

## News And Views About Community Action

By Tina Zerbian,  
Guest Columnist

President Obama, in his State of the Union Address, said this about Americans several times: "We do big things." I agree. In that same address, he said, "I've proposed cuts to things I deeply care about, like community action programs." Later, in unveiling his budget, the president justified his proposal to cut Community Action by 50-percent by saying that the anti-poverty agencies have remained "virtually unchanged" since their creation in 1964. I'd like to challenge the president's thinking on this. I'd like to point out that Community Action does big things. Community Action agencies are required to continually assess the needs of the community and to respond to new and emerging ideas. When foreclosures were the result of the mortgage crisis in this country, who stepped to the plate? (continued)



# The BRAVO Newsletter

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## Training Helps Enhance Weatherization

Shortly after President Obama took office more than two years ago, Congress quickly approved his ambitious plan to help the country reduce energy consumption and create jobs. Since that time, El Paso has been the beneficiary of millions of dollars to help mostly low-income and elderly residents make their homes more energy efficient. Project BRAVO, the City of El Paso and the City of Socorro were all sub-recipients of weatherization funding under the DOE and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Under the program, numerous contractors were hired and hundreds of jobs were created. According to the Environment News Service, thousands of contractors have been hired by local weatherization programs across the country who in turn have hired nearly 90,000



American workers to weatherize homes in just

about every corner of the country. The Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) allows an average investment of \$6,500 per home in energy efficiency upgrades. In El Paso, Project BRAVO has been responsible for weatherizing as many as 1,700 homes by the end of August, 2011. But the job involves



Above, nearly two dozen weatherization workers and local contractors received advanced training at Project BRAVO in February to help improve the quality of the work done to upgrade energy efficiency of thousands of home in El Paso County.

more than just placing weather stripping on windows. Weatherization workers are required to adhere to a stringent set of guidelines to ensure homes are properly weatherized, according to Project BRAVO Weatherization Manager Mike Martinez. The advanced training will ensure that the homes of qualified El Pasoans achieve the goal of an energy cost saving of between 25% and 30% on their utility bills. President Obama has declared that the country's future is dependent on its ability to reduce energy costs.

## PB Office Staffers Volunteer For Weekly Clean-Up Duty

The reality of budget reductions quickly made Project BRAVO staffers realize one thing: The days of full-time janitorial service are over, at least for now. Without hesitation, members of the Project BRAVO staff have begun volunteering one hour of their time per week to help keep the main office shiny and clean. On any given Friday afternoon, staff members from Housing, Community Relations and Community Services, can be seen emptying trash cans and sweeping floors. "I have no objection whatsoever to helping out," said Community Relations Manager Roy Ortega. "We need to make sure our offices remain presentable to our clients," he said. Janitorial workers at the main office are available throughout most of the week. However, several times a week they are assigned to help clean other Project BRAVO offices scattered throughout El Paso County.



Housing Counselors Pete Huerta, above, and Ignacio Segura, left, pull mop duty at the main office.

Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him work diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built.  
-Abraham Lincoln



Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource.  
-John F. Kennedy



### THE PROMISE OF COMMUNITY ACTION

Community Action changes people’s lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

–Community Action Partnership



### Community Action (continued from page 1)

Community Action agencies did. CAAs nationwide were fighting predatory lending and helping families caught up in subprime mortgages. In his speech, the president said that Americans measure our success “by the

jobs they can find and the quality of life those jobs offer.” He went on to say, “people need to be able to train for new jobs and careers in today’s fast-changing economy.” Now, the president’s Recovery and Reinvestment Act (stimulus) funding was controversial, but when Community Action was asked to step up to the plate to create jobs, we did.

Across this country, Community Action Agencies created and retained 18,432 jobs, ranking eighth out of approximately 200 Recovery Act Programs. We do big things. And, I say that this is an example of being nimble, not of being mired in the past.

One of the president’s priorities is “clean energy technology — an investment that will strengthen our security, protect our planet and create countless new jobs for our people.” Last year alone, more than 90,000 jobs were created as a result of the weatherization program that was approved and implemented to help families reduce their energy consumption. I call that progress.

“But,” the president says about the need to make cuts,



supports such as employment, education and housing to 20.7 million vulnerable Americans, including 7.3 million children and seniors.

But don’t we all need to sacrifice in these tough economic times, including agencies like Community Action? Sure we do. Cutting half of our funding equates to a \$350 million reduction in a federal budget that equals \$3.7 trillion. Not even a drop in the bucket. It means the loss of economic security, food security, energy security and housing security.

Mr. President, Americans do big things. We agree. But Community Action agencies are there to support those accomplishments, to create jobs, to keep kids in school, to install sustainable energy resources, to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable.

We do big things.

*Tina Zerbina is the CEO of Cattaraugus Community Action in Salamanca, New York. This article was reprinted and edited from oleanimesherald.com*

“let’s make sure that we’re not doing it on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens.” Those vulnerable citizens are the very people served by Community Action agencies. Our network provides critical