



Button Hole Celebrates 25th Anniversary Of Providing Access And Opportunity To All

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Images: (Top, L to R) Ed Mauro and Karen Adams; Button Hole golfers
(Bottom, L to R): Billy Andrade and Brad Faxon; Ed Mauro and Manny Tutu

Manny Tutu stood at the podium. With his extraordinarily imposing build, he looked like he would be more comfortable on a football field than addressing a large audience that included Rhode Island golf legends Brad Faxon and Bill Andrade, among other notables.

And although he did in fact play college football, it was golf that gave him confidence and poise — which was evident to those in attendance recently to celebrate [Button Hole](#)'s 25th anniversary celebration and to honor its founder, Ed Mauro.

"It's not my Button Hole. It's the Button Hole of a lot of people, particularly the kids who came here," said 93-year-old Mauro.

Fueled with a vision of making golf affordable and accessible to all, Mauro transformed a 26-acre gravel pit in the heart of Providence into what's now a nationally acclaimed golf facility. Supported by Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC), since opening its doors in 2001 more than 25,000 Rhode Island youth have learned to play golf, fulfilling Mauro's dream of providing opportunities by making golf affordable and accessible to all and offering mentorship, structure, and life lessons through the game.

Tutu, now an educator in Central Falls, was one of those youth. Tutu grew up in Providence's concrete inner city, where basketball and football were a way of life. Golf was never something he had considered until he was introduced to the game through a free program Button Hole offered to a local [Boys & Girls Club](#).

"Long before I understood golf as a sport, I understood it as something that seemed to belong to somebody else. Golf was not something I saw very often in the Providence neighborhoods where I grew up," Tutu said.

"I remember coming here and realizing that this was a place where I could learn something completely different. Button Hole made golf accessible," Tutu continued. "It gave kids from Providence the opportunity to step onto a course, learn the game, meet people, and imagine themselves belonging in a space that might otherwise have felt out of reach. And somewhere along the way, I fell in love with the game."

Ed Mauro accomplished his mission.

"Ed's vision was about creating a place where people could learn, grow, compete, and connect. 25 years later, we are standing here as proof that the vision worked," said Tutu. "As an educator, I spend my days working with young people, and one of the most important things I've learned is that sometimes opportunity is the difference between what a young person believes is possible and what they ultimately accomplish. Button Hole has been providing that opportunity for generations of Providence kids," said Tutu.

And that vision was on full display at the recent anniversary celebration, where the night belonged to Button Hole's founder, who was flanked by media and surrounded by an outpouring of well wishes and supporters.

"This is just a great night for Ed," said Andrade. "He's done so much. He's been a great role model for me. To see his passion to want to help others and do it though golf is a home run in my opinion."



Ten Years In, Equity Institute Educator Pathway Program Keeps Turning Barriers Into Careers

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Images above courtesy of Equity Institute

Equity Institute's Educator Pathway Program is changing the trajectory for the school support professionals who keep Rhode Island classrooms running. We're proud POC's investment is helping the program build even more momentum.

The program helps paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, and bilingual support staff clear certification hurdles and step into permanent, salaried lead teaching roles. So far, 100% of the program's supported participants are now actively advancing toward full licensure or teaching under emergency credentials in local public schools. This year, they're on track to welcome 91 participants.

For Carlon Howard, Co-founder and Chief Development Officer at Equity Institute, the work matters most against a stark backdrop: an estimated 8% of Rhode Island

educators identify as Black, Latino/a, Asian, Native, Pacific Islander, or multiracial, while more than 40% of public-school students do.

Howard points to a bilingual teaching assistant in Providence who had spent years stuck in a low-wage support role, held back by a single technical subtest on the state licensing exam.

"Watching her work with our pathway coach, breakthrough testing anxiety, master the specific concepts, and clear her final exam to become a salaried, certified lead teacher in her own classroom was an incredible reminder of why this work exists," Howard said.

The road hasn't been without obstacles. Howard's team found that navigating state certification benchmarks proved especially difficult for adult learners juggling full-time jobs and families. In response, Equity Institute shifted from static study materials to personalized diagnostic prep tools and automated milestone tracking. The pivot cut administrative work and freed staff to focus on direct, high-touch support.

