

GERARD JOAB –

Creating support so others can lead



L-R: Michael Rubinger, LISC President and CEO; Michael Tierney, LISC Executive Vice President and COO; Arthur Ryan, Chairman, President, and CEO of Prudential Financial, Inc.; and Gerard Joab, LISC Sr. Program Director at a Living Cities Annual Board Meeting

Photos: Marvin Jones



WBG0 Reporter, Jenna Flanagan, interviewing LISC Senior Program Director, Gerard Joab, at the LISC NJ Neighborhood Achievement Awards.



L-R: Ray Ocasio, Executive Director of La Casa de Don Pedro; Congressman Donald Payne, 10th District; and Gerard Joab, LISC Senior Program Director at the LISC 25th Anniversary Celebration held in Washington, D.C.

For Gerard Joab, the fourth annual LISC New Jersey Neighborhood Achievement Awards ceremony on November 2 represents more than just an opportunity to acknowledge the people and institutions that are making New Jersey communities better and stronger. It's also a time to reflect on the impact that Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the national nonprofit he works for, has had on neighborhoods nationwide.

This year, the Greater Newark & Jersey City LISC program will honor outstanding community leaders who work every day to build healthy and vibrant communities throughout the State. The luncheon event, from noon to 3 p.m. at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, will include civic leaders, community residents, funders, government officials, and community development practitioners. Past honorees include Tri-County Community Action Partnership, Ironbound Community Corporation; Diane Johnson, Housing and Urban Development Field Director; Pleasantville Councilman Lincoln Green, Sergeant DeLacy Davis – Executive Director of East Orange Police Athletic League; Prudential Financial, Wachovia Bank and PSE&G.

LISC, the nation's leading community development support organization, for the last 26 years has provided grants, loans and technical assistance to neighborhood-based organizations that are building affordable housing, starting new businesses, creating jobs, starting schools, and encouraging other elements necessary to sustain communities.

Since opening a Newark office in 1986, LISC has provided 19 local nonprofit community development corporations (CDCs) with over \$9.3 million in grants and low-interest loans to produce nearly 1,400 new affordable homes and apartments and 340,000 square feet of commercial space. Through its affiliate, the National Equity Fund, LISC has also directed over \$26 million of project equity via the syndication of Low Income Housing Tax Credits. As senior program director for LISC's Greater Newark & Jersey City office, Joab in the last 12 years has

played a major role in that effort.

"Community development isn't just about building houses," said Joab, "it's about building communities. Sure, residents need affordable homes. But they also need good schools, child care, health clinics, places to buy nutritious food, recreational areas and safe streets. And while we've made great strides over the years, plenty of people in New Jersey and throughout the country are still lacking those essential elements."

Joab, a University of Maryland grad, cut his community development teeth at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a national organization dedicated to building collegiate fellowships. In his seven years there he was a campus minister at Bowie State College, Howard University, George Washington University and Georgetown University, where he worked with kids in after school and summer programs, bringing them to inner cities such as Newark, Jersey City, Paterson and Clifton. In the process, Joab witnessed urban revitalization efforts first-hand and subsequently became executive director of the Donald Jackson Neighborhood Corporation in Newark's South Ward.

"Our connection to the national LISC organization is one of the key values we bring to the local community development arena," said Joab. "It allows us access to financial resources and to identify and transfer best practices from one community to another. If there's something that's going on in Phoenix or San Francisco that is relevant to a community group or CDC here, we don't have to reinvent the wheel."

LISC currently has offices in 33 cities. Since 1980,

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those sites have helped create more than 196,000 affordable homes and apartments and 27 million square feet of retail, community and educational space.

“But things have changed and we’ve had to change with them,” said Joab. “As difficult as it seemed in those early days, the challenges we faced were different when we started. For example, we used to have younger and smaller groups. Now organizations are much more sophisticated. The community development arena wasn’t recognized by private developers back then, so there was less competition. Builders today see community development as a business and they want their share. While the amount of money available to community development was probably less back then, there weren’t as many organizations vying for those dollars. In some ways it was easier to get a project funded then, than it is now.”

Joab, 47, is a past president of the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey, past president of the Newark Rotary and a former board member of the Montclair Economic Development Corporation and the Make-A-Wish Foundation. He was a recipient of the Prudential Foundation’s National Prize for Non-Profit Leadership and the Policy Leadership Award from the New Jersey Public Policy Research Institute.

The annual LISC neighborhood awards program is open to nominations throughout the state as a means of spotlighting successful programs and strong leadership in the area of community development. ■