

Offering a second chance

Bellport organization holds training classes

By LINDA LEUZZI

Helen Martin, director of the Bellport Hagerman East Patchogue Alliance, used to lie awake nights listening to people talk on her street corner. And she would worry.

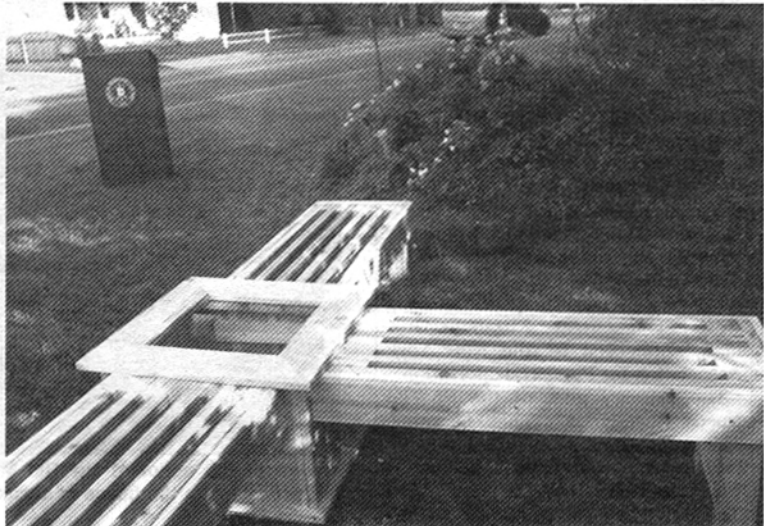
"I was thinking of something we could do to help these people," she recalled. Eventually, her organization established the Urban Repair Corps and taught interested folks how to repair and build houses. Members of the corps helped to fix up the 41 houses the Alliance has, homes that were initially boarded up and abandoned. The homes are then rented out to homeless and low-income families who have the possibility of buying them.

As part of the corps, high school students made picnic tables for the Martha Avenue Park in preparation for the first National Night Out in north Bellport. "These kids were great," Martin remembered. "They formed a bond among themselves and supported one another."

These projects are the forerunners of Bellport Second Chance, a program that helps ex-offenders re-enter the community and work force, currently being offered at the Alliance headquarters. The first session took place this summer with 11 students. They designed, sawed and constructed the community park bench commemorating Alvin Brothers Jr., who was killed in a drive-by shooting a year ago. The second session just started, and again, 11 are enrolled.

Angela De Vito, with the Nassau/Suffolk Building and Construction Trades Council, is running the program with Grace Harrington. De Vito heads the Built on Pride construction and building apprenticeship program for young people.

"We go through what the apprenticeship program is and what the various



This bench, dedicated to Alvin Brothers Jr. was constructed by students in a new program offered by the Bellport Hagerman East Patchogue Alliance.

ADV/Leuzzi

skill trades do and what our construction safety standards are that lead to a U.S. Department of Labor certificate," De Vito explained. "We do some job readiness skills, like how to conduct yourself during an interview, resume preparation, we talk about how to use math in construction and Red Cross and CPR training. We talk about discrimination and sexual harassment in construction jobs and how to reach out for construction-related work."

"The men and women who take the program range in age from 25 to 40 years old, she said. "The program overall has been in existence since early 2001; we have just begun to work with paroled individuals for the last six months," De Vito said.

De Vito said attendance is an agreement between the participants and

their parole officer. "To tell you the truth, that hasn't been an issue," she said. "For the most part, people are ready and desirable of taking a different path in their lives and getting things back together. They have a good grasp on reality." But they need a chance, and that's where overcoming the barrier business owners can create comes in. "What's rewarding is not only to see that they paid their debt but that they accrued skills and what we as a society need to see is that they want to take steps to do better," she explained.

Several of the first 11 graduates have already been placed in their internship program and others are in the process of applying for construction-related work or the apprenticeship program, she said. The classes will be held regularly at the Alliance and De Vito was hoping the Alliance would also offer an on-site GED program there.

To learn more about the program, contact Angela De Vito at 951-3315, or call the Bellport Hagerman East Patchogue Alliance at 286-9236. ■

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