

2010

CORETTA SCOTT KING WOMEN FOR DIVERSITY AWARD WINNER



TINA NIXON

PROVIDING A SAFE HAVEN FOR PEOPLE IN NEED

by Mikell Worley

“Doesn’t everyone deserve to feel safe enough to just take a deep breath?” asks Tina Nixon, chief executive officer of the YWCA of Greater Harrisburg. “Sometimes it’s just that simple. Many of us take for granted that we have a place to feel comfortable enough to catch our breath,” says Nixon. “But when a woman is in a domestic violence situation, she lives in fear, and simply having a sense of safety and peace can give her the opportunity to reflect, assess, and think about what she needs to do next.”

When a client at the YWCA stopped Tina and thanked her for “having a place

where I could just come and breathe,” it gave Tina perspective on how basic and fundamental their clients’ needs are. “Many of them come with nothing and need so much. To be grateful for the opportunity to simply take a breath is very telling.

“When you lose everything, whether it is from a fire, hurricane, or because you have escaped with your life in the middle of the night, taking nothing with you, you are in survival mode. You just want to live to see the next day. The YWCA provides that safety net,” declares Nixon. “It is only after the basic need of feeling safe is met that our clients are open to the additional services we provide. In that ‘safe place’ they can evaluate their situations, set goals, and ultimately go on to achieve self sufficiency.”

Tina understands that feeling of desperation, because she has experienced domestic violence in her own life. When Tina was just eight years old, she, her mother, and her three sisters fled one night from her physically abusive father. They took refuge at the YWCA, where they found a safe haven.

Tina was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in July 1967. After their successful escape from Tina’s father, she and her sisters lived with their mom. “Being a single parent living with limited resources was tough on my mom, but even though we didn’t have a lot, she was always willing to help others. I saw people take advantage of her and that has made me much more guarded. I’ve learned not to get emotionally attached and that there is a delicate balance between nurturing and enabling.”

As a student, Tina did not have a well-defined occupation in mind. She was more focused on what she did not want, rather than a specific career goal. She wanted to break the cycle of violence in her life and end her family’s dependence on the welfare system. Those were Tina’s primary goals. However, her paternal grandmother encouraged her to aim high and convinced Tina that she could do anything she wanted. “At the time, the expectation of a young black girl in the city was that she would be another statistic—become pregnant and drop out of school,” comments Nixon.

In 1985, Tina graduated from Bishop McDevitt High School, and the following fall she entered East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. However, she found college difficult and felt that she did not belong. “I would occasionally call my grandmother,” Tina recalls, “and she would convince me to continue, insisting that I *did* belong and I *would* succeed. With her support and faith, I graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in political science/sociology in 1989.”

Following graduation Tina worked for former Speaker of the House, K. Leroy Irvis, in the Pennsylvania State Legislature, where she had worked during the summers in college. She then launched into a career with non-profits and began working with agencies focused on issues such as hunger, welfare-to-work, and health care.

In 2000 she was hired as director of Resource Development at the YWCA of Greater Harrisburg. Tina did a stellar job in public relations, marketing, and fundraising, taking in more than \$500,000 for the organization in four years. In June of 2004 she was promoted to CEO of the YWCA, where she oversaw a staff of 123 full- and part-time employees, and a budget of more than \$4.6 million. Today the YWCA’s budget is \$5.2 million.

“Everyone who walks through our doors is treated with dignity and respect,” Nixon says. “Our staff is committed to seeing the value and potential in each person.” In addition to Tina’s accolades for her staff, she is also generous with praise for her board of directors, volunteers, and donors.

When I asked Tina how can people help, she responded without hesitation. “We need unrestricted funds to meet the diverse needs of our clients. There are situations we can’t anticipate or incorporate in the budget.” She gave several examples. “We had a woman come to us who had cancer and needed a special diet that wasn’t available through the food bank. Another needed a refill for a prescription and had no insurance.

“Women come to us who are too terrified to stay in this area and ask for help with transportation costs to be relocated to another area to save their lives and the lives of their children. One woman simply wanted a scarf. She had a gaping head wound and wanted to cover the wound and the stitches.”

Nixon’s life work mirrors the mission of the organization she leads. The YWCA of Greater Harrisburg is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. Tina’s compassion for all people is widely respected. She has spent nearly two decades promoting equality and providing a voice for people in need.

Who could have imagined that the future of an eight-year-old girl seeking shelter at the YWCA would lead to a dedication to providing a safe haven where women and their children could literally catch their breath and be given the opportunity for a new beginning?

