



# Building Bridges Building Bridges

VOLUME 1

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## Executive Director's Message

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Welcome to FIRN's new quarterly e-newsletter, "Building Bridges". The name refers to the common thread of "bridging cultures and building community" that is shared by all who are committed to FIRN's work. This takes many forms. For example, "Rosa", an immigrant from Guatemala, improved her English sufficiently with help from volunteer Adult LEAP tutors to earn a promotion to housekeeping supervisor at an area hotel in November 2007. She was one of over 1,400 individuals from 49 countries who improved their lives with FIRN's assistance in 2007.

Community support for FIRN's work is strong, and we are truly grateful. Over 100 volunteers tutor English, serve on our Board of Directors and committees, provide staff support, and contribute professional expertise ranging from website design to legal advice. Generous donors fund FIRN's immigration counseling, information and referral, employment counseling, interpreting and translation services, and literacy programs for children and adults. Howard County government, The Horizon Foundation, Columbia Foundation, and The Rouse Company Foundation are among our strongest longstanding supporters, and new community partners such as the ZONTA Club of Howard County, Columbia Pro Cantare, State Farm Insurance Company and the State of Maryland's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene are expanding FIRN's reach. Our spring 2008 corporate giving season is in full swing. With the foreign born at 16% of Howard County's population and growing, FIRN's challenge is to engage every member of the community in our work. So please help recruit volunteers, inspire donations, refer clients to us, and attract new community partners for FIRN. Share this newsletter and urge others to visit FIRN's website at [www.firnonline.org](http://www.firnonline.org). I hope you'll agree: FIRN's work is the work of us all!

Jennifer L. Blake  
Executive Director

## The Sixth Annual American Success Awards

On May 7, the 6th Annual American Success Awards dinner will honor Howard County's foreign-born business and community leaders **Francis A. and Joyce Afoakwah, Peter S. Lee** and **Dr. Saba S. Sheikh** for their outstanding contributions to the county's economy and the community.

The award, presented by FIRN in partnership with the Howard County Government, Howard County

Economic Development Authority and the Howard County Chamber of Commerce, recognizes foreign-born individuals who live or work in Howard County and have made a significant contribution to either their ethnic or general communities. Award winners have distinguished themselves by either owning a successful Howard County business or achieving a high level of success in his or her chosen profession.

You are invited to this year's awards dinner to celebrate and mingle with the winners and hear their success stories.

The event will be held on Wednesday, May 7, 6-8:30 p.m. at Ten Oaks Ballroom in Clarksville. Tickets are \$75. For ticket information, call the Economic Development Authority at (410) 313-6500.

## Ron Kline: Howard County's Volunteer Of the Year



Photo Source: howardcountymd.gov

Congratulations to Ron Kline. On March 4, 2008, FIRN's own Ron Kline was named Howard County Volunteer of the Year by County Executive, Ken Ulman. Since he "retired" in 1999, Ron has been volunteering at FIRN for 25-30 hours each week as our IT Specialist.

Ron's generosity and commitment are beyond compare. His assistance with our computers, telephone system, software applications, and non-technical "odd jobs" has helped sustain FIRN and its mission to provide resources for the foreign born.

An accomplished photographer, Ron's photos speak volumes on FIRN's website, at events and in the office reception area. Ron has been an integral part of the FIRN family of staff, volunteers and clients. He has worked quietly, steadily and faithfully for almost a decade to keep FIRN going.

In short, Ron Kline is the epitome of an outstanding volunteer. RON KLINE WE SALUTE YOU!

## Learning the System

Although "Ike" was an experienced small shop owner for 7 years in Liberia, he risked losing interview opportunities or alienating employers due to his unfamiliarity with American basic job search formalities. He had been late to an interview with a local retailer after relying on public transportation because he did not understand the area's transit system and capabilities. Ike received coaching on how to call and speak with an employer about a job, reschedule an interview and present his skills. He also learned how to obtain HoCo transit information via the phone and online, select job leads within a reasonable geographic area, and find opportunities near bus routes. Once familiar with the bus system, Ike learned about several job openings from friends and family, successfully interviewed with a local assisted living facility, and landed a new job there as a custodian earning \$10 per hour in July 2007 – only two months after immigrating to the U.S.

## Caring For Kids?

FIRN is partnering with Maryland Public Television to present "Grow Right Grow Bright", a workshop for informal caregivers of children. Grandparents, neighbors Attendees will receive valuable information about child development, health and safety. Relatives and friends who babysit are invited to attend. Participants will be invited to share in fun activities and share experiences in a relaxed group setting. Caregivers will receive a great tote bag packed with valuable items videos, storybooks and informational pamphlets and a furry new Sesame Street toy. This program will be presented in English, Korean and Spanish. Join us at FIRN on April 23, 2008 from 6-8pm. Dinner will be served. There is no cost for this program. Seating is limited and registration is required.

