

Papitto Opportunity Connection

July 2025

A Day To Celebrate Dominican Culture

Mark your calendar! A fun-filled parade, lively music, and dancing in the street are all part of the annual celebration at the Dominican Festival, August 10 in Providence. The day-long event is presented by [Quisqueya in Action \(QIA\)](#) a Providence-based nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the art and culture of the Dominican Republic and its language through education and community involvement. [Papitto Opportunity Connection \(POC\)](#) is proud to support and join in the celebration.

Proceeds from the Dominican Festival benefit QIA's educational programs which aim to foster cultural pride through education, connecting youth to the richness of their Dominican heritage, while also helping them prepare for college.

"Our goal is to empower our youth to become future leaders. We give them knowledge and instill the importance of supporting community and volunteerism, said QIA President Marilyn Cepeda. "They also help us organize the festival every year."



QUISQUEYA IN ACTION, INC. PRESENTS

DOMINICAN

PARADE & FESTIVAL

Sunday August 10th

Tributo a la Diversidad

Honorees

GRAND MARSHALS · GRAN MARISCALES

 <p>GRACE GONZALEZ</p> <p>ADVOCATE AND MARKETING OUTREACH DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBORHOOD HEALTH PLAN OF RHODE ISLAND</p>	 <p>AXEL THOMAS</p> <p>ARTIST ADVOCATE FOR ARTS & CULTURE DIRECTOR OF MISS CARNAVAL INTERNATIONAL</p>	 <p>DEBORAH GONZALEZ, ESQ.</p> <p>DIRECTOR OF THE IMMIGRATION LAW CLINIC CLINICAL PROFESSOR OF LAW ROGER WILLIAMS COLLEGE</p>	 <p>MARIA TORRES, M.Ed</p> <p>EDUCATOR 2025 PROVIDENCE SCHOOLS TEACHER OF THE YEAR</p>	 <p>HONORABLE SABINA MATOS</p> <p>RHODE ISLAND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR FIRST ELECTED DOMINICAN-AMERICAN IN USA</p>
--	---	---	---	--

FOR MORE INFO: 401-388-0710 · INFO@QIAUSA.ORG

Image courtesy of Quisqueya in Action

Organizing the Dominican Festival is not an easy task. Designed to celebrate and honor [Dominican](#) heritage, shared humanity, and cultures, the festival has grown into one of the largest festivals in the area.

“We use the parade and the festival to emphasize the issues that are affecting our community. This is why we are hosting a tribute to diversity. One of our Grand Marshals is Deborah Gonzalez, Director of the Immigration Law Clinic at Roger Williams University. She’s done a lot of work advocating for immigration reform,” said Cepeda. “Lt. Governor Sabina Matos is also one of our Grand Marshals. She’s the first Lt. Governor of Dominican descent to be elected in the country. She’s done great work.”

The festivities kick off at 10 a.m. with the parade that travels down Broad Street en route to Roger Williams Park. There, the festival begins at noon at the Temple to Music. Thousands are expected for this fun-filled afternoon that will feature internationally acclaimed Dominican singer, Alex Bueno, local dance groups, authentic Dominican food, family-friendly activities, and more.

For additional information, click [here](#).

Surfing For A Brighter Future: How E.C.O. Is Changing Lives

On a hot July afternoon, the south end of Narragansett Town Beach is filled with surfers, riding seemingly effortlessly over the mounting waves that fill the ocean. Among the many surfers is a group of young men who are clearly having a more difficult time than the others standing on their boards, waiting to catch a wave to ride to shore. A few fall over and rest on the boards. Others attempt to get back on the board and give it another try.

Despite the difficulty they are having in the water, none appear frustrated. The teens are all smiles, and the laughter is evidence they are having a great time. The difficulty they face in the water is nothing compared to the challenges they have faced growing up miles away from the ocean in Rhode Island’s urban core cities.

The teens – from Providence and Pawtucket – are part of [E.C.O.](#) (Experience, Confidence, Opportunity), an innovative program dedicated to transforming the lives of at-risk male youth, primarily of ages 13 to 18, adjudicated to [DCYF](#) custody and residing at [Ocean Tides](#).



At its core, E.C.O. is an engine for change, turning challenges into solutions by providing a full year of mentorship and structured recreational activities designed to foster behavioral change and empower youth for successful community re-entry.

