as the ongoing equality issues in the USA as a central thesis and, was selected for 2019’s prestigious Edward T. Cone Composition Institute to be premiered by the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. Musica de Cámara, Inc. commissioned his Concerto for Puerto Rican Cuatro and Strings Orchestra that premiered at El Museo del Barrio in N.Y.C. in 2016. His works have been commercially recorded by trumpeter Luis “Perico” Ortiz, guitarist John Rivera Pico and ForteGuitar Quartet.

Rodríguez received his Bachelor of Music degree at the Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico and a Master of Music degree at the Juilliard School. He will begin his Doctor in Musical Arts degree.

Composer and pianist Liliya Ugay has performed in many countries around the globe, collaborating with the Nashville Symphony, Albany Symphony, New England Philharmonic, Yale Philharmonia, Norfolk Festival Choir, Molinari Quartet, and Paul Neubauer among others. Her music has been featured at the Aspen, Norfolk, Cultivate, American Composers, Chelsea, New York Electroacoustic Music, June in Buffalo, and the 52nd Venice Biennale. She has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, ASCAP, Yale University, and the Woodruff Foundation; most recently, she was a finalist for the 2019 Rome Prize. Liliya was a prizewinner of many international composition and piano competitions in the USA, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and Russia.

One of her passions as a pianist is to promote the music of repressed Soviet composers in her concert series Silenced Voices. Originally from Uzbekistan, Liliya is currently a composer-in-residence at the American Lyric Theater working on a full-length opera with Julian Crouch, and at the Washington National Opera working on a one-act opera with Sokunthary Svay. She is a DMA candidate at the Yale School of Music; her primary mentor is Aaron Jay Kernis. Liliya was recently appointed as an Assistant Professor of Composition at Florida State University.

Tony Solitro composes concert and stage music that is “fraught with tension” and “amusingly intricate.” Politics, history, literature, drama, and visual art inspire his compositions. Examples from recent projects include: No More in Darkness, a meditation on a feminist explorer’s journey to Tibet; More Beautiful Than Night, a cycle of gay love songs interweaving romance, sensuality, and bawdy quips; living—despite I living—against, which incorporates the syncopated rhythms of protest chants; and Les Bouteilles de la Table Ronde, a surrealistic drinking song for women, integrated within a mixed-media installation.

Winner of the Cheryl A. Spector Prize from the Third Millennium Ensemble, Tony’s string quintet Shadow Confrontations was composed for bassist Joseph Conyers (Assistant Principal, Philadelphia Orchestra) and recorded with the Daedalus Quartet. He was awarded fellowships and artist residencies at Yaddo, Brush Creek, Kimmel Harding Nelson, VCCA, and the Brevard Music Center. He earned his Ph.D. as a recipient of the George Crumb Music Fellowship from the University of Pennsylvania and his M.M. from the Longy School of Music on a Nadia and Lili Boulanger Scholarship.

Tian Hui Ng is Music Director of the Mount Holyoke Symphony Orchestra. His innovative programming has been acknowledged with grants from institutions such as the Massachusetts Cultural Council, National Arts Council of Singapore, Singapore International Foundation, and Women’s Philharmonic, among others.

An advocate of new music, he has assisted in and premiered new works by Pulitzer and Rome Prize winners such as Curt Cacioppo, Robert Kyr, David Sanford, and Joan Tower.

His 2001 direction of Stravinsky’s The Rake’s Progress was praised by the Birmingham Post (UK) for its “high orchestral quality” while his 2014 premiere of Mary D. Watkins’s Civil Rights era opera, Dark River, was critically acclaimed in the United States.

Tian has conducted orchestras around the world including the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra (Czech Republic), Dartington Festival Orchestra (UK), Orchestra of the Royal Opera of Wallonie (Belgium), and the Oregon Bach Festival Orchestra. A versatile musician, he is equally at home in the realm of choral music and has conducted ensembles like the Stuttgart Chamber Choir (Germany), Carnegie Hall Festival Chorus, Oregon Bach Festival Chorus, and the Young Person’s Chorus of New York.

Tian Hui Ng continued his education at the Yale School of Music where he helped to start a new tradition with the music of his graduation recital reflecting on war and conflict.
Highlights of El Sol Latino 2007 - 2009

Note of the editor – The following is a small sample of worth remembering headlines of articles and editorials that appeared in our pages from 2007 to 2009 addressing issues relevant to the Latino community.

Collateral Damages of Educational English Only

In April 2008, we published the results of a study conducted by the Latino Institute about school suspensions in the Massachusetts public schools. We also highlighted a new study about Hispanic students in the public schools. The study analyzes the consequences and implications of the School of the Americas on the Latino community.

