

Papitto Opportunity Connection

June 2024

Celebrate Juneteenth

Papitto Opportunity Connection is proud to support Juneteenth, commemorating June 19, 1865 the date that marked end of slavery in Texas. On this day, we collectively celebrate African American liberation, accomplishments and contributions, through education, effective communication, inner strength, and endurance.

This year is especially significant in Rhode Island as it marks the first year Juneteenth National Freedom Day is celebrated as an official state holiday.



"It is a time to celebrate our freedom and reflect on past and present struggles. During this holiday, we recognize the impact African American culture has played in America through music, dance, athletics, and pioneered inventions," said Helen Baskerville Dukes, organizer of the largest Juneteenth celebration in Rhode Island.

Juneteenth is celebrated throughout the month in Rhode Island and includes events and programs that educate individuals seeking to learn more about black history while also focusing on uplifting the African American community.

The highlight of the month is the sixth annual Juneteenth Festival, Saturday, June 22, 12-7 p.m. at 195 District Park in Downtown Providence. This free event draws thousands of people and includes music, cultural foods, clothing and this year will feature performances from R&B artist, Stokley. The former lead singer of Mint Condition, Stokley is a GRAMMY-nominated vocalist, songwriter, producer, and multi-instrumentalist whose hit song "SHE" rose to #1 in the Billboard charts in 2020.

For more information on the Juneteenth Festival, visit [here](#).

POC had the chance to hear from others about what this significant day in history means to them, as well:

"Juneteenth is a time for us to honor the resilience of the people of African heritage. For the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, it is also an opportunity to share the deep, rich African heritage history that we have in Rhode Island, one of strength, ingenuity, and achievement for all Rhode Islanders to be proud of and celebrate," said Theresa "Soni" Guzman Stokes, Executive Director of the RI Black Heritage Society.

"The Rosa Parks Center will be celebrating Juneteenth with JuneteenthRI and our RI family. Juneteenth is very important to us. It is a time of love, honor, and appreciation. Appreciation to the ones who paved the way so that we can continue to be free. So, we celebrate them, and we celebrate us," said Arthur Johnson, Director of The Rosa Parks Center in Providence.

Meet The 2024 Transform Rhode Island Scholarship (TRIS) Winners

For the third straight year, POC is listening and investing in young people in Rhode Island. Through the 2024 Transform Rhode Island Scholarship (TRIS), POC announced it is investing \$1.4 million in Rhode Island High School students' ideas to improve the lives of

those who need it most in the Ocean State. Since TRIS was established in 2022, POC has invested more than \$3.5 million in this program.

TRIS asks RI high school students to answer one question, if you had a million dollars to improve the lives of those who need it most in Rhode Island, how would you do it?

Below: Managing Trustee, John Tarantino and POC Founder, Barbara Papitto join the 11 TRIS winners



This year's winner is Classical High School's Sebastian Connolly. His winning idea is to create an inter-school tutoring program that would recruit students from Rhode Island high schools with the most resources/best educational outcomes to tutor their peers at underserved schools in the state.

The Harvard-bound senior drew on his own experience tutoring students from Providence's underserved communities at the Boys & Girls Club of Providence and saw firsthand the impact tutoring had on these students. For his transformative idea, Sebastian will receive a \$25,000 scholarship and will have a seat at the table as POC invests \$1 million to make his idea come to life.

"My senior year I started tutoring at Dr. Jorge Alvarez High School through the Boys and Girls Club," said Sebastian. "I saw that for the students there, because they didn't have the same tutoring infrastructure that exists at Classical, what I was doing made a lot more of a difference."

Image below: Sebastian Connolly.



"The Transform Rhode Island Scholarships will not only change the lives of these students, but also the communities in which they live and go to school," said POC Founder Barbara Papitto. "The level of thought by all of these students is amazing, and there were so many incredible ideas to create real change here in our state, we invested an additional \$300,000 in a 6-week pilot program to kickstart two other students' ideas."

To read about the rest of the TRIS finalists, click [here](#).

Celebrate Diversity During RI PRIDE

Papitto Opportunity Connection celebrates inclusivity and recognizes the amazing work of so many organizations who are focused on LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual, plus two-spirit or non-binary) advocacy and cultural change.

Youth Pride, Inc. (YPI) is the only nonprofit in the state of Rhode Island solely dedicated to meeting the needs of LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults through direct service, support, advocacy and education. A POC grantee, YPI offers youth between the ages of 5-25 free resources that include: individual counseling, case management, housing, and rental assistance. YPI also hosts four different weekly support groups, and three different wellness groups including yoga, Dungeons & Dragons, and a cooking class called Queer Gourmet! The center operates as a drop-in space, facilitating access to a basic needs pantry, LGBTQIA+ diversity professional development training to the community, and is home to Rhode Island's Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Network for schools.



WE COULD USE A HAND THIS PRIDE SEASON.

AT THE CENTER, OR OUT IN THE COMMUNITY

VOLUNTEER WITH YPI!

SIGN-UP TODAY!

[HTTPS://FORMS.GLE/YZU3VRY3KY6TVWCL8](https://forms.gle/YZU3VRY3KY6TVWCL8)

ROLLING ORIENTATIONS ONLINE AND IN-PERSON

GET INVOLVED TODAY!



Stop by YPI's three tents during Rhode Island Pride, Saturday June 15, in District Park Providence to learn more about their impact, resources, meet staff, purchase Pride swag, or take a selfie!

For more info, visit [here](#).

Building Bankable Business Celebrates Successful Second Year

Sometimes to succeed, a small helping hand is all that is needed. In 2022, POC teamed up with the Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (RIHCC) and Navigant Credit Union to begin a micro loan program designed to help Latino small business owners and entrepreneurs start new businesses and micro businesses, increase access to capital, create relationships and history with financial institutions, and generate an acceptable and credible credit score.



The program, Building Bankable Business, announced that as of last month, 11 small businesses have completed the first two years of the microloan program and will have \$27,560 in remaining loans forgiven. These 11 small businesses are part of the first cohort of loans issued under the program and collectively they have paid off \$19,440 over the last two years.

Under the terms of the program, the businesses, which are members of the RIHCC, are eligible to apply for loans between \$500 and \$5,000, which are held by Navigant. If the businesses successfully make monthly payments over two years, the loans are then

forgiven with funding provided by Papitto Opportunity Connection. Since the program's inception, more than 60 small businesses have received loans totaling \$247,500.

Reminder: June 17 Grant Deadline Is Approaching!

Just a quick reminder – the deadline to apply for POC's June grant cycle, including the POC Million Dollar Innovation Challenge is fast approaching!

Proposals must be uploaded to the POC online portal by 11:59 pm on June 17th.

Learn more and apply [here](#).

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