For one Providence teenager, “Ken’s Trips” have given him a new perspective on life.

“I never thought I’d surf. It’s going great. A lot of confidence came with it. I was scared at first, but I had to try it, I just did it and now I’m in love with it,” said the 16-year-old. “My goal is to make my parents happy and make me a better person and make sure I never go back to the training school or any other place like that. I want to get my high school diploma; I want to become an entrepreneur. This program is helping a lot. It’s helping me gain a lot more skills. I never thought that I would be able to accomplish these types of skills. Until Ken (Rusko) came around.”



Images courtesy of Ken Rusko

E.C.O.'s transformative programming unfolds in three phases: recruitment, workforce development, and diversion. Over the past two years, E.C.O. has engaged 80-90 youth, introducing them to diverse activities like indoor rock climbing, disc golf, indoor BMX biking, swimming, snorkeling, surfing, indoor video golf, and martial arts.

“These kids, not all of them, don’t have a great family life. It’s hard for them to understand the world around them because no one is showing them,” said E.C.O. Founder Ken Rusko. “This program gives them an opportunity to be in the community, be part of programs other people in the community get to do. It helps them assimilate.”



This year, E.C.O.'s goal is to fully implement its workforce development program and to secure vital housing options for gang-involved youth to safely leave that life behind.

"If you want someone out of the gang, you must move them out of the neighborhood," Rusco said. "Right now, I am a one-man show pedaling as fast as I can, but I need administrative help, and funding for that as well as for our programming. It would be great to find a coalition of RI organizations and businesses interested in becoming part of the team to provide funding and resources."

To learn more or contribute, contact Ken at ken@eco-ri.com, visit eco-ri.com, find them on Instagram @ECO143, or call 401-441-1167.

Your support can help transform lives and build a brighter future for young people.

Newport Mental Health Provides Crucial Services Across Newport County

[Newport Mental Health](#) (NMH) is dedicated to improving the lives of Newport County residents through high-quality, evidence-based mental health and substance use services. NMH offers more than 30 programs and welcomes more than 100 new clients coming in every month- emphasizing the critical need for the nonprofit's services. Every program aims to promote resilience, improve quality of life, and restore hope.

With support from POC, NMH has been able to strengthen its ability to serve Newport County residents who are uninsured or underinsured, ensuring they have access to essential behavioral health care.



Image courtesy of Newport Mental Health

"Papitto Opportunity Connection's generosity goes beyond funding; it's a statement that everyone deserves access to care, no matter their financial situation," says Susan Piacenti, NMH Vice President of Philanthropy. "Because of the Papitto Opportunity Connection, we're able to say 'YES' more often to help with needs beyond clinical care, such as helping someone buy a bus pass so they can get to their appointments, or making sure a child in treatment doesn't go without dinner.

That kind of impact is powerful, and we're so thankful to have POC as a partner in creating real, lasting change for the most vulnerable in our community."

In 2024, NMH connected with Rhode Islanders more than 143,000 times. This included 5,849 community interactions through the Rhode Island Outreach (RIO) program, which brings care directly to people where they are—on the streets, in shelters, or in other community settings. NMH's Emergency Services team also responded to 5,242 crisis calls, delivering immediate clinical support.

The impact of NMH's outreach is measurable. Hospital admissions for psychiatric conditions have decreased by 21%, and Newport Hospital has seen a 46% reduction in Emergency Department visits by NMH clients.

If someone you know is experiencing mental health or substance use challenges and need an extended hand with assistance, click [here](#).

Empowerment Factory Hosts Art In the Park

The Empowerment Factory's Art in the Parks Program connects families and communities, engaging children in reading, art, and collaborative discussions about a variety of social and emotional concepts, including positivity, kindness, perseverance, and diversity. The program aims to build young artist's self-confidence, emotional intelligence, empathy, and mindfulness.



Images courtesy of The Empowerment Factory

This series of free, weekly community events is held throughout the summer in public parks in Pawtucket, Providence and Central Falls. Each one-hour program includes a read-aloud illustrated story time, a guided discussion of social-emotional learning lessons, and a related craft project for each young artist to take home.



"Art in the Park is a unique opportunity for families to come together and have fun while learning and exploring creativity in a safe space," said The Empowerment Factory Founder and Executive Director Gail Ahlers. "Each workshop is different, so we've been able to build a community of kindness among families who return each week."