At the time, the opposition to the model of teaching English that led to the suspension of many students who failed in their English class or who had a low GPA or who were not working.

The findings of the new study that the plan to teach English to all children in the state was not working. The study states that the Latino students need to be taught English in a more structured and systematic way.

Among thecollateral damage, the language barrier found by the study was significant. The study found that the Latino population was not receiving the necessary education to succeed in school.

Domestic Violence Through the Survivors’ Eyes

The study showed that domestic violence is a common problem in the Latino community. The study found that domestic violence is a common problem in the Latino community. The study found that domestic violence is a common problem in the Latino community.

El Sol Latino Memorable Front Pages 2007 - 2009

Portada / Front Page

A Night of Pride for LGBT Youth

On Friday, May 27, the LGBT youth and allies gathered at the City Hall to celebrate Pride Month. The event was organized by the LGBTQ Center of New Bedford.

Artivista Alvidra Martinez-Anaya @ UMass Fine Arts Center

In 2015, Alvidra Martinez-Anaya organized a conference on LGBTQ issues at the UMass Fine Arts Center. The event brought together queer and trans artists and activists to discuss and address the issues affecting the LGBTQ community.

Chauvinistic Immigration Raid in New Bedford

In June 2008, immigration officials conducted a raid in New Bedford. The raid targeted undocumented and deportable immigrants. The raid caused fear and panic in the Latino community.

Latinos Excluded from the War Documentary

In 2009, the film about the war documentary was released. The film excluded the Latino perspective, which was not included in the documentary.

Portada / Front Page

Latinos Students and Redistricting in Amherst

In 2010, 22 members of the Amherst community participated in the School Committee meeting to discuss the redistricting plan.

Photo: Courtesy of the Amherst School Committee members, who submitted the anti-redistricting plan to the School Committee for consideration.
U.S. Supreme Court Temporarily Halts Citizenship Question for Census 2020

WASHINGTON, DC | NALEO | June 27, 2019 – The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund released a statement from CEO Arturo Vargas following the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to temporarily halt the citizenship question from moving forward in Census 2020:

“Today’s (June 27, 2019) decision from the U.S. Supreme Court has for the moment walked our nation back from the brink of a catastrophic disaster that would have inflicted a wound on our constitution and democracy that may never have healed.”

“Choosing to send the case back to the district court in New York in a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court found that the U.S. Commerce Department’s rationale for adding the question was ‘contrived’ and raised questions about its motivations. The New York District Court previously ruled that the Administration acted in error, with two other similar lower court rulings finding that the addition of the citizenship question also violated the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. Commerce Department must now provide an alternative and reasonable justification to the lower court in order to move forward with a question on citizenship in Census 2020.”

“While this victory is far from the settled, the nation’s highest court did send a clear message today that future cabinet members and administrations are not free to make arbitrary and politically motivated decisions at will, denying those with ill-intentions the power and discretion to fabricate excuses and ignore facts and laws free from consequences.”

“Even if the citizenship question is halted for good, we know this effort to undermine the progress of the Latino community and suppress the count of Latinos has left its mark on Census 2020. Our work mobilizing the nation’s second largest population group remains more important than ever as we attempt to rebuild the trust that has been eroded over the course of this fight. Standing alongside our nation’s Latino leadership and partners, we will work together to educate our community about this important development and make sure that every Latino is counted in the 2020 Census.”

“The Census Bureau understands as well as we do, that an undercount of Latinos, who account for nearly one of every five persons in the United States, would mean a failed Census for the country.

Through our nationwide ¡Hágase Contar! (Make Yourself Count!) Campaign, we will do our part to save the decennial count by engaging Latinos from coast to coast about the importance of participating in Census 2020. Our toll-free bilingual hotline—877-EL-CENSO (877-352-3767)—will be in full operation to ensure that members of our community have the information they need to count themselves and their family members.”

“The stakes are too high for the Latino community and our democracy to rest on our laurels. Our dedication to a full portrait of this nation is unwavering, and we remain staunchly committed to ensuring a fair and accurate Census count of all persons in the United States, including Latinos and immigrants, as required by the U.S. Constitution.”

NALEO Educational Fund is the nation’s leading non-profit, non-partisan organization that facilitates the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. Founded in 1981, NALEO Educational Fund achieves its mission through integrated strategies that include increasing the effectiveness of Latino policymakers, mobilizing the Latino community to engage in civic life and promoting policies that advance Latino political engagement.
Civil society requires people to be civil. As the campaign for the next president of the United States begins, there is a hint of good news that some of the candidates might be willing to address the injustices connected to life in poverty and approach this in a way that reflects a civil society. On June 17, 2019, nine Democratic presidential candidates spoke at the Poor People’s Campaign Presidential Forum at Trinity Washington University, in Washington, D.C.