For more information on how to contribute to the YWCA, visit <http://ywcahbg.org/>. ❖

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NADINE "AMINA" KIM

INNOVATION AND SUCCESS THROUGH COLLABORATION

by Mikell Worley

Nadine "Amina" Kim, director of Development Services for Harris-town Development Corporation (HDC), believes that collaboration among businesses, non-profits, educational institutions, and the government is the key to community success. "It saves resources, increases impact, and eliminates duplication of services. Innovation only happens when you have a clear idea of the environment around you, which you learn through others' work and experiences. Success only happens when you share, cooperate, and collaborate."

Since she began working with HDC in 1991, Ms. Kim has been instrumental in

NADINE “AMINA” KIM

the planning, funding, organizing, and implementing of numerous community wide programs, including the Pennsylvania Council for International Exchange (PACIE) and the World Trade Center of Central Pennsylvania. In 2002, she initiated a variety of cultural programs at the International House Harrisburg, a student housing facility. “Programs include presentations on world cultures, international films, language clubs, dance, and music. They [the programs] have been specifically designed to assemble people of various cultures to provide education and an opportunity for interaction and increased understanding.”

Ms. Kim was born in Marrakesh, Morocco, in 1956. Appreciation for learning and education were core values in Amina’s family, and she excelled throughout her school years. In addition to her family’s native Arabic, she became fluent in French, the official language of Morocco. “During my first year in high school, I chose to pursue English as my major in college. In 1975 I enrolled in Modern Letters at the University Mohammad IV, Rabat, Morocco, and transferred to The Centre PODOgogique ROgional two years later to continue my studies. I graduated in 1979, [and] was assigned to teach English as a second language at LycOe Plateau, SalO.”

Our community is fortunate that Ms. Kim and her family moved to the Harrisburg area. They came because of a law that was in place several years before Amina and her husband met. When the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia in 1975, Amina’s husband, who was attending college in Morocco, was unable to return to his home, thus becoming a refugee in Morocco. Amina and her husband met in 1975, were married in 1979, and had three children. Because Moroccan women married to foreign men at that time could not transfer their nationality to their children, (that law has since changed) the children were considered refugees due to their father’s status.

In 1988 they moved to Central Pennsylvania where Amina had extended family. “We sold everything, packed one suitcase for each family member, and traveled to Lebanon, Pennsylvania where we stayed with my brother-in-law for several weeks until we could rent an apartment. It was difficult to leave our country, family, and friends, but my fears subsided quickly when I realized how considerate everyone I encountered was. We began to rebuild our lives.”

“Ms. Kim’s work and her title do not adequately describe the many positive ways she has impacted the community,” states Bradley R. Jones, vice president of Community Development for HDC. “She has been in the forefront, both within the workplace and within the community in prioritizing the importance of showcasing diversity issues – particularly cultural diversity.

“Ms. Kim is proud of her cultural heritage and is the first to volunteer to assist immigrants in learning and navigating [American] culture. She understands the value of mentoring and is dedicated to assisting international college-age students, as well as students of other ages. She encourages international communication and learning among students by creating language clubs and other activities.”

Many local schools and colleges invite Ms. Kim to share her knowledge and insights with their students. She discusses her life experiences, her thoughts on international and global perspectives, and the cultural diversity in the greater Harrisburg area. The Dauphin County Commissioners’ Diversity Forum, the World Trade Center of Central Pennsylvania, and the Hershey World Culture Club have all benefited from her keynote speeches.

She volunteers as a co-chair for the Harrisburg Regional Chamber of Business Women and serves on the board of directors for the Institute for Cultural Partnerships. She is a mentor in the Harrisburg University for Science and Technology Business Mentoring Program and also belongs to the Habitat for Humanity Women Build Project, the Urban Land Institute, and the Pennsylvania Council for International Education.

Ms. Kim enjoys knitting and tennis. She competes in the United States Tennis Association recreational tournaments and the World Team Tennis in which her team recently qualified to compete at the national level in Indian Wells, California. “Tennis requires mental concentration (beside many other abilities). Emotions about anything other than the game can cloud your judgment and affect your body’s ability to perform. It builds confidence, discipline, and mental toughness.

“I’m indebted to the mentors, formal and informal, who have guided me along the way and to the experiences and knowledge I’ve gained through my work with the Hargestown Development Corporation,” she says. “Over the years, I have learned a great deal, even when making mistakes sometimes. I like to share my experiences, good or bad, and I like to learn from others.” ❖

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CHIARA SABINA, Ph.D.

