

Friends of St. Lawrence Watts Youth Center



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Father Peter Banks,
Founder
- Lincoln Stone, Esq.,
President
- Cindy Byrne, Esq.,
Vice-President
- Michelle Plunkett, J.D., CPA
Treasurer
- Robert Stenson, Esq.
Secretary
- Charles Steinmetz,
Past President
- Eleanor Allen
- Phil Battaglia, Esq.,
Molly Baumer
- John Cameron, CPA
- Antonia Carpenter
- John Conway, CPA
- John Coughlin
- Ken Gilbert
- Adriana Lopez
- James McMahon, Esq.
- Richard Meehan
- Rosa Meza
- Lillian Paetzold
- Teresa Perez
- Albert Pichardo
- John Utley
- Scott Wood, Esq.,
Alma Reeves Woods

STAFF

- Linda Northup,
Director
- Kimberly Brooke,
Associate Director

Diamonds in the Rough by Tom Hoffarth

Without context, the statistics you may come across that attempt to tell a story about the lives of those in the Watts area of South Central Los Angeles can be misleading. Police numbers quoted in the media about aggravated assaults, gang violence or drug arrests may be too raw to even make much sense any more.

Stereotypes are easily drawn from those numbers anyway – perhaps none more so than those of teen pregnancy or drop-out rates of high school students, whose hopes to escape these boundaries of poverty must seem even more desperate.

But if you look close enough, it isn't difficult to find kids these days that defy any of those negative-sounding trends.

Tutors at the Friends of St.



Lawrence Literacy Center, many of whom have been former students of St. Lawrence of Brindisi, take active roles in leadership camps, college counseling and job training, fostering a positive attitude through their accomplishments that cascade down to the elementary-aged students who they can deeply influence and bring optimism.

Friends of St. Lawrence tutors, aged 16 to 21, are a mix from the public and Catholic schools. Some who participated in a weekend retreat marked the first time they had ever been out of the city and put in the middle of a wooded forest to learn about how they can further become role models within the community.

“I think the media generally focuses on making Watts notorious for crime, gangs and violence instead of carefully scrutinizing our good qualities and aspects,” said Melissa Zavala, a literacy tutor who has also been a recipient of grade school and high school scholarships through Friends of St. Lawrence. She recently attended Camp Stevens.

“Seeing the graduates of St. Lawrence school go off to succeed

Teens- Continued To Page 2

Inside

Feature Story	1
Fr. Peter Thank You	3
Mardi Gras 2009	4
Nemollinxipe Update	4



in high school reminded me of why I should work hard and continue my educational career. I feel proud to have made it to my junior year at Notre Dame Academy and keeping a good GPA.”

Ana Cuellar, a former CompuTeen and high-school scholarship recipient, hopes that despite media portrayal of Watts, “everyone has a unique situations that affect the direction of his or her life. No one can be judged by stereos types because we all have our own stories and motives for behaving the way we do.”

Jeffery Flores, a literacy tutor who says the passing of his father had a profound influence on his decision to attend college and focus on aerospace engineering, agrees that those who say negative things about his community “makes me angry because they judge everybody on maybe one person’s actions or what they have heard. The stereotypes against Watts make the community look bad, but the truth is far from that. Not everybody from Watts is throwing their futures away.

There are many young dedicated teenagers trying to have a better life.”

Cynthia Napoles says her greatest accomplishment so far has been “being hired at the St. Lawrence Literacy Center. I was once a literacy student and know the great impact this program has on a student.”

With hopes of going to college to study ophthalmology, Napoles also wants people to be more aware of what Watts has to offer.

“I think Watts is just like any other city – it has its good and bad. But it has been blessed with great people who work hard every day to make it a better place for everyone.”

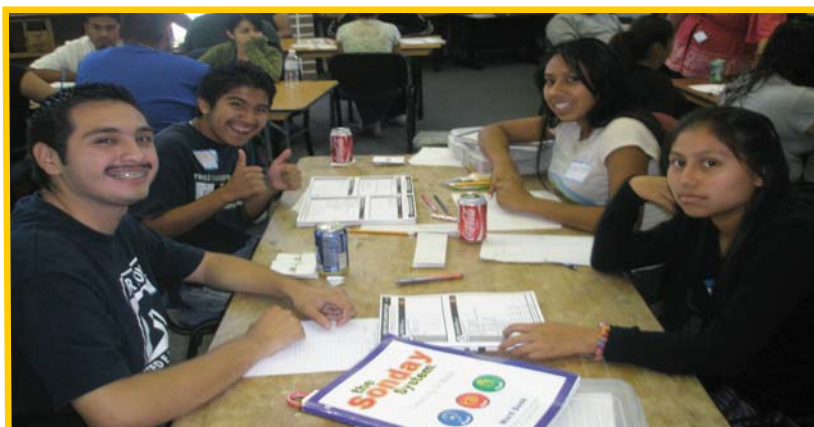
Literacy tutor Stephanie Gonzalez, whose career goals include majoring in psychology or social work before pursuing a masters and Ph.D., says that overcoming the difficulties of growing up around drugs and

alcohol wasn’t so difficult with a supportive family.

“I think I chose the right path and never came across that,” she said. “When my sister became pregnant at age 15, she made me realize that I should just go after my dreams of attending college.”

Melissa Turcios, a literacy tutor and high school scholarship recipient who wants to go after a college degree in business administration or special education, believes that “people should dismiss the connotations and give Watts a chance. If they were open-minded they’ll realize Watts is filled with wonderful people. We know people can stress the negatives, but when I hear that, I just tell them the good stuff about my neighborhood and they change their view.”