Although President Donald Trump was invited, he did not attend. The forum’s goal was for these 2020 presidential candidates to demonstrate their commitment to improve the lives of improvised Americans by offering their ideas on how to accomplish this. The forum was defined by one of the two leaders of the Poor People’s Campaign, Reverend Barber, who stated “Any nation that ignores half its people is in a moral and economic crisis that is constitutionally inconsistent, economically unstable and morally insane.”

The Poor People’s Campaign began in 1968 with the goal to gain economic justice for poor people in the United States. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) first organized it. The campaign has continually worked for fair “federal and state living-wage laws, accessible standard housing, equity in education, an end to mass incarceration, a single-payer health-care system, and the protection of the right to vote” (that is, public investment). Recently, the revitalized aim of the campaign has expanded to address the social forces that are embedded with poverty and trap people without escape. These forces include racism, sexism, ableism, classism and ecological devastation. Civil society requires people to be civil.

The American economy is based on capitalism with ideas of competition, the “survival of the fittest” and the belief that anyone can enter the free market to fight for and get a “piece of the pie”; that is, financial wealth. The American economy is based on the premise that the difference in income and accumulated wealth is meaningless. Unfortunately, in reality, rising income inequality threatens the well being and life satisfaction of the poor. “There are no societies without wealth disparities, but there are limits as to how much inequality can exist before the society ceases to function” (The Daily RIFF, November 13, 2013).

It can be intoxicating to focus on the feelings of wealth and success connected to capitalism. There are, however, myths connected to capitalism. These are not easily discussed and politicians can be tempted to brush them aside or minimize them. There is a myth that when those with resources are doing well, all people are doing well. This is false. News reports these days claim the American economy is booming. Often politicians use government numbers to claim political success. Missing, however, is the fact that the economic divide between rich and poor is increasing leaving those in poverty without resources needed for daily life. There is another myth that economic opportunities connected to capitalism are readily available to all people equally. That is, economic opportunities are just waiting for the person to step forward and grab hold of the chance to become wealthy. The reality, however, is that social forces such as racism, sexism, ableism and classism disable these opportunities.

The Poor People’s Campaign gathering on June 12, 2019 was significant. The Campaign demands the government address the needs of the poor and provide opportunities for all the citizens, not just those who are wealthy. The nine presidential candidates offered a variety of ideas that might be referred to as moderate to “radical”. They ranged from the suggesting that:
- the politicians establish a more collaborative approach to bipartisanship
- build more housing
- provide government assistance to those with high rents
- allow incarcerated people to vote
- guarantee a monthly income for all working people
- tax the wealthy at a higher rate
- cut the defense budget.
Helping the Poorest in Holyoke... By Hurting Them the Most by DAVID & JACQUELINE YOS

Why would anyone object to building two new schools in Holyoke, especially when there can be little debate that our current facilities are badly deteriorated and inadequate, and the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) is offering us a “generous” fifty-eight percent reimbursement? Nonetheless, it is important to consider, and undeniably the people have the right to know, all of the facts and potential implications, before making a decision.

As good as everything may sound right now, what we are really trying to do is impose a short-term solution – perfect for those on a three-year timeline, but not so much for those of us on a twenty to thirty-year one – on a long-term problem, by expending all of our resources on but one piece of the educational puzzle, in a way which, notwithstanding – nor to diminish – all the recent talk about the pressure that will be placed on Holyoke’s largest taxpayers, will actually hurt our lowest income residents the most.

First of all, there is some ambiguity over what we will be voting on; it is not whether we want new schools (although we hope to add a second question to the ballot to that effect, which should provide much greater clarity both to voters and the result), but whether we want to pay for them through a debt exclusion, which is one way of getting around the 2 ½% limitation on tax increases.

Secondly, we have noticed that the general public in Holyoke’s approach to education has been every half-decade or so to rally around some cause célèbre, while unfortunately having little understanding of its intricacies and day-to-day workings. In this case there has been much harping on studies which purport that the physical condition of school buildings themselves has a greater effect on student success than the larger socio-economic environment in which the kids live. What these studies don’t appear to take into account, however, is that run-down schools are far more likely to be found in socio-economically disadvantaged communities, whereas the newest, best maintained facilities are usually found in more affluent areas; perhaps dropping two shiny new schools into Holyoke, while changing nothing else, will be the control experiment, at least for the five to ten years before they also become worn down.

Or actually five to ten years to obsolescence is too optimistic an estimate: current enrollments for the second, third and fourth grades are currently 427, 404 and 397, respectively, while the new buildings will have a capacity of 550 each, meaning that only a year after they are projected to open they will be over capacity by at least 128 students.