PROMOTING RESEARCH TO SHAPE POLICIES AND SERVICES

by Mikell Worley

Study and research have been the driving force behind the career of Dr. Chiara Sabina, assistant professor of social sciences at Penn State Harrisburg. Dr. Sabina was recently awarded a \$680,000, two-year federal grant from the National Institute of Justice to gather data on violence and victimization among Latino adolescents. Little research of this kind has been conducted within the Latino community. Her interest in this population developed while she was taking courses in women's studies and psychology. Dr. Sabina's dedication to social justice also plays a big part in her chosen topic of study.

CHIARA SABINA, Ph.D.

“I was raised on Long Island, New York, integrated into a community abundant with cultural diversity. My mother, from Puerto Rico, remarried a Jewish man, who on all counts is my dad, when I was four years old. It was the best of both worlds. We had a Christmas tree and a menorah! My world was rich with cultural, religious, and racial diversity.”

When Chiara began attending school she didn’t speak English fluently. “We lived in a wonderful school district that provided individualized time and support. I became immersed in English through school and when my household language changed through my parents’ marriage.”

Yet, it wasn’t until high school that Chiara realized differences could be threatening. “Families from different cultures left the city and moved onto the island, creating racial tension. There was an incident at my school [that occurred] the day before high school graduation when a group of students painted swastikas on the running track.

“I was a junior at the time and serving as the president of the International Cultural Society, created to bridge the cultural gap among diverse cultures in the high school through structured activities. I was asked to speak to the student body rally about the incident to encourage tolerance and understanding.”

Dr. Sabina credits Phyllis Lober, the first of several of her mentors, with encouraging her to talk about the racial tensions surrounding this incident in high school and to discuss solutions. “She advised us to talk about problems – not keep them in the closet. She had traveled the world, had a rich understanding of history, and encouraged me to understand and appreciate diversity. She’s retired now, although she still takes time to teach ESL in China, and we still keep in touch.”

Mentors have played a critical role throughout Dr. Sabina’s academic career. “Having a mentor can make the difference in a student’s life. I was fortunate to have mentors in high school, college, graduate school, and postdoctoral training.”

In 1996 Chiara began her freshman year at the University of Delaware, where she first became involved in research. “A course in women’s studies opened my eyes to a different way to see the world. I began to consider the role of the Latino woman throughout history and in our present society.”

In her sophomore year Dr. Sabina began conducting research on Latino women, concentrating on Latina professionals-their education, families, and workplace experience. She quickly became disheartened. As she reviewed the statistics of Latino women professionals, Dr. Sabina came to the conclusion that she was truly very fortunate to have re-

ceived such high quality education. “Far too few Latino women reach their full potential. Only .3% of Hispanic women age 25 and above obtained doctoral degrees. In addition, they experienced a disproportionate amount of violence.*

“Psychology was my major and I added Spanish studies as my second major with a minor in women’s studies. My research centered on women’s experiences with intimate partner violence, documenting their victimization and responses. Research among these groups, including Latinas, immigrants, and sexual minorities [those in same-sex relationships] is important because it shapes and informs policies and services.”

In 2003 Dr. Sabina was introduced to Buddhism, which seemed to echo her own sense of humanity and solicitousness. “The philosophy/religion emphasizes a compassion for all living things and views the world as inherently good. There is a slowing down that encourages present moment awareness. It teaches that if you treat someone badly, you are ultimately hurting yourself.” The belief system proved a natural fit for her. “Buddhism stresses right livelihood, the goal working in ethical ways that benefits humanity. The ability to apply my academic training to help call attention to and address the suffering of others, and help students develop their minds, is a most humbling honor.”

Dr. Chiara Sabina earned her doctorate in applied social psychology from Loyola University in 2005. She continued her education through a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of New Hampshire at their Family Research Laboratory, a position funded through the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). In 2008 she moved to Central Pennsylvania where she continues to live out her passion of promoting awareness, compassion, and understanding for diversity in her role as a professor.

The courses she teaches at Penn State include Women’s Studies, Sexual Identity over the Lifespan, Homelessness, and Racial and Ethnic Inequality in the United States, as well as research method courses. A common denominator in all of her classes is an expectation that all students directly confront their own perceptions in order to reduce fears and stereotypes.