## The FIRN Health and Human Services Coalition

In January of this year FIRN was awarded a grant from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to provide Minority Outreach and Technical Assistance to the foreign born residents of Howard County for smoking cessation and cancer control. In February, more than 20 residents of Howard County convened at FIRN to begin developing a plan to effectively reach the diverse cultural communities. Thus, began the FIRN Health and Human Services Coalition. The Coalition is comprised of residents from Asia, Central and South America, Africa and the Caribbean.

Since the first meeting, Coalition members have been meeting within Cultural Ad Hoc Committees to develop a service needs survey that is culturally sensitive to their respective communities. Also, FIRN Coalition members have actively participated in the Howard County Health Department Tobacco Coalition as well as the HCHD Cancer Control Coalition.

The surveys are expected be completed and administered this spring. Although, the initial focus of the FIRN Coalition is tobacco cessation and cancer control, it is anticipated that the needs survey and the expertise of the Coalition members will identify other health and human service issues to be addressed.

## Citizenship Day at FIRN

On April 19, the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) will sponsor "Citizenship Day 2008" at FIRN. During the one-day workshop, lawful permanent residents seeking to become U.S. citizens can receive important guidance and advice from an attorney volunteering his/her time. Citizenship applicants will receive assistance filling out all necessary documents required by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services ("CIS"). In addition, individuals attending the workshop will receive advice and information on future steps in the naturalization process, including interviews, English proficiency exams and civics tests administered by CIS. The workshop will be held on Saturday, April 19, 2008, from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Cost: \$20.

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## Free Legal Clinic



FIRN proudly announces the first Free Legal Clinic, to be held on Saturday, April 26 from 8:30-12:00 noon at FIRN's office in Columbia. Local attorneys will speak on 3 panels throughout the morning.

Topics will include Landlord/Tenant Rights, Family Law, Debtor/Creditor Rights, Small Business, and Traffic Court/DUI. This service is made possible by the pro bono contributions of members of the Howard County Bar Association, Women's Bar Association, and Maryland State Bar Association.

Many foreign-born individuals and families face common legal issues while acclimating to their community. This program is designed to answer some of those questions and give them a general overview of the American system of jurisprudence in the context of those legal issues. All foreign-born individuals statewide are welcome to pre-register for this free event. Interpreters may be provided if registrants notify FIRN prior to April 12, 2008.

## U-Visa Workshop

On February 29, FIRN immigration attorney Cheryl Geiser-Young conducted a state-of-the-art training workshop on the "U-Visa" for 45 attorneys, nonprofits, and law enforcement officials from Maryland, DC and Northern Virginia. The U-Visa grants temporary immigration benefits to certain victims of crimes who assist government officials in investigating or prosecuting certain criminal activities. An important tool for law enforcement, it significantly reduces fear of deportation by alien crime victims. FIRN already has a waiting list of victims seeking assistance with the U-Visa, and we are working with the Domestic Violence Center and other partners to encourage more alien victims of crime to step forward.

## Save the Date

You and your friends and associates are invited to the

### 6TH ANNUAL AMERICAN SUCCESS AWARDS DINNER

This event honors and recognizes the achievements and contributions of the Foreign-born community in Howard County.

**Date: Wednesday, May 7, 2008**  
**Venue: Ten Oaks Ballroom, Clarksville**  
**Time: 6 p.m.-8:30 p.m.**  
**Cost: \$75**

More information will come!  
For questions about the event please contact FIRN at  
410-992-1923.

This fundraiser for FIRN is co-sponsored by Howard County Government, Howard County Economic Development Authority and Howard County Chamber of Commerce.

## Donation Information

Private sector donations from corporations, foundations, community-based organizations, local businesses, individuals and others are critical to sustaining FIRN's capacity to bridge the language and cultural gaps of a growing foreign-born population. Generous contributions enable FIRN to provide a growing array of high-quality services that acclimate and strengthen our foreign-born neighbors and build the capacity of local agencies, businesses, and organizations that serve and employ them. FIRN counts on your support to help prepare our foreign-born neighbors to be strong workers, high-achieving students and effective leaders - strengthening our community for all. So, please, give as generously as you can for a stronger Howard County!

FIRN is a registered 501c3 organization. Our tax number is 52-1397480.

**Credit Card Donations:** Donations may be made online through [Network for Good](#) or by calling FIRN at 410-992-1923.

**Donate By Mail:** To donate by mail, please make check payable to: FIRN, Inc.

**Mail to:** FIRN, Inc.

5999 Harpers Farm Rd, Suite E-200  
Columbia, MD 21044

**Supporters:** FIRN is grateful to be part of a community that has long valued diversity and supported the foreign-born. Longstanding supporters have included [Howard County Government – Community Partnerships Program](#), [The Horizon Foundation](#), [The Columbia Foundation](#) and The Rouse Company Foundation.