This brings us to our third point: with the city’s debt already well over $50 million – about $1250 for every individual – this proposal will more than double that, to over $106 million. Considering that the city could raise only about another $15,000 without another override or debt exclusion, and that we are one of only a handful of municipalities with free cash – the difference between revenue and budgeted expenses – at least one percent of the budget, and trending downward over the last five years from four million dollars to less than one and a half million, it is difficult to see how we could possibly pay for the one or two additional schools that will need to be renovated or replaced in the very near future.

Fourthly, what may seem like a fantastic deal really isn’t, and certainly isn’t an equitable one, when we consider the way it’s being paid for. Just to review, a progressive tax, such as an income tax, increases as a person’s income increases, and vice versa, whereas a regressive tax, in this case the property tax, works the opposite way; the tax on any given value of property remains the same, but as a person’s income decreases he or she pays a higher percentage of it in tax, while as one’s income increases he or she is taxed at a decreasing rate.

To illustrate: Somerville is building a new high school costing about $257 million; with actual state reimbursement of only 47% the city must contribute about $137 million of that total. The city has 32,453 households, with a median income of $84,722, which constitute 75.95% of the total tax levy. This means that each household’s share of the cost is around $3206, which is 3.78% of its income.

In Holyoke, with a projected cost of $132 million and state reimbursement of 58%, our contribution would be about $56 million. We have 15,403 households, with a median income of $37,954, constituting 55.78% of the total tax levy. This means that here each household’s share of the cost would be about $2228, which is 5.34% of its income. In other words, even though we are getting a higher reimbursement rate, we are still paying a higher percentage of our income for a project costing only about half as much.

With the proposed debt exclusion it is estimated that the residential tax rate will rise by $1.27, to $20.56 per thousand dollars of valuation; this means we will go from having the eighth highest average tax bill in the Commonwealth as a percentage of per capita to the sixth highest (22.54% to 24.03%). On the commercial side an increase of $2.72, to $42.58 per thousand, moving us from third place to first for having the highest commercial rate. While much has been made of Holyoke’s relatively low property values – the third lowest equalized valuation per capita in the Commonwealth, in fact – if one looks at it in the context of the basic economic law of supply and demand, then clearly there are factors making property here undesirable that are not enough to offset its lower cost; certainly an even higher tax rate will likely make the situation worse rather than better, and with it being so large in our city, any decline on the commercial side would have strong secondary effects on the residential.

Renters, generally speaking, will be effected as much as homeowners; just as any other business passes along costs to its customers, residential property owners will pass along some or all of the tax increase to their tenants. The exception is those living in properties owned by nonprofits, although some of those entities do make payments in lieu of taxes to the city, and surely there will be pressure to increase those PILOTs.

Low to moderate income people need a place to live too, and it has long been one of Holyoke’s great virtues to provide that, freeing other communities from that obligation and its attendant costs. We do not believe Holyoke should abandon that value now for a more gentrifying path, one simply masquerading as being for the children.

Although almost nothing in Holyoke surprises us anymore, it is nonetheless astonishing that so reckless a proposal, with seemingly no planning for future needs and demographic trends, and demonstrating not even rudimentary understanding of our community’s unique economic situation, would be allowed to reach final approval status with the MSBA, with no other options available. Yes, we should have been more proactive, but rather than blaming us for not attending your meetings, perhaps it is you who should have taken some responsibility for reaching out to us, especially when contemplating a major tax increase that would affect us so profoundly.

And how can we be expected to trust in you now?

It seems that we have forgotten that the purpose of government is to serve us, not the other way around, and do not have to settle for whatever crumbs are given us. Yes, it hurt’s to realize that just when we felt “they” – the politically powerful, the establishment, whatever you want to call them – we’re finally doing something nice for our community, we are really just being played once again. Other communities, including Lynn and Amherst, have already rejected “once-in-a-lifetime” two-school deals, and it turns out life has gone on for them after all. And it is ridiculous to even think they would ever allow us to fail, because, given the receivernesship, it is not we who would fail, but them.

We are not arguing against the inevitable need for buildings to be replaced, but going ahead with this two-new-schools-at-all-cost approach, rather than a turning point, will be a continuation of our practice of lurching from one term problem, by expending all of our resources on but one piece of the educational puzzle, in a way which, notwithstanding – nor to diminish – all the recent talk about the pressure that will be placed on Holyoke’s largest taxpayers, will actually hurt our lowest income residents the most.

In this case there has been much harping on studies which purport that the physical condition of school buildings themselves has a greater effect on student success than the larger socio-economic environment in which the kids live. What these studies don’t appear to take into account, however, is that run-down schools are far more likely to be found in socio-economically disadvantaged communities, whereas the newest, best maintained facilities are usually found in more affluent areas; perhaps dropping two shiny new schools into Holyoke, while changing nothing else, will be the control experiment, at least for the five to ten years before they also become worn down.

