Rochester Institute of Technology is one of ten universities this year to be awarded a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) grant. The nearly $400,000 will be used over three years to support more advanced partnership activities with the NorthEast Neighborhood Alliance (NENA) and RIT.

NENA and RIT have been community-university partners for more than four years, with an established mission to support and propel the implementation of the NENA Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan while broadening and deepening the educational experience for RIT students. The HUD funding comes at the close of another large federal grant awarded to the partnership. In 2000, RIT was awarded its first federal grant to support partnership activities with the NENA. The Corporation for National and Community Service awarded RIT a 3-year $400,000 grant to pilot a formal community-based or service-learning program at RIT. The Learn and Serve grant was the first opportunity for the NENA-RIT partnership to begin meaningful work together and experience the natural synergy in partnering professional technical expertise from a university with the knowledge, wisdom, and fortitude of residents determined to revitalize their community starting at the grassroots. By the end of the Learn and Serve grant, the partnership boasted more than 400 participants, including community...
residents, RIT students and faculty members representing six departments and four colleges at RIT.

With the partnership established and three years of rewarding work behind them, the NENA-RIT partnership moved into the next phase of activities which focuses efforts into four specific program areas, as determined by the community leaders: Housing, Economic Development, Neighborhood Planning, and Neighborhood Revitalization. The grant also includes formal research activities that incorporate participatory action research methods.

Each of the four program areas focuses on distinct goals and objectives to create sustainable change in the northeast neighborhoods. The Housing activities include the development of a design guidebook that promotes cost effective means for meeting new construction and rehabilitation building standards, with emphasis on sustainable design, visitability, and energy efficiency. Participating faculty and students, lead by Professor Nancy Chweicko, School of Design, CIAS, will support the housing initiatives by providing ongoing consultation.

The Economic Development program area involves Professors Robert Barbato and Ray Tierney, COB, to assist in the development of a Small Business Resource Center in Sector 10 as part of a permanent program of the Small Business Institute in the College of Business. Professor Tierney will also provide ongoing consultation for NENAs urban agriculture initiative, the Greater Rochester Urban Bounty.

Neighborhood Planning and Neighborhood Revitalization may sound similar, but their objectives are distinctly different. Neighborhood Planning activities focus on strengthening neighborhood-based information and planning tools, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping and environmental site assessments. Neighborhood Revitalization activities concentrate on enhancing leadership capacity and participation of neighborhood residents.

Over the past thirty-five years, the city of Rochester has seen many changes. Recently, Rochester has focused its efforts on the growth and revitalization of urban communities. One such area lies between Goodman Street and the Genesee River, in a community known as Sector 10. Now a predominantly African-American and Latin-American community, Sector 10 used to be a bustling Italian-American neighborhood, where Louis Andolino, RIT emeritus professor, was born and raised.

“The area has always been– and will stay– a neighborhood in transition in terms of its ethnic and racial composition. Before I lived there it was largely a German and Irish neighborhood,” said Professor Andolino. While growing up in the area, Andolino said that it was “a relatively poor community where working class people represented the last wave of immigrants coming into Rochester from Italy.”
Rochester officials, community leaders, and academics from across the country gathered at the RIT Inn & Conference Center October 2-4, 2003, for a conference focusing on the partnership between the NorthEast Neighborhood Alliance (NENA) and Rochester Institute of Technology. “When the Grass Takes Root: Building Partnerships Between Urban America and Higher Education” focused on sharing the lessons learned from the NENA-RIT partnership with participants who are building similar partnerships throughout the country.

A company of seven actors and actresses from Learn It Live Productions opened the conference with a dramatization that portrayed the many phases of partnership experienced by NENA and RIT. The dramatization illustrated the partnership’s conception, evolving relationships, challenges and successes.

Once the performance ended and all local and visiting guests had been welcomed, Meredith Dalton, Learn and Serve America project coordinator, hosted a forum with Rochester Mayor William A. Johnson, and Dr. Albert Simone, RIT president. President Simone began the forum discussing the impacts of the partnership on RIT, stating: “We can’t be ivory towers with a moat protecting us from the outside world. If we’re really going to educate our students, they need to see the world around them.”

**Lou Andolino**

By Brandon Borgna

With help from the NorthEast Neighborhood Alliance (NENA) and the city of Rochester, the Sector 10 community has taken strides in revitalizing their area in terms of beautifying streets, developing affordable housing, creating neighborhood gardens and providing internet and computer access for its residents.

