Highlights from the 2009 NASW Social Work Pioneers® Weekend Program

The NASW Social Work Pioneers® celebrated their 15th anniversary October 23-24, 2009, in Washington, D.C. It was also the 5th anniversary of the Pioneers Annual Program. Eighty Pioneers and their families and friends attended the program in addition to social work students from the Schools of Social Work at Catholic, Howard, Norfolk State and Morgan State Universities.

October 23, NASW Conference Center and Pioneers’ Room

Betsy Vourlekis, Co-Chair, Pioneer Steering Committee, and James J. Kelly, President, NASW, opened the afternoon’s program followed by Robert Cohen who presented a historical recapitulation of the first 15 years of the NASW Social Work Pioneers® Program. The major presentation was given by Samira K. Beckwith, President and Chief Executive Officer, Hope Healthcare Services, Fort Myers, Florida, discussing “Economic Crises and Recovery: A Role for Social Workers.” Other featured speakers were Isadora Hare, Perinatal Health Specialist, Maternal and Child Health, PHS, Department of Health and Human Services, Rockville, Maryland; and Uma Ahluwalia, Director, Montgomery County Maryland, Department of Health and Human Services, Rockville, Maryland.

The afternoon concluded with a dessert buffet reception with Dorothy Harris, Joan O. Weiss, and Barbara Glaser serving as hostesses. This was a great opportunity for local Pioneers and those from California, New York, Maryland, Virginia, Florida and Wisconsin to renew acquaintances. Special thanks to Helen Rehr, Elaine Congress and Pat Brownell for traveling from New York to represent the New York Pioneers.

Clockwise from top right, NASW Social Work Pioneer® Steering Committee Co-Chair Betsy Vourlekis and NASW President Jim Kelly; Samira Beckwith and Bernice Harper; Joan O. Weiss and Barbara Glaser; Elaine Congress, Helen Rehr and Jesse Harris; NASW Foundation Staff Kerri Criswell Major and Bonita Davis; Isadora Hare and Stephanie Chambers, NASW; Ken and Margery Carpenter and Bob Arnold, Director, NASW Foundation; Ada Deer, Uma Ahluwalia and NASW Director of External Relations Rebecca Myers.
Saturday, October 24, the Woman’s National Democratic Club

The Saturday morning session opened with greetings by Betsy Vourlekis substituting for Mark Battle, who was unable to attend. Juan Ramos memorialized those Pioneers who died during the past year, and Patricia Martin-O’Meally introduced the new Pioneers elected during the past year. Jessie Dowling Smith reported on the LEGACY Project.

Harris Chaiklin introduced the speaker of the morning, Dr. Richard Barth, Dean of the School of Social Work at University of Maryland. He spoke on “Innovative Strategies for Practitioners at All Levels for the Next Decade: Advancing Scientific Charity.”

Prior to the luncheon, Pioneers visited the exhibit area which contained poster presentations of each of the Special Guests who were later honored. Ken Carpenter was responsible for assembling the exhibit. Group pictures were then taken of the Pioneers attending the Program, their families and guests, and those students in attendance.

The luncheon was special with the dining room full of purple table decorations and beautiful floral place cards painted by Beryl Carter Rice. Bernice Harper gave the welcoming comments paying tribute to Ruth Irelan Knee. A Happy Birthday Sing Along, written by Bernice Harper, was sung by all. Birthday cake served as dessert.

Jack Hansan introduced the celebration honoring those Pioneers in their 90’s, including Dr. Dorothy Height, Virginia Karl, Dr. Katherine Kendall, Dr. Helen Rehr, and Jessie Dowling Smith. Those present received a special box of candy. At the conclusion of the program, special guest, DC Council Member Tommy Wells, a professional social worker and former head of the DC Consortium for Child Welfare, spoke about his experiences as a member of the Council.

Clockwise from top left, Patricia Martin-O’Meally; Jack Hansan; Harris Chaiklin; Ada Deer and Jessie Smith; Dr. Richard Barth; Richard English in the Woman’s National Democratic Club dining room; Birthday Cake for the Pioneers 15th Anniversary; DC Council Member Tommy Wells and James Zabora, Dean, National Catholic School of Social Service, Catholic University of America; Ruth and Bob Cohen; and an exhibit poster featuring Ruth Irelan Knee.
With thanks to all who participated.

With many thanks to the committee for organizing a wonderful event, combining substantive presentations with opportunities to network and catch up with friends and colleagues. We know that many who wanted to join us were unable to attend, or could only participate in part of the weekend’s events. We encourage all to attend next year, and offer a special thanks to those who made this event possible by donating in support of the NASW Social Work Pioneer® Program.

Top left, Dorothy Harris and Pat Brownell; New Pioneer and NASW Metro DC Chapter President Hal Lipton; second row Bernice Harper and Norma Gray “Cindy” Jones; Joan O. Weiss, who received an alumni award at the Catholic University’s National Catholic School of Social Service on October 24; Elaine Congress and NASW Past President Elvira Craig de Silva; third row Beryl Carter Rice; Elizabeth Watkins; Josephine Yelder; and Bernice Harper, Jim Zabora, and Hal and Lenne Lipton.

With special thanks to Ken Carpenter, Pat McDougal of Howard University School of Social Work, and Bob Arnold for taking photographs of the event.
About the Pioneers

The NASW Social Work Pioneer® Program was created to honor social workers who have contributed to the evolution and enrichment of the profession. The Pioneer Program identifies and recognizes individuals whose unique dedication, commitment, and determination have improved social and human conditions.

Pioneers are role models for future generations of social workers. Their contributions are reflected in every aspect of the profession, as well as in the establishment of social policies and human services programs. They have accomplished this through practice, teaching, writing, research, program development, administration, advocacy, legislation, and election to public office.

Above, family, friends and guests of Pioneers at the 2009 Annual NASW Social Work Pioneers Weekend Program. Top, Paul Ephross, Jesse Harris and Bob Cohen with the NASW History Exhibit on Friday at NASW; guests enjoy the luncheon on Saturday at the Woman’s National Democratic Club.