Or actually five to ten years to obsolescence is too optimistic an estimate: current enrollments for the second, third and fourth grades are currently 427, 404 and 397, respectively, while the new buildings will have a capacity of 550 each, meaning that only a year after they are projected to open they will be over capacity by at least 128 students.

This brings us to our third point: with the city’s debt already well over $50 million – about $1250 for every individual – this proposal will more than double that, to over $106 million. Considering that the city could raise only about another $15,000 without another override or debt exclusion, and that we are one of only a handful of municipalities with free cash – the difference between revenue and budgeted expenses – at least one percent of the budget, and trending downward over the last five years from four million dollars to less than one and a half million, it is difficult to see how we could possibly pay for the one or two additional schools that will need to be renovated or replaced in the very near future.

We are not arguing against the inevitable need for buildings to be replaced, but going ahead with this two-new-schools-at-all-cost approach, rather than a turning point, will be a continuation of our practice of lurching from one poorly thought out quick fix to the next; a true departure would be planning a sensible and sustainable strategy, which might even succeed through consensus, rather than one of our usual adversarial battles.

Lastly, there has been much talk of letting the people decide, but democracy cannot be very successful without an informed electorate, so we hope that everyone will take the time, and be allowed the opportunity, to make an educated choice this November fifth.

DAVID & JACQUELINE YOS (jdyos@hotmail.com) are residents of Holyoke.
La novia gitana de Carmen Mola

El día de la celebración de su despedida de soltera, antes de casarse con Raúl Garcedo, encuentran muerta a Susana Macaya. Siete años antes, había encontrado muerta a su hermana Lara Macaya, en la misma celebración, el día antes de su boda. ¿Cómo murieron las dos? De la misma manera. Horrorosamente.

En ambos casos, tenían parte de la cabeza afetada exponiendo donde el asesino les había taladrado en el cráneo tres pequeños agujeros “unidos por un corte en forma de círculo.” Y en los agujeros les habían metido gusanos, “gusanos que han debido de comerse todo el cerebro.” Las víctimas debían de haber sufrido violentamente. Hablando de Lara, “La chica tardó casi una semana en morir, consciente, entre dolores terroríficos.” Así empieza La novia gitana de Carmen Mola, historia publicada por Negra Alfaguara.

La novela se centra en los esfuerzos de la Inspector Elena Blanco, jefa del equipo de la Brigada de Análisis de Casos, y del Subinspector Ángel Zarate, para solucionar este caso tan macabro. Se había considerado solucionado el caso de Lara ya hacia tiempo y tenían encarcelado al supuesto asesino, Miguel Vistas. Él se había enamorado de Lara, pero ella solo “se reía de él.”

¿Se trata de otro asesino imitando al encarcelado? ¿o del mismo asesino de las dos hermanas, y, por consiguiente, el encarcelado será inocente? Les ayuda en su pesquisa Chesca, agente de la Brigada de Homicidios y Desaparecidos, y el policía Orduño “siempre que puede ser necesario usar los músculos además de la cabeza.”

Se sugiere que los homicidios tal vez tengan que ver con el prejuicio racial, puesto que las víctimas eran “medio gitana y medio paya.” Es un punto de discordia entre los padres de Lara y Susana. Su madre Sonia se dirige a su esposo, acusándole que “La culpa es tuya, Moisés. No has sabido cuidar de tus hijas. Nunca has aceptado que sean más payas que gitanas…en el fondo rabiabas por no educarlas según tus normas. Tus normas de otro siglo, tu disciplina absurda.” Moisés parece estar de acuerdo con su esposa porque lamenta que “No he sabido proteger a mis hijas. Ese es el mayor fracaso de mi vida.”

Elena también tiene una historia triste. La persigue la imagen de un niño perdido. La atormenta la memoria del día cuando secuestraron a su hijo y visitó El Centro de Atención al Duelo, lugar donde le ofrecieron consuelo. Su ex-esposo la acusa de quedarse atascada, mientras que él “desistió de buscar al niño al cabo de un año.”

La novela presenta toques de humor cuando menos lo esperamos, toques que alivian un poco la tensión de la trama. Se describe a Alfredo Costa, policía compañero de Zárate, con un juego de palabras, diciendo que está “ahora más cerca de los cincuenta que de los cuarenta,[y] no podría perseguir a la carrera ni a su abuela.” Al investigar a Raúl, Chesca comenta que el “ordenador tiene más filtros de seguridad que el de Donald Trump.”

Si es una novela negra que se concentra en la muerte grotesca. (¡Salen gusanos de los ojos de las hijas asesinadas!) Y, si no fueran suficientes las referencias a lo macabro, varias veces aparecen referencias al Uróboros, un semi-dios serpiente mordiéndose la cola.