“I’m very pleased about the city making strides to revitalize that community. [The partnership] is an excellent experience for RIT students to learn more about and work in the neighborhood,” says Andolino.

Part of the success of these projects comes from the increasingly active role of Sector 10 residents in the community. Maintaining several urban farms has allowed for an expansion in local food production, as well as adding more property to the Community Land Trust. The urban farms also create profit through sales at the public market in Sector 10.

“When I was growing up everyone went to the market because the atmosphere was similar to the open air markets in Italy, where the majority of the neighborhood had come from. While the times have changed, along with the demographics of the community, the public market still serves as one of Sector 10’s greatest assets. The public market is still a great aspect of the neighborhood and the city. It keeps myself and friends I grew up with coming back to the neighborhood,” says Andolino.

Sector 10’s future looks bright. In addition to the resources obtained directly through the NENA initiative, the RIT-NENA partnership received a $400,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to assist several community initiatives. Many new and exciting prospects now await in the future of the NENA-RIT partnership.
Knowledge is power, as the saying goes. In the case of the NENA-RIT partnership, part of that knowledge comes from research with the Sector 10 community. In a new study recently completed by Dr. Carolyn Hilarski, an associate professor from RIT’s social work department, and Sector 10 residents Cortez and Carmen Jones, new insight and knowledge was gained about life in the Sector 10 community. The study focused on the effects of trauma and violence on family dynamics in Sector 10. It is the hope of the researchers to bring new empowerment to the community as a direct result of the study.

Community involvement was essential to the success of the study from the very start. A preliminary survey titled “What’s going on in your neighborhood?” was created by the NENA staff in hopes of getting general trends of current issues in the community. Using Dr. Hilarski’s expertise in participatory action research, the professor put together a new age-specific assessment to be administered to teens in the community between the ages of 14 and 17.

“I wanted to know everything,” says Hilarski. “It was important that we use the youths in our surveys, because they are mirrors of family dynamics, an important indicator of potential problems.” Because of her eagerness to explore the lives of Sector 10 youth and get as much information as possible, she said the only difficulty in this study was “keeping the survey short enough.”

The actual survey instrument was administered to the Sector 10 youth by brother and sister team Cortez and Carmen Jones. They were responsible for distribution and collection of the consent forms, and recruiting participants for the study. Cortez, a senior at East High School, will be able to use the experience he gained with this research as a valuable tool for his college career.

The youth of Sector 10 were an important focus for the study, because they are the ones most capable of making changes in the future of the Sector 10 community. “The children are the ones with the resources to accept new knowledge and education,” says Hilarski. “We need to make sure they live in an environment conducive to getting a good education, and improve the community.”

The empowerment of the Sector 10 community will likely come from a “trickle down effect,” as Hilarski calls it. “The adults will be empowered, and the children will pick up on that as well. The mayor and police will be better able to help empower the community as well, now that the community has a sense of what needs to be addressed, they can ask ‘How can you work with us to solve these issues?’”

The results of the research are to be presented before the NENA council during a community forum in April. Cortez and Carmen Jones will again have a chance to showcase their skills as researchers, the conclusions drawn from the surveys and the experience they gained in working with Dr. Hilarski on this effort.

“The adults will be empowered, and the children will pick up on that as well.”

By Kevin Ptak
“Sustainable” Communities  
By Matthew A. Colaprete

revitalizing Sector 10. Some major accomplishments include bringing a new supermarket into the area, creating jobs, and rehabilitating houses.

The students in the Sustainable Communities class work with the NENA initiative on different projects within Sector 10 which help benefit the community. “It is a way for us students to help the community, by using our skills and background, at no cost to anyone,” says Rachel Weigelt, a third year interior design student. “When people say sustainable communities, they think of forests and grass. This class isn’t about that, it is about making a better urban environment. Within the class, we focus on bettering environmental issues, but overall it has to be a way in which it can better Sector 10 and its community.”

Along with making a difference in the community, there were many other reasons these students chose to take the class. “I thought it would be in my best interest to take the class because when I go to apply at a company, they will look for people who have knowledge in sustainability,” said Weigelt. Monica Desso, another third year interior design student, has a different idea of what taking this class can do for the future. “I want to make sure none of these materials are present.”