Looking ahead, the focus is on thoughtful growth as it welcomes more local school support staff into the program.

"As we expand our reach across Rhode Island, we're continuously developing better ways to support our participants by refining our one-on-one coaching strategies, deepening individualized academic support, and expanding flexible, high-impact learning opportunities," Howard said. "Our priority is ensuring that every candidate has the tailored tools, personal guidance, and community backing they need to clear licensing hurdles and step into lead teaching roles."

[Watch this PBS report](#) to learn more about how Equity Institute works. The Equity Institute's Educator Pathway Program is a free resource for participants.

To support aspiring educators, [donate here](#).



Celebrating The Future Gen Cancer Scholars

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Bottom right image: POC founder Barbara Papitto and Future Gen Cancer Scholars

POC recently had the honor of participating in the graduation ceremony for the first and second-year cohorts of the [Future Gen Cancer Scholars](#) – a milestone that speaks to the power of investing in young people and the communities they'll go on to serve.

"POC is founded on a principle of opportunity, and this program is designed to do just that....give opportunity to young people who might not otherwise have access to such a unique fellowship," said POC founder Barbara Papitto. "It is truly inspiring to see how excited these young aspiring medical professionals are to be engaged with some of our state's leading physicians and researchers."

The FutureGen Cancer Scholar's fellowship gives Rhode Island high schoolers from the state's most underserved communities including Pawtucket, Central Falls and Providence, a truly rare experience: hands-on time shadowing top cancer physicians and accessing state-of-the-art labs across Brown University Health, Hasbro Children's Hospital, Rhode Island Hospital, and The Miriam Hospital.

Each summer, the program engages approximately 50 mentors – physicians, fellows, medical students, researchers, nurses, and specialists from departments spanning Hematology/Oncology, Radiology, Pediatrics, Surgery, Pharmacy, and beyond – all committed to nurturing the next wave of healthcare professionals.

Adam Sackor, a rising senior at [Juanita Sanchez High School](#) and a recent Future Gen Scholar graduate, embraced the opportunity to spend two summers working along Rhode Island's top doctors. "It's just a stepping stone for our futures and being a part of this program has influenced me to do many things. I'm excited for what the future's going to bring." said Sackor.

Now in its fourth year, the program reflects POC's \$10 million commitment over five years – a testament to POC's belief that meaningful opportunity starts with meaningful investment. The results speak for themselves: more than 70 students have completed the program to date, which boasts an impressive 95% completion rate. Today, 16 scholars are actively enrolled, and recruiting for the upcoming year will begin soon.

Hellen Laredo, a rising junior at [Davies Career & Technical School](#), recently completed her first year in the program. "The biggest lessons that I've learned in this program has not come from textbooks in the classrooms, but from the patients," said Laredo. "I've seen how patients react, how patients see me, how they see the future of healthcare and medicine and it's just so beautiful and so motivating to be here."

Click [here](#) to hear from POC Founder Barbara Papitto about Future Gen and to learn more about the program.



More Than 500 RI Teachers

Lined Up to "Shop" At The ELISHA project's Annual Teacher Appreciation Event

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Images above courtesy of the ELISHA project

More than 500 teachers from across Rhode Island turned out for the nonprofit [The ELISHA project](#) to “shop” for school supplies, classroom decor, and teacher essentials. The teachers did not need cash or a credit card to fill up on notebooks, binders, pens, pencils, crayons, markers, and more.

The Pawtucket-based ELISHA project, distributed free school supplies to nearly 500 educators statewide as part of its Second Annual Teacher Appreciation Event, letting teachers stock up on much need supplies as the school year begins.

Back-to-school costs are rising. According to The Century Foundation, a typical basket of school supplies now runs \$175 per student — nearly 8% more than in 2025. Notebooks alone jumped 23%, from \$4 to \$4.92, while notebook paper rose 20%. Overall families are expected to spend around \$4,000 per student on school supplies and lunches this year.