Pero está bien escrita, con personajes bien desarrollados e interesantes como lo son Blanco y Zárate, que hacen que el lector, o en este caso la lectora, quede tan absorta en la lectura que casi perdona lo grotesco de la trama. Casi.

La novela se divide en cinco partes, pero, sorpresal, antes de cada parte se va desarrollando otra negra historia, mucho más corta, toda en letra bastardilla, que no parece relacionarse con la historia de los Macaya. Esta historia trata de un niño encerrado—no se sabe quién es ni se sabe por qué—al cual “un perro callejero al que le falta una pata” empieza a comerle una pierna.

Reseña de Catheen C. Robinson, profesora jubilada del español y de la historia de la América Latina que se dedica ahora a escribir.
STCC launches online giving day to boost scholarships

SPRINGFIELD, MA | SPRINGFIELD TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE | June 17, 2019 – Springfield Technical Community College Foundation kicked off a new tradition on June 12 with its first online giving day.

At that time, people had a chance to contribute through “STCC GIVES” and help build scholarships to ensure that students have the support they need to succeed.

“We are grateful for the support we have received over the years from our donors,” said Director of Operations & Donor Relations Kelly Galanis. “Whether you’ve donated in the past or you’re thinking of being a first-time donor, STCC GIVES is a perfect opportunity to help transform the lives of our students.”

Galanis said donors had many options to support students:
- Make a gift online by visiting bit.ly/stccgives
- Text “STCCGives” to 50155
- Call the STCC Foundation at (413) 755-4529
- Drop off cash or checks at the STCC Office of Advancement in Garvey Hall
- Mail a donation to STCC Office of Advancement, One Armory Square, Springfield, MA 01102

Galanis said the goal was to raise money to help the STCC Foundation create scholarships for students. Participants were eligible for prizes, including Red Sox tickets.

Scholarships helped students like Mohamed Gabriel, of West Springfield, an engineering science transfer major who graduated in May. While at STCC, he received several scholarships and was invited to speak to donors at an STCC Foundation event on May 23.

“In my second year, I heard about scholarships. At first I thought, ‘I don’t think I’ll get any.’ But then I thought, ‘Why not try?’ So I did. I went and applied for as many as I could and ended up not getting just one, but six scholarships. I knew I could worry a little less about the financial aspects of school and focus more on academics.”

Another student who graduated in May with a degree in biotechnology, María Ramos, of Agawam, said she would use her $2,000 scholarship to pay off loans. “It’s amazing,” she said. “This is going to help me out so much.”

Helder Serrazina, of Monson, who is pursuing his degree in business administration, received the Jean and Jim Genasci Honorary Scholarship, which is awarded to LGBT students who demonstrate how they actively serve as a leader or role model and promote the goals of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

Serrazina said he was honored to receive the award. After graduating from STCC, he wants to study at the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and dreams of one day earning a law degree from Harvard University.

A total of 57 STCC student scholarship winners were celebrated at the STCC Foundation’s Scholarship & Awards Breakfast.

The STCC Foundation and the college provided $1.1 million to support students in fiscal 2019.

Interested in applying to STCC? Visit stcc.edu/apply or call Admissions at (413) 755-3333.
Vaccines are safe and important
by ANA PAMELA TORRES OCAMPO

Imagine you are living in Spain in the 1600s. You are home but hear all of these rumors about people getting sick and not having any kind of treatment available. Some of them even have died from it. The disease is called diphtheria and is recommended to avoid other sick people because air can transmit it. So you change the way you interact with your surroundings. Avoid places with big crowds or spaces where you know there will be a lot of people. But it’s Sunday, the day you visit your grandmother. You pass through town and discover that is deserted. You see someone who is coughing and it looks suspicious. Better keep walking and avoid contact.

The scene previously described could also have happened in Boston in 1721 with a smallpox epidemic. An epidemic is the fast spread of disease over a population in a very short period of time. Some time later, there is another epidemic of diphtheria in New England, taking thousands of lives.

All of this changed when Edward Jenner invented the first vaccine in 1769. He experimented on a child (something that would be not supported today) by infecting him with a cowpox virus and hoped that it would help him with a smallpox infection. Although, the situation was not ideal (experimenting of a human child) he discovered something important that changed the course of human history regarding spreadable diseases, they could be prevented.