“Dr. Sabina engages my heart strings as she tirelessly engages in minority focused research areas where there is a dearth of thought and literature,” notes Felicia Brown Haywood, director of student affairs at Penn State Harrisburg. “Her work to help eliminate the research gap profiling victimization in the Latino community shines a light in an area where greater awareness can serve as a foundation to include voices from the margins of society. I am truly impressed with her as she ventures to trvail the diversity terrain that few if any has every traveled!” ❖

*PCT64. SEX BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR THE POPULATION 25 YEARS AND OVER [35] - Universe: Population 25 years and over Data Set: Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF 4) - Sample Data

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VALERIE PRITCHETT

**CHARACTER,
NOT COLOR,
FRAMES MY
PERCEPTION**

by Mikell Worley

Valerie Pritchett, news anchor for abc27News, serving Hershey, Harrisburg, and Central Pennsylvania, weaves questions throughout her conversation. Pritchett's sincere interest in all people, her curiosity, and her compassion may well be the reasons she has become so dear to all of us who have had the pleasure of working with her in the community.

Valerie grew up in a military family, interacting with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. "The character, not the color, framed my perception of people when I was growing up," Valerie reflects. "My dad was in the air force and my

VALERIE PRITCHETT

community was very diverse. My opinion of the people around me has always been based on asking ‘How do you treat me as a person and what are you like as a person?’”

Pritchett was a high school student when her interest in television began. She was discovered while filming a commercial during a cooking class, when the supervisor of the school’s television department was impressed by the quality of her on-screen presence. She was invited to join the department, and her interest in broadcasting was launched. Pritchett completed two internships during college and was hired at a television station in New Jersey. She joined our community as a reporter for abc27 News in 1993.

The young reporter quickly became an active force in our community, both through her job and as a volunteer. She gives generously of her time and talents to the causes that she considers valuable. “My interest in volunteering began with my work as an EMT in college. That’s when I began to realize the value of giving. Over the years I’ve seen the younger generation consider what they can give instead of what they can get,” Valerie notes. “Now our schools are encouraging students to volunteer, and colleges are looking at what applicants have done for their communities.”

A commitment to volunteering continues to be central to Valerie’s life. She regularly donates her time to numerous non-profit agencies, such as the United Way of the Capital Region, the American Literacy Corporation, the American Cancer Society, and Dress for Success. Valerie also has a reputation for being an animal lover and supports organizations that benefit them, including the Central Pennsylvania Animal Alliance.

“Working with Valerie is always a pleasure,” states Floyd Stokes, executive director of the American Literacy Corporation. “She is seen at numerous events in the community. She is gracious and always responds positively to volunteering. Valerie is a professional—likeable, dynamic, and a wonderful community servant.”

Valerie is fascinated by the stories of the people she meets through her job as an anchor and as a community volunteer. “When it comes to diversity,” says Valerie, “Tell me about your culture, how can I better

understand you? Those are some of the things I want to know. We are all so unique and we can learn so much from each other. Basically, we have the same needs—food, shelter, and love.”

This anchor woman’s interest in stories, commitment to making a difference, and her passion for young people are the foundation for a weekly television segment called *Val’s Kids*, which started in 2000. Children in the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network share their stories on-air, with the hope that they will find permanent homes. So far, 231 children have been featured, resulting in 66 adoptions. The program has a 46 percent overall success rate. Val feels blessed to be in a position to help children find safe and nurturing homes.

Pritchett always appears serene and focused, yet she possesses an underlying energetic enthusiasm. She conducts her interviews with poise and grace, even though she insists that her mind is frequently overloaded. “There are times when I know I appear distracted,” Valerie laughs. “There are deadlines, priorities, questions to ask, calls to make, e-mails to answer, and schedules to keep. I am always multi-multi-multi tasking all the while trying to cut down on caffeine.”

As a news anchor, it is often necessary for Valerie to detail disasters and tragedies, local as well as global. Valerie’s faith helps her keep the distressing side of news coverage in perspective. “Life is about living—faith and hope keep you alive.” She encourages us to have faith that things will improve and to realize that we may not always understand God’s plan for us. “We are all here for a purpose. Ultimately, God decides where he wants us to serve,” declares Pritchett.

“When one door closes, He has already opened the next door. We just don’t know it yet,” she says confidently. “I’ve been greatly influenced by the teachings and the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” Valerie comments. “Our world is so much richer if we take a chance to get to know someone. Spark a conversation with a person from a different culture or background. We all benefit when we share the parts of our lives that we cherish. Passion is so infectious. What we give and what we get in return is amazing.” ❖

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PINA UGLIUZZA

**BUILDING BRIDGES
THROUGH
TRANSLATION AND
COMPASSION**

by Mikell Worley

Many of us have felt frustrated when dealing with the numerous documents and confusing forms required by insurance companies, healthcare providers, or other agencies for any given reason. Imagine dealing with that kind of administrative bureaucracy if you are living in a country where you are not fluent in the language or familiar with the culture. If your physical well-being, livelihood, and ability to provide for your family were threatened by an accident, work injury, or a disability, then frustration would rapidly change to panic.