Educators, meanwhile, routinely spend their own money to ensure students have what they need. The ELISHA project — Rhode Island’s largest distributor of food and essential items to communities with the greatest need — wanted to give back to those educators who give so much of themselves.

“We know that teachers are really a lifeline to a lot of students. They put a lot of money, a lot of time into educating them, and having the things that they need for kids to be successful. This event is to give appreciation to our teachers that do so much for their kids,” said the ELISHA project’s Lisha Gomes.

The initial response was overwhelming. The event’s promotional flyer was shared more than 4,000 times on social media. Registration opened August 5 and was originally slated to run through August 14, but demand was so high registration closed within five hours of opening.

Kendra Pires, a 6th grade math and MLL (multilingual learner) teacher who’s spent 14 years at Pawtucket’s Goff Middle School, filled two large bags with supplies and contemplated how she would carry the overstuffed box next to her on the floor.

“The students a lot of times come in with nothing... it’s just nice to be able to give them something that a lot of them can’t afford to get, and that a lot of us

can't afford to get as well, said Pires.

Gomes said the goal was never just to fill backpacks. There are plenty of organizations already do that.

"It's great that kids can get a backpack on every corner," said Gomes. "We wanted to think outside the box — take care of the teachers, take care of the people that take care of our kids."



Revolve Dance Project

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Images above courtesy of Revolve Dance Project

When was the last time you saw a drum set at a ballet performance? An electric guitar? At [Revolve Dance Project](#) (RDP), music and movement intersect. The Rhode Island-based company brings together choreographers, composers, dancers, and musicians as equal collaborators to find the balance between movement and music.

RDP offers paid commissions, creative residencies, and fully produced performances to give artists the time, space, and resources to create. It's the only organization of its kind in Rhode Island, producing collaborative work you won't find anywhere else.

“RDP reunites music and dance as intrinsically connected art forms, bringing together exceptional artists from around the world to create works that could not exist without true interdisciplinary partnership,” said Founder and Artistic Director Kirsten Evans. “Every performance is a one-of-a-kind experience, showcasing original collaborations that reflect the voices, perspectives, and creativity of today’s artists.”

This was on display this summer as RDP celebrated its 5th anniversary season with “REVOLUTIONS”, a three-week creative residency followed by two performances at The Strand Theater. The program featured four world premiere collaborations pairing original choreography with newly commissioned musical compositions, including a reimagined excerpt from “The Sleeping Beauty.”

In addition to performances, RDP gives back to the Rhode Island community by hosting annual Summer Intensives for students of all ages, experience levels, and abilities.

Looking ahead to the upcoming season, RDP plans to keep pushing forward: more opportunities for artists, deeper community engagement, and a higher standard for interdisciplinary performance in Rhode Island.



News & Notes

June 2026 Grant Applications Update

The POC Trustees have been working throughout the summer to review more than 125 applications for the POC small grant program that were submitted in June 2026. It is anticipated that those who will receive grants will be notified by the end of September, with grant distributions being made in October 2026.

The next grant cycle will be open December 1-15, 2026.



Upcoming Celebrations And Events:

There are a multitude of POC grantees celebrating over the coming weeks — for some of them there is still time to get a ticket and show your support.

On September 3rd, the [Latino Policy Institute](#) will hold its annual Latinos Unidos event at Farm Fresh in Providence. This year LPI will celebrate former POC Advisory Board Member Paola Fernandez of Centreville Bank for her contributions to the founding of LPI and for her work to ensure the voices of all are heard and not left behind. Also, LPI will recognize Clinica Esperanza, which treats uninsured Rhode Islanders without asking about immigration status, insurance, or ability to pay.



[Progreso Latino](#) will celebrate 49 years of impact with its [Noche Tropical Gala](#) at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet in Cranston on September 25th. This celebration will honor nearly five decades of hope resilience, and transformation while raising funds to help support the organization's education, workforce development, health and wellness services, youth and older adult programs and community advocacy.



On September 28th, the [Economic Progress Institute of Rhode Island](#) will host its 15th annual Policy & Budget Conference at the