More than 223 years later, we know a great deal about vaccines. The origin of the word vaccine comes from the latin vacca and vaccinus which means cow. This is due to the experiment previously mentioned that was done with cowpox viruses. The way that vaccines work is by giving “heads up” to your body. As human beings we have an immune system. This system is very sophisticated and it’s the alert system that controls what enters our body. For example, when you have a paper cut, the immune system is the first one to detect it and it signals immune cell (a.k.a little miracle workers) to come around and help fix the situation: to clot the wound and to avoid that other things (bacteria, viruses, fungi, etc) to get into the blood stream and infect other parts of your body. There is a lot of scientific literature that supports the function of the immune system but we also know this due to experience because if you remember, you have never gotten sick from a paper cut.

But what if you get cut with metal? It is a different kind of material and the first thing you need to know is if you are vaccinated against tetanus. Tetanus is a disease caused by a bacterial toxin. So what does the tetanus vaccines do? When you get vaccinated, small parts of the bacteria, but not the ones that make you sick, get injected into your body. So then our immune cells or “miracle workers” get familiar with it and eliminate them. One of the most amazing characteristics about the miracle workers is that they have memory. Therefore, if they encounter pieces of these bacteria again, they already know how to fight it and have an advantage over it.

Not all diseases can be prevented by vaccination, although scientists are working very hard to figure it out. But we need to give an advantage to our bodies. We need to take care of them. Because otherwise, we are reversing time and going back to times where you wont be able to leave your house due to the spread of a disease. Please consider this when you have the option to get vaccinated you or your loved ones against any disease. In New York City, there is a case of measles, it is being called and outbreak which is different than an epidemic because it has only happened within a small community. But if its not prevented it can spread and cause an epidemic. This should not happen. Measles is preventable by vaccination.

If you want more information please visit the following websites: https://www.niaid.nih.gov/research/how-vaccines-work https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/How-do-Vaccines-Work.aspx https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7iY7z7ZCs

ANA PAMELA TORRES OCAMPO (a.torres.ocampo@gmail.com) is a PhD student at the Molecular and Cellular Biology (MCB) Program - UMass Amherst.
The Care Center new Nautilus II edition released

by MANUEL FRAU RAMOS

The Care Center in Holyoke released the 17th edition of Nautilus II: Poetry and Art by Young Mothers Studying at The Care Center with an event on June 21 at Odyssey Bookshop in South Hadley.

The launching of this publication has become a yearly event that attracts a large number of friends of The Care Center to Odyssey Bookshop. The journal is among the projects of The Care Center that were honored by the White House in 2011 with a National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, issued by The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities. The Care Center and its humanities programming have been featured in an hour-long piece that aired on National Public Radio stations.

Every year a group of young mothers from The Care Center is selected to edit the literary magazine. In the process, they learn editing, graphic design, public speaking and leadership skills necessary in the production of Nautilus II. The magazine is a collection of poems, photos, and art.

This year the Student Editorial Board was composed of Sylvia Torres (Senior Editor), Janelis Cartagena, Trinini Kamrowski-Singlelton, and Paola Rodriguez (Editors). Craig Malone was in charge of Design and Production, and Staff Editors were Ana Rodriguez (Poetry Editor), Li Ming Dolan (Art Editor) and Marjory Zaik (Contributing Poetry Editor).

Poems from Nautilus II • Volume 17, Spring 2019

Yes I Am by Nykesha Alston

I am A Mother of two beautiful girls.
I am The Future of our present.
I am Not Alone.
I am A Goddess in a warm world.
I am A Sparkling Rose like the first day of Spring.
I am A Black Woman.
I am Free.
I am Different.
I am The Brightness to 11 diamonds.
I am A Human time machine.
I am Me.

Nykesha Alston is from Springfield and is the mother of 2 beautiful baby girls. She find poetry therapeutic and wnt to be a forensic scientist.

Goodbye Abuelo by Daliana Lugo

Saying goodbye is the hardest thing you’ll ever have to do
no matter the time or place you’ll always say goodbye
sometimes.
Especially when you aren’t prepared,
ever will I be prepared mentally nor emotionally.
So sweet and so loving but we still say goodbye?
Yet though I knew your time was near,
your spirit was still so lively and uplifting.
Goodbye Abuelo, watch over us Always.

Daliana Lugo was born and raised in Cidra, Puerto Rico and currently lives in Holyoke, Ma. She is a proud mother who is working on her future. She hopes to move on to a two-year college and move on in life. Poetry helps, she writes the negative parts in her life and is able to continue further.

The cover for this year’s edition is a drawing by Destiney Burgess-Marsh, inspired by Homer’s Odyssey, in the Humanities 108 course at The Care Center.

Tzivia Gover, Founding Editor and Poetry Editor for the last 16 years of the journal, announced last year that she was stepping down and leaving the Care Center to spend more time on my own writing, and to follow my dreams.