Where would you turn for help? For some time now, thousands of people across Central Pennsylvania have turned to Pina Ugliuzza, director of Regional Development for Weinstein, Schleifer, and Kuper-smith (WSK), P.C., Attorneys at Law. The firm attributes its growth and successful business model to Pina's hard work and compassion.

In 1968, when Pina was 14 years old, Pina's parents traveled with her and her 12-year-old brother from Sicily, Italy, to the United States in search of new opportunities. "It was very hard, leaving our roots behind and trying to fit in," Pina reflects. She had studied English in school but still felt uncomfortable with the language barrier. "I slept with my English/Italian dictionary. It was my security blanket," she adds.

The family made its home in Reading, Berks County, where Pina attended St. Peter's Catholic School. "At first I wasn't able to keep up with my class and had to repeat the eighth grade. The sisters and teachers were very supportive. The next year, as my English improved, I won the award as the highest achiever of the class. My parents were very proud of me."

Pina's family lived in an Italian community that continued to grow because of the influx of immigrants to the area. They came because of the lack of industry and a decreasing job market in Italy. Yet when these Italians arrived in the United States, they encountered language barriers and cultural differences, and were unaware of their rights.

The young Pina made friends throughout her community and noticed that many of her neighbors needed help filling out legal and medical forms, applications for jobs, and school enrollment paperwork. Word soon spread that this young girl was a valuable resource and willing to help her friends and neighbors. "Pina can help you" was frequently heard throughout the Reading community.

Then in 1972, Pina met Alex Ugliuzza through friends of their families. They fell in love and were married two years later. Pina's marriage didn't end her concern for those in need, and she continued to take friends and neighbors to medical and legal appointments.

In 1983, Pina's work turned personal, when it was her father who needed her help. He was working at a local foundry when his leg was severely crushed. His employer provided little medical and disability coverage, so Pina began the long process of taking him to numerous medical appointments and seeking legal representation.

It was difficult to find a lawyer in Reading who would represent an injured immigrant without requiring a retainer. Fortunately, they found a firm in Philadelphia that took personal injury cases without an advance payment. David Weinstein, Esquire, founded the firm that took the case.

Time passed, and Pina continued to help Italian immigrants. She became very adept at it. In fact, she vividly remembers "sitting in a doctor's office with a Spanish social worker who worked for the local Hispanic Center doing the exact same thing that I was doing. She was amazed that I was a volunteer." Other than operating out of an office, Pina was doing the same job as the Spanish social worker.

All of that was about to change, recalls Pina, when in 1986, "Norman Weinstein and Chuck Schleifer, partners with the Weinstein Law Firm, called me to extend a job offer." Pina was to continue the work she was doing, only now she would earn a salary. "I met clients at my kitchen table. My outreach into the Italian community crossed over into the Latino community who embraced me and the package I was bringing."

As demand grew, the law firm opened new locations. The first regional office opened in Wyomissing in 1993, then in 1996, the office moved to downtown Reading. "As others were moving out of the city, we were moving in," Pina notes. "We wanted to be in the heart of the community."

By that time, Pina was handling the attorney/client communications and coordinating intakes and follow-up administrative duties for hundreds of cases. "We decided to hire a part-time employee from Nicaragua. She understood the culture of the community and WSK's clients." Currently, there are 45 employees at eight sites (Philadelphia, Reading, Lebanon, Lancaster, Kennett Square, Allentown, Harrisburg, and Delaware County) working to be "Your Bridge to Justice."

In 2008, Pina was directly involved in the decision to open a branch of WSK in Harrisburg. The attorneys of WSK volunteered to help create the new non-profit corporation named the Latino-Hispanic-American Community Center. Following Pina's example of direct community outreach and involvement, the law firm is actively providing professional legal assistance to Central Pennsylvanians with an emphasis on the Latino and Hispanic-American community.

Now working as director of Regional Development for WSK, Pina notes the services that the lawyers provide are still greatly needed. "During the last 40 years things haven't changed. Immigrants still fear the unknown. The lack of knowledge about their legal rights cause many to flounder in the system." WSK's business model that began in Pina's kitchen is best suited to help the immigrant community and all Pennsylvanians.

The decades of service that Pina has dedicated to helping others goes well beyond her language skills or her superlative knowledge of the law. The words "I want to help" are interwoven throughout her life story, and she treats everyone with empathy, compassion, and respect. ❖