Before Brian can begin to focus on studying the soil, his first objective is to make a Geographic Information Systems map of the area. The map will include all the parcels within the specific area, residential and commercial, along with the contact information for the previous or current owners. Brian’s project is beneficial to Sector 10 because it will help to ensure that future homes or businesses that are developed are built on an environmentally safe surface. “We want new residents to come into the area, and take care of the new homes they live in,” said McGrath. By ensuring a safe living environment, it might help bring new people and companies into the area.

There are many projects that students are working on that will have a great impact with Sector 10. As an environmental science major, Brian McGrath is putting his knowledge to work. Brian is studying the environmental quality of land parcels within the Sector 10 community. “Within my [study] area there are between 900 – 1000 homes that are either vacant or have been bulldozed over. I want to make sure before they start to redevelop this area, that the ground they work on is safe,” said McGrath. Through his project, Brian wants to help test for any hazardous materials in or around the area. “What if there was a gas tank underground that leaked some petroleum? I want to make sure none of these materials are present.”

Each of the students has personal benefits that come along with doing their projects. “Growing up in Churchville, I never really got into the city of Rochester that much,” said Desso. “It made me learn a lot about my city, along with the professional experience in design I was able to practice, made it helpful for when it comes time to move on to a career.”

Both students and members of the Sector 10 community are able to benefit from the projects. Through the efforts of the students from the Sustainable Communities class at RIT, and their partnership with NENA, each group is able to make a significant contribution to the Sector 10 community. Overall, the Sustainable Communities class at RIT is a wonderful way for students to become involved in the Rochester community.

As McGrath said, “We as students can’t do the projects ourselves, but we can begin to set a stage where someone can move on with our projects, and use them to revitalize Sector 10.”
RIT and the City  By Brandon Borgna and Meredith Dalton

Mayor Johnson shared the same sentiments about the community’s benefits from the partnership, saying: “The partnership is absolutely necessary if we’re going to turn our urban neighborhoods around.”

Following the discussion with Mayor Johnson and President Simone, Hanif Abdul-Wahid, a representative from the Markettview Heights Association in Sector 10, spoke about the history of Sector 10 and the evolution of the NENA-RIT partnership.

The conference showcased several other speakers, including Professor Ann Howard, program director for Learn and Serve America at RIT, and Mr. Clay Osborne, RIT Minett Professor and vice president of human resources at Bausch and Lomb, Inc. The keynote address Saturday evening was given by Mr. Gus Newport on “The Value of Partnerships in Neighborhood Revitalization.” Mr. Newport is the former executive director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and the former Mayor of Berkeley, CA. His areas of expertise include neighborhood planning and development, economic development, youth employment and training, and community organizing. His address discussed his partnership experiences and the power struggles he perceives between community, university, and government.

In addition to the presentations, workshops were offered as part of the program on Friday and Saturday. Friday’s workshops addressed the service-learning experience from different perspectives, including faculty, students, neighborhood residents, and program evaluators. Saturday’s workshops were delivered in an interactive format, so participants could experience the challenges of partnership and begin thinking about how to effectively start a partnership in their own community or university.

Saturday’s program also included an interactive simulation facilitated by Bob Rosenfeld and Diane Garga of Idea Connection, Inc. The simulation engaged all conference participants as representatives of one community. The exercise divided the large group into three sub-groups, the chief’s council, Ivory Tall Institute, and the Heights members, with each subgroup holding differing levels of power and resources. The challenge was to develop relationships that would fulfill the needs of each group. The simulation was designed to give participants the opportunity to go beyond their intellectual understanding of building healthy partnerships, and feel the struggles associated with building partnerships where there are multiple dimensions of power and resources.

RIT and NENA are currently building on the partnership they have developed over the last four years. The partnership is designing new projects which continue to incorporate academic service-learning at RIT with the economic revitalization priorities of the NorthEast Neighborhood Alliance. The NENA-RIT partnership has also expanded beyond academic borders and is building valuable youth to youth connections between RIT students and the Sector 10 youth.

“When the Grass Takes Root: Building Partnerships Between Urban America and Higher Education” showed the commitment of the City of Rochester, NENA and Rochester Institute of Technology to revitalize urban neighborhoods and strengthen the bond between communities and universities.

“As RIT improves, the community improves,” said President Simone. It’s that idea of forming similar bonds that visitors to the conference will bring back home to their communities.