The Care Center, established in 1986, has become an oasis of hope and opportunity for success for thousands of young people in the region, mostly residents of Holyoke, by creating an environment where success is possible. It has worked with thousands of teen mothers and their families as the women continue their education and move toward greater self-awareness and economic stability.
Noche de San Juan

Organizado por Nueva Esperanza
22 de junio de 2019

Parque Carlos Vega en South Holyoke

Carlos Vega Park - South Holyoke

Artesanías Boricoquí del artesano
Damián Andrés Moreno Díaz

Geraldo Tapia Rivera y Jesús Espinosa

Bobby “Pitbull” Figueroa

L.Torres y Lisa – Salsa pa’l Bailador

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MassHire Holyoke Career Center - Proyecto Juvenil de Diáspora

MassHire Holyoke Career Center ha desarrollado un emocionante proyecto piloto financiado por Commonwealth Corporation para el verano 2019. Estamos reclutando estudiantes del Pioneer Valley entre las edades de 14 y 15 años que fueron evacuados de Puerto Rico debido al huracán María.

Es una oportunidad de trabajo y aprendizaje, y los estudiantes recibirán un estipendio por participar. La fecha de inicio del programa es el 8 de julio de 2019, y hay un proceso de solicitud y elegibilidad.

El objetivo del proyecto es enseñar a los jóvenes sobre seguridad alimentaria, agricultura local y sostenibilidad. Los estudiantes aprenderán cómo cultivar y procesar cultivos y participarán en viajes semanales a negocios locales donde los alimentos se almacenan, preparan y se acceden. Nuestras Raíces, una organización de agricultura urbana de base comunitaria en Holyoke, Massachusetts, utilizará un plan de estudios llamado ‘Siembra Siempre’ para educar a los participantes. MassHire Holyoke Career Center documentará el proyecto y proporcionará preparación para trabajo.

Para obtener más información, comuníquese con la Coordinadora del Proyecto Jharikem Borrero-Irizarry al (413)322-1765, jborrero@masshireholyoke.org, o con la Directora del Centro Juvenil Gladys Lebrón-Martínez al (413)322-7143, glebron-martinez@masshireholyoke.org

Investing in the future for the common good

continued from page 8

Improving the lives of those in poverty is politically challenging but certainly not radical. In the current political environment, discussing social inequity and the poor does not get votes. Poor people are disenfranchised and a underrepresented in the voter booth. Instead, politicians prefer to address the challenges of those in the middle class. Money that a government spends on public services such as food, housing, and health for those without resources is a critical, essential moral imperative; investments politicians need to be ready to support. Improving the lives of those in poverty means that poor people cannot be excluded from food, health and housing simply for not having enough money to purchase these basic human needs.

On November 19, 2017, Pope Francis in his homily for the First World Day of the Poor, identified “omission” or “indifference” as the wrong where the poor are concerned. Further, Pope Francis states “When money, instead of man, is at the center of the system, when money becomes an idol, men and women are reduced to simple instruments of a social and economic system, which is characterized, better yet dominated, by profound inequalities. So we discard whatever is not useful to this logic; it is this attitude that discards children and older people, and is now affecting the young.”

There is good news when hopeful potential political leaders begin to open up the discussion of life in poverty and propose new ways of enabling the people who live in poverty. Civil society requires us not to turn a blind, indifferent eye to common good, to our civil responsibility. Civil society requires people to be civil.

This guest opinion is one in a series on living in poverty. DR. WALTER MULLIN (wmullin@springfieldcollege.edu), Professor of Social Work and MIGUEL ARCE (marce@springfieldcollege.edu), Associate Professor of Social Work at Springfield College.
La Familia Hispana, Inc.
Western Massachusetts Puerto Rican Parade 2019
Latino/Puerto Rican Honorees
June 1, 2019
Holyoke Community Charter Schools

Emil Morales (Grand Marshal), Dr. Sonia Correa Pope (Special Dedication), *Carmen Morales Cruz (Godmother), Benjamín Torres (Godfather), Grisel Delgado (Cultural Ambassador), Carlos Edwin Colón “Carlitos Caribbean Cool” (Special Guest), Nereida Valentín (Cultural Ambassador), María Mercedes (Community Champion)

Carlos González (Springfield State Representative) - Master of Ceremonies, Emil Morales, Nereida Valentín, Dr. Sonia Correa Pope, Carlos Edwin Colón “Carlitos Caribbean Cool”, Benjamín Torres, Grisel Delgado, and Diosdado López, Presidente de la Junta de La Familia Hispana, Inc.

Carlos González, Alex Morse, Benjamin Torres, Dr. Sonia Correa Pope, and Gladys Lebrón Martínez

Diosdado López and María Figueroa from La Familia Hispana, Inc. and Kathy McKean and Tian Hui Mg from MIFA Victory Theater

Emil Morales and family