Supported by POC, Art in the Park runs through August 27. Walk ups are welcome but registration is appreciated.

To register or for more information on The Empowerment Factory, click [here](#).

TeamFAME Celebrates Class Of 2025

Flanked by his TeamFAME classmates, Manuel Lopez stood on the [International Tennis Hall of Fame](#)'s historic Horseshoe Court and addressed the crowd. The grass courts have welcomed countless tennis legends, but for this rising sophomore at [Rogers High School](#), his experience on the court was much more than perfecting his forehand.

Through [TeamFAME](#) (Future Aces Modeling Excellence) he has found a pathway to success, on and off the court. His hard work has not gone unnoticed. Lopez has received numerous awards including FILA's R.E.A.C.H. (Realizing Extraordinary Accomplishments with Courage and Humility) Award and for his positive attitude and work ethic, he was honored as the Rogers' tennis team's Freshman of the Year.



Images courtesy of International Tennis Hall of Fame

“A lot of different ways this (TeamFAME) has made me a better person,” said Lopez. “I am really grateful for this program. Without this program I wouldn’t be playing tennis. I wouldn’t be getting straight As. I would be a whole different person without this program.”

TeamFAME builds community through tennis by offering free after-school and summer activities for underserved youth. Supported by POC, TeamFAME provides comprehensive academic support, including tutoring and homework help, alongside enriching activities focused on character development, leadership, and healthy living. Its goal is to foster holistic growth, helping students excel academically, personally, and socially, ultimately preparing them for future success and becoming positive contributors to their communities.



Lopez was one of several members of the [TeamFAME Class of 2025](#) graduates honored recently during the fifth annual Sunset Slam.

“They helped me play better tennis and they helped me get my grades up,” said Ariyah Nada. “They gave me all the different opportunities on court and taught me what to do off court.”

In addition to playing tennis, TeamFAMERs participated in community service efforts Working with 11th Hour Racing, TeamFAMERs completed enriching work to reduce their carbon footprint as a Green Team such as collecting harvest and donating to Newport’s Martin Luther King Jr. Food Pantry. The youth also strengthened their financial literacy with Citizens Bank and posted strong academic achievements– with several achieving honor roll status.

“We’ve watched these students grow from quiet observers into passionate voices and community leaders,” said Executive Director of TeamFAME, Marguerite Marano.

If you know of an under-resourced middle school student in Newport and surrounding communities who would benefit from this program and you would like to help, click [here](#).

Black Classics Under The Stars

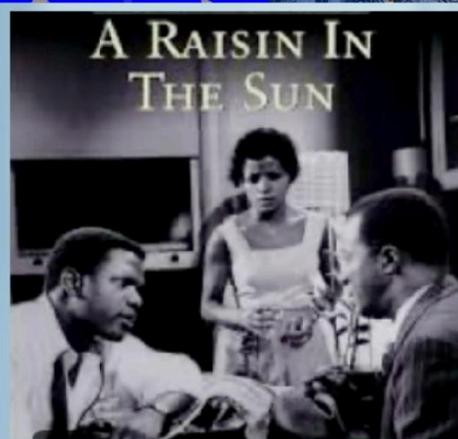
Bring your family, friends, a blanket or chair and enjoy "Black Classics Under the Stars" on August 21 at [195 District Park, Providence](#).

Presented by the [Rhode Island Black Film Festival](#), the evening begins at 6:15 p.m. with live music by Jazz Saxophonist Randy Ashe and his band, followed by the 1961 classic film, [“A Raisin in the Sun.”](#)

BLACK CLASSICS UNDER THE STARS

Thursday, August 21, 6pm

6:30 pm Live Jazz Featuring
Saxophonist Randy Ashe & Company
Movie Begins 7:15pm



Sponsored by



RHODE ISLAND
FOUNDATION

Image courtesy of Rhode Island Black Film Festival

Showtime is 7:36 p.m. and the movie and popcorn are free. Register [here](#).

[WEBSITE](#)

[MISSION](#)

[SIGN UP](#)

[CONTACT](#)

Papitto Opportunity Connection

100 Westminster Street Suite 105 | Providence, RI
02903 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Our Privacy Policy](#) |
[Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

