



# UNITAS NEWS

Serving Children and Families in the South Bronx for four decades

November 2006

940 Garrison Avenue, Bronx, NY 10474

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www.unitastc.com

From the Executive Director Dr. Ian S. Amritt:

Dear Friends,

*It is with pride and honor that I introduce this first edition of Unitas News. Close to 40 years ago, Unitas was born in the South Bronx and has sustained its public presence through its direct connection with the community at large. As our service community expands, we seek to connect with everyone, not only with our personal connections, but also with this newsletter. I am looking forward to sharing with you all the exciting news and events around the Unitas family, which you are now part of.*

Sincerely,

Dr. Ian S. Amritt  
Executive Director



## The Unitas Legend



The Unitas that flourishes today is the result of the vision of Dr. Edward Eismann in his formal clinical work at the Lincoln Community Mental Health Center in the South Bronx in 1967. Discouraged by lack of responsiveness to formal agency-based mental health services to youth; Dr. Eismann took his clinical skills out into the streets, engaging youth in "therapeutic dialog" on street corners, in alleyways,

tenement stoops, roof tops and school yards. "Doc", as he was dubbed, soon realized that the street was as valid a place as his office to employ the therapeutic tools of empathy and conflict resolution. There, he was able to clarify and reframe the open hostilities he found into conversations of negotiation, mediation and cooperation. Over time, he developed strong and influential relationships with neighborhood young men and women who were striving to survive difficult times. By sustaining these bonds, he instilled in them the belief that they together with him could be vehicles of change for neighborhood children at risk.

"Doc" organized the street system into a "therapeutic community" whereby these older youths bonded with, and helped, younger youth as symbolic kin. Together, they formed "symbolic families", where they were taught how to have a collective influence on each other. A "tribal council", an extended family community session, was also formed, composed of all "symbolic families" meeting daily or weekly in street or school settings, some 100-175 strong, to discuss and resolve interpersonal tensions and problems related to life, street and family. It was a radical departure from traditionally conceived office-spaced mental health services, but one that offered therapy in the clients' own life space and in the company of their own natural network, where influence was profound.

Since 1977, Unitas has been an independent not-for-profit organization that has continued its work with its symbolic family structure and symbolic family sessions, as well as expanded services to include a program of direct family therapies and school-based interventions. Research studies and documentary tapes support the effectiveness of Unitas' work. It continues to be grounded in its belief in the inherent power of all people to be helpers, healers to each other in need. It does this through a united participation of neighborhood youth, families and professionals working in collaborative relationships with each other. Such collaborative unity is reflected in the organizations chosen name UNITAS. ■

# CARETAKER NETWORK

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## Bonding by Richard Sherman

One of my favorite experiences this summer was accompanying the children and teenagers on swimming outings. I would get right into the water and begin my regimen of swimming and floating. The group would see me on my back with hands behind my head virtually sleeping on top of the water. They would gather around asking me how I was able to stay on top of the water and would try it themselves; some succeeding, some just having fun trying. For the next two hours, I would show interested and excited children and teenagers ways to float, move their arms and legs, and many other swimming techniques. In the end, we had an enjoyable and memorable experience that we could talk about, reference to in further conversations, and plan for in future excursions.



This is Unitas. Not a recreation program in conceptional terms, but the usage of a recreational activity helps in the coming together of neighborhood children, teenagers, youth workers, and adults that have a common interest or skill. From that activity, the youngsters get to know the teenager and vice versa. Friends are introduced and brought into the activity. A small community has taken shape. This community, in turn, becomes a network that can be used by the youngster in times of stress and need.

As the children were introduced to me through my swimming skills, they learned that I was a retired teacher who they could seek out if they had problems in school or just needed guidance to finish a project. My status in Unitas was such that children during the summer would also seek me out if they were hungry, lost something, needed a reliable adult to accompany them to the store, or just needed someone to be with and talk to. In return, these children gave me their friendship, a sense of belonging in the community and an experience I will never forget. ■

## November Calendar of Events

**November 2, 2006: Reception for Local Clergy  
2:00-5:00 PM  
St. Athanasius Church**

On November 2, Unitas will be holding a reception for local clergy to give a background of the Unitas program, update them on our current programs, and discuss the possibility of working together to deal with concerns in our community.

**November 18, 2006: First Annual Thanksgiving  
Turkey Giveaway  
12:00-6:00 PM  
Garrison Avenue between  
Manida and Barretto Street**

On November 18, Unitas is partnering up with CenterCare to have its first annual Thanksgiving turkey giveaway event, in which we are expecting to give away turkeys to 500 families. There will also be entertainment for residents of all ages, including a stage where various artists ranging from pop to gospel will perform.