Zavala, whose plans are to attend college and pursue a medical degree, summed up her experience growing up in South Central L.A.: “You have to live here in Watts in order to understand the people and the community. You can’t pass judgment unless you have fully





experienced something.”

Added Cuellar: “I live in Watts with a sense of pride. I can prove to people that I break the

stereotypes they so blindly believe. What is more, my story is not the only success story. The proof that Watts is

not the harmful place it is made out to be is out there, people just have to be willing to see it for themselves.” Ana will be attending Brown University on a full scholarship this fall.

Friends is proud of our teens. They have benefitted from our programs and now the world will benefit from their successes. The small investment we’ve made in leadership training, teaching job skills, Literacy Center and scholarships will pay off tenfold. They will go on to be future leaders and positive role models in their community.

Thank You Fr. Peter

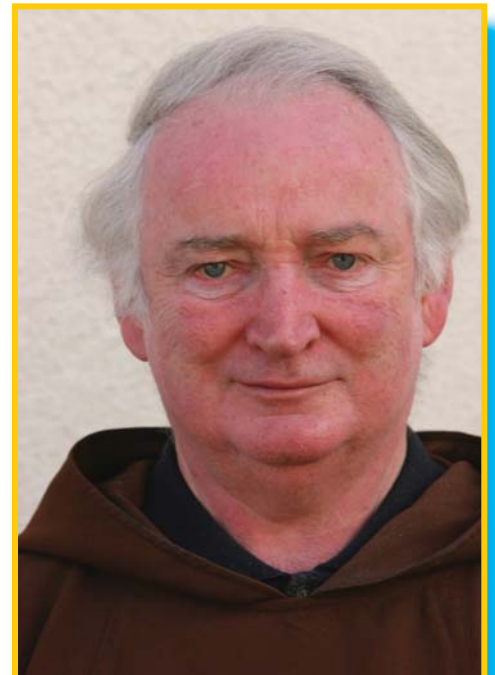
Please join us for a Mass thanking Father Peter Banks for his years of service to St. Lawrence Brindisi Church and the community of Watts.

July 26, 2009

11:00 AM

**St. Lawrence Brindisi Catholic Church
10122 Compton Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90002**

Fr. Peter came to St. Lawrence Brindisi as a young priest from Ireland, in 1973. He was called a way from the parish nine years later. But in 1998, after an evening of soul searching about why he became a priest, Father Banks returned to St. Lawrence as its 22nd pastor.



In 1999, Father Peter Banks founded Friends of St. Lawrence-Watts Youth Center because he recognized that education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and the road to improving the quality of life in the inner city. He also believes education is a weapon against the growing gang problem in our neighborhood. Children who achieve success in school are less likely to be lured into gangs. Father Peter brought together leaders of many ethnicities and religions from the local Watts neighborhood and citizens from throughout Los Angeles County committed to sharing their skills.

Father Peter is now being called to become the Vocational Director of his Capuchin Order with an office in San Ynez. However, he will remain active in the Watts community.

2009 Mardi Gras Party

Laissez Les Bons Temps Rouler! More than 260 revelers “let the good times roll” during the Friends’ annual Fat Tuesday celebration held at American Martyrs’ O’Donnell Hall on Tuesday night, February 24th. Party goers enjoyed Cajun fare catered by Vycki Smaldino, and of course the now famous Hurricanes, in the very posh O’Donnell Lounge. To view more great event photos please email us at email@friendsofwatts.org

Thanks to the tremendous generosity of our sponsors and individual donors, this year’s event raised more than \$90,000. Proceeds go directly to the Watts Community – either through scholarships that are vital in allowing them to attend St. Lawrence Brindisi school or as support for the Friends’ programs including the Literacy Center, which



provides after school, one-on-one tutoring for kids reading below their grade level.



We have the greatest appreciation for the many volunteers who donated countless hours to the success of this event and to our *generous sponsors: Antonia and Dave Carpenter; Pat and Rich Meehan; Ellen and Charlie Steinmetz; Amy and Lincoln Stone; Mollie and John Baumer; Brigante Cameron Watters & Strong; Byrne and Nixon, LLP; Equassure, Inc.; John And Cindy Smet; American Martyrs Church; Cyrstal Property Management; Mikelyn and Patrick Dooley; Hilton Family of Hotels; kelly delmonte photography; Lagraphico; Nadine and Paul Melancon; Socorro and David Ortiz; St. Lawrence Brindisi; Mark and Sharon Wood.*

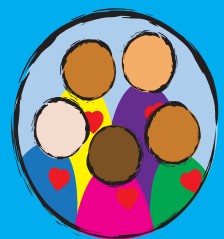


Nemollinxipe Update

In our December letter we introduced you to Ophelia and Manuel and their son Nemollinxipe (pronounced ne-mau-lin-chi-pa).

Nemollinxipe started 3rd grade at St. Lawrence Brindisi School last fall reading at a second grade level. He attended tutoring sections at the after-school Literacy Center every Tuesday and Thursday. He and his tutor worked hard all year. He was tested last month and is now reading at a 4th grade level. He is very proud of his accomplishments. He now has a love for reading and has greatly improved his chances to graduate high school and attend college.

We are proud of all our Literacy Center students. They work hard with their tutors and have made great strides toward becoming proficient readers.



Friends of St. Lawrence-
Watts Youth Center
10122 Compton Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90002
Phone: 323-567-1439
Fax: 323-564-3051

email@friendsofwatts.org

www.friendsofwatts.org