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Banking/Wealth Management

**ONES TO WATCH**in Banking/Wealth Management **24**By **BERNADETTE STARZEE**

As 2015 came to a close, two Long Island nonprofits received a big gift from a big bank.

As awardees in Bank of America's Neighborhood Builders program, the two nonprofits were granted \$200,000 each in unrestricted funds, along with leadership training for their executive director and an emergent leader within the organization.

This year's winning organizations were Islip Terrace-based Mercy Haven and Long Beach-based Circulo de la Hispanidad.

They join a list of 22 Long Island-based nonprofits that have been named Neighborhood Builders since 2005, when Bank of America brought its national program to the Island. The latest winners are among 45 winning organizations across the bank's national footprint to receive the funds and leadership training in 2015.

Giving back to the community is part of the mission of many banks, subscribing to the point of view that strong communities contribute to strong banks. Bridgehampton National Bank, for instance, is fresh off its 5th Annual Holiday Apple Campaign to raise money for food pantries. Last year, the bank distributed \$30,000 in proceeds from the campaign to local food pantries.

For the last 16 years, Astoria Bank's charitable endeavors have included spearheading an annual Kids Tools for School drive to distribute school supplies to needy families throughout its footprint. TD Bank wrote nearly \$150,000 in grants to nonprofits serving Long Island over the 12-month period that ended in October.

While the \$200,000 in unrestricted funds from Bank of America's Neighborhood Builders program is significant, the executive training portion of the program is often the biggest takeaway. The winning executive directors and emergent leaders attend two multi-day seminars with other leaders from around the country. There are additional webinars throughout the year that are open to the current winners as well as alumni.

"When I talk to prior winners, they tell me the money is nice, but it's the leadership training that they get throughout the year that is really the value of the program," said Bob Isaksen, Long Island market president for Bank of America. "They build a strong network with leaders of existing programs throughout the country, and they continue to be connected and share best practices with that network long afterward."

Back in 2007, Theresa Regnante was chosen to receive emergent leader training when her then-employer, Hempstead-based EAC Network, was selected as a Neighborhood Builder.

"Typically, emergent leader trainees might be the chief operations officer or the lead development person in the organization," said Regnante, who is now president and CEO of United Way of Long Island in Deer Park. "I was the chief development officer at the time – I raised the money, and I was really good at that, but the value of the training was that it opened my eyes to understanding the overall business of running a nonprofit. There's an art and a science to running an organization. I had the art – I knew my craft – but what I didn't know was the expansive business side of running an organization – the science side – that I hadn't been exposed to.

"Going through the training with emergent leaders in organizations from around the country and learning how they do things was valuable," Regnante added. "While you're there, you pick a peer group, and to this day, the five

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**BOB ISAKSEN:** Past winners say the leadership training is the major takeaway of the program.

**Two nonprofits awarded large grant, training from Bank of America****GRANT**, From Page 21

people from my peer group still convene every six months by conference call."

Like Regnante, the other emergent leaders from her peer group now head their organizations.

"The way nonprofits do business today is so different from 20 to 30 years ago," she said. "All successful nonprofits have diversified enormously, and there has to be training for leadership. Agencies don't have a pot of money to send two or three people to training, and we're very grateful to Bank of America for this training – it has a tremendous impact on the people who have had the opportunity to go through it."

For Neighborhood Builders, Bank of America invites about 20 organizations in the Long Island market to submit applications each year. The program focuses on organizations concerned with workforce development, affordable housing and hunger relief, according to Isaksen, who noted the applicants are whittled down to 10 finalists. A panel that includes Isaksen and outside business experts, including a past Neighborhood Builder, comb through the applications, looking for financial stability and a well-thought-out plan of how the organization intends to use its funds.

"The organizations submit a very lengthy written application and the decision is made based on the strength of the application," Isaksen said. "It's a prominent group of judges and a robust conversation – people aren't shy about their opinions."

Mercy Haven and Circulo had "well-thought-out applications about how the funds would be used and how winning would benefit their mission," Isaksen said.

Mercy Haven, which provides temporary and permanent housing and supportive services to needy Long Islanders, will apply its grant funds toward support programs such as homeless outreach and free legal services, as well as to help initiate development of a \$5 million, 16-unit apartment complex to further serve clients.

Circulo, which provides a wide range of human services, will apply its funds to workforce development programs and to transition to new leadership, as executive director and founder Gil Bernardino looks to pass the baton after 35 years at the helm.

■ **BERNADETTE.STARZEE@LIBN.COM****PREVIOUS NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDERS****2005**

- Long Island Cares – The Harry Chapin Food Bank
- Family Service League

**2006**

- Family and Children's Association
- John T. Mather Memorial Hospital

**2007**

- EAC Network
- Ronald McDonald House of Long Island

**2008**

- Huntington Hospital's Dolan Family Health Center
- Island Harvest

**2009**

- Central Nassau Guidance and Counseling Services
- Community Development Corporation of Long Island

**2010**

- Hope for Youth
- Long Island Children's Museum

**2011**

- East End Arts
- Hispanic Counseling Center

**2012**

- Concern for Independent Living
- Interfaith Nutrition Network

**2013**

- Transitional Services of Long Island
- Adelante of Suffolk County

**2014**

- Health and Welfare Council of Long Island
- Long Island Housing Partnership