**November 30, 2006: Wine & Hors d'oeuvres  
reception  
6:00-9:00 PM  
Fordham University  
Mcginley Center Ballroom**



On **November 30, 2006**, Unitas will be holding an event titled: **“Unitas: Celebrating Our Family’s Past; Ensuring Our Children’s Future”** that will be a launching to our **40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala** next year. The November 30th fundraiser will bring together Unitas Alumni and other people/organizations that have an interest in either what we do, or the Hunts Point community in general. It is meant to be a celebration of Unitas' past and present, with a look towards its future in the Hunts Point community.

*If you have a question or comment about any of these events or would be interested in attending, please contact Eric Bredhoff at 718-589-0551.*

Have any questions or comments? Please feel free to contact us at [Unitastc@aol.com](mailto:Unitastc@aol.com)

# SYMBOLIC FAMILY

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## UNITAS SUMMER PROGRAM



To the left are pictures from the summer play street located at Fr. Gigante Plaza. For seven weeks, professional staff of Unitas joined with the local branch of the Police Athletic League, and the Southeast Bronx Corporation (SEBCO) to produce a seven week summer day camp program that was open to all members of the community and those who were just passing by. It was free to all who participated.

Some of the many activities included in this program were volleyball, arts and crafts, four square, basketball, and board games. A reading and research program was also provided daily, as well as a dance component. Children also went on trips to the pool, a museum, the zoo, a movie, and a play. At the end of the summer, children and staff went to a city-wide PAL extravaganza at Central Park.

The special part of this program occurred daily from 4:30 to 5:00. All activities stopped as the participants were invited to join in a community circle. The circle was used to introduce participants, both new and old, to each other and the group, and to share information, e.g., a special event at the library, a trip that will occur the following day, someone's birthday. The circle was also used to present a problem and suggest solutions through a story or skit that the teenage workers and children would take part in.

The hope is that this summer day camp will continue. Three organizations used their resources in a successful venture to provide a summer program that was certainly needed and wanted by the community. Unitas provided workers who had undergone training in working with children, the PAL provided the activities and had a curriculum that they used throughout the summer, and SEBCO provided the space, set the rules and regulations for its usage, and provided security. In the end, children and teenagers had a place to meet, make new friends, re-establish bonds with old friends, practice and learn new skills, and enjoy pleasant experiences with each other.

Unitas hopes that the participants come together during the Fall and Winter at the Thursday program at St. Athanasius. The format will be somewhat similar to the Plaza program-recreation followed by a community circle. ■

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# FAMILY CIRCLE

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## Giving Hunts Point a Voice



Unitas, in partnership with the Hispanic Federation, kicked off its voter registration drive at Father Gigante Plaza in Hunts Point in June of this year. Why would a community mental health organization get involved with a voter registration drive? Unitas took on this effort in order to empower Hunts Point residents to make a difference in their own lives by choosing who sets the laws they must follow. This year, some very important elections will be taking place on the state and local level that will no doubt affect the lives of people in our neighborhood. Some of the many offices that are up for grabs include the positions of Governor, Senator, Congressman, State Senator, and Assemblyman.

The Bronx, unfortunately, has a long record of low enrollment and voting totals. Only 42% of Bronx residents are currently registered to vote. However, just because someone is registered does not mean they will vote. Only around half of those who were registered to vote in the Bronx in 2004 actually voted for the office of President. This trend does not change much in our area of Hunts Point.

We must have a voice or we will risk being forgotten. So far, nearly 100 people have decided not to stay quiet any longer by registering to vote at our table in the Plaza. If you would like to register to vote, change your address, name, or party enrollment please join us at Father Gigante Plaza on Southern Boulevard and Tiffany Street on Thursdays from 3-6PM or stop in at our office on 940 Garrison Avenue any weekday from 11-5 PM. If you have any questions please contact Eric Bredhoff at 718-589-0551 ■

## 40<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY RAFFLE

\$10 DONATION FOR A BOOK OF 4 TICKETS

**GRAND PRIZE:** VACATION FOR TWO TO LAS VEGAS

**2<sup>nd</sup> PRIZE:** DELL COMPUTER    **3<sup>rd</sup> PRIZE:** IPOD

**4<sup>th</sup> PRIZE:** MP3 PLAYER. PLUS 5 CASH PRIZES!

Drawing will be held at the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala in Spring 2007. If you would like to purchase tickets please contact Eric Bredhoff at 718-589-0551.

We would like to extend a special thanks to our generous donors, whose tax-deductible contributions have made all of this possible.

- ⓧ Dr. Ian S. Amritt
- ⓧ Honorable Maria Del Carmen Arroyo
- ⓧ Marjorie W. Bresler
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- ⓧ Diane Lipsey Watkin

If you would like to become one of our generous sponsors, please feel free to contact Eric Bredhoff at [Unitastc@aol.com](mailto:Unitastc@aol.com) or (718) 589-0551. We look forward to hearing from you.

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4