## Important Dates for FIRN Volunteers

### Club LEAP

- March 31 – April 1** No CL at Laurel Woods
- April 17 3-4pm** In-Service training for tutors at Bollman Bridge
- April 24** Schools Closed

### Adult LEAP

- April 8** No Adult LEAP

## Upcoming Events

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- April 3** FIRN Citizenship Test Prep  
7pm – 8.30pm  
Classes will be held at FIRN Thursday evenings through May 8<sup>th</sup>. Please call FIRN to pre-register. There is a \$40 materials fee.
- April 16** FIRN Health and Human Services Coalition Meeting 6pm-7:30pm. Meeting will be held at FIRN.
- April 19** Citizenship Day Workshop 10am-4pm.  
Workshop will be held at FIRN. There is a \$20 fee.
- April 23** Caring for Kids 6pm-8pm  
Workshop will be held at FIRN. Call FIRN to Pre-register. FREE
- April 26** FIRN Free Legal Clinic 8:30am-12 noon  
Workshops will be held at FIRN. Call FIRN to pre-register. FREE
- May 3** Latin American Spring Concert 8pm (Columbia Pro Cantare)  
Concert will be held at the Jim Rouse Theatre, Columbia. Proceeds from the silent auction will be shared with FIRN. Contact Columbia Pro Cantare for more information (410) 799-9321 [www.procantare.org](http://www.procantare.org). Cost \$23.
- May 7** American Success Awards Dinner 6pm  
Dinner will be held at Ten Oaks Ballroom, Clarksville. Call FIRN for more information. Cost \$75

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We envision a community in which foreign-born individuals are welcomed and successful, and contribute to a global perspective, vibrant economy, and rich fabric of cultures and customs.

Our mission is to help ensure equal access to community and opportunities for all foreign-born individuals.

#### Board of Directors

Nestor Benavides, President  
EMG Corporation

Zack H. Shariff, Vice President  
Allen & Shariff Corporation

Brian L. Oliner, Secretary  
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Young-chan Han  
Maryland Department of  
Education

Margaret Kim  
AllCare of Maryland, LLC

Executive Director  
Jennifer L. Blake  
[jblake@firnonline.org](mailto:jblake@firnonline.org)

## Volunteer Opportunities

### Spread the Word...

#### Tutors for Club LEAP after-school program

Club LEAP is seeking lead and assistant volunteer tutors for the 2008 session. We are starting clubs in 3 new schools. The time commitment is twice a week for 1 to 1.5 hours, directly after school. Training is provided. A criminal background check is required for this position for all tutors who are age 18 and older.

#### Site-Supervisors for Adult English Tutoring Academy on Tuesday nights or Saturday afternoons

Seeking to gain experience or enhance your skills in program management and supervision? Dedicated volunteers are needed to set-up, register and monitor students and tutors at

English tutoring sessions on Tuesday nights or Saturday afternoons. Time commitment: 2 hours per week plus periodic leadership meetings for a minimum of 4 months. ESOL experience is helpful.

#### Tutors for the Adult English Tutoring Academy

Volunteers are needed to tutor Adult English learners one-on-one or in small groups on Tuesday nights or Saturday afternoons for 1 ½ hours per week for a 12-week session.

#### FIRN Ambassadors

Serve for an hour or two a month assisting FIRN staff provide information about our services at health fairs, community events, and cultural activities.

#### Join a FIRN Committee

Foreign born volunteers are needed for health and human services advocacy, education, and outreach committees. Time commitments will vary but average about 3 hours per month.

#### Or how about the Cabaret Committee

Are you interested in PR, promotions or marketing? Special events planning, graphic design or entertainment management? Treasure hunting, antiques or appraising? Organizing, recruiting and managing? Interested? We are looking for a few good folks to work on our Cabaret committees.

## National Volunteer Week

This year our country celebrates National Volunteer Week April 27<sup>th</sup> through May 3<sup>rd</sup>. A nationwide poll of volunteer administrators has designated the theme, "Volunteer to Change the World". This theme was selected to inspire and encourage those for whom making a difference is not a choice but a commitment. At FIRN we are proud of our volunteers for encouraging and assisting our new neighbors to become more engaged in their new neighborhoods. FIRN volunteers are special because they meet the challenges of our new world not as isolated individuals but as members of a true community.

National Volunteer Week was created in 1974 to establish an annual celebration of volunteering. It is our country's moment to recognize and celebrate all of our volunteers. This is just one opportunity for FIRN to say a special "THANK YOU" to our volunteers who serve in many ways to make a change one key stroke, one phone call, one meeting, one new vocabulary word, one new neighbor at a time.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of FIRN, Inc. we appreciate your time and effort to serve our clients, and we sincerely thank you.

The FIRN Volunteer Appreciation Dinner will be held on Tuesday June 10, 2008 from 6:00-8:00 pm at our office. Stay tuned for more details in the coming months. We will have door prizes, awards, music and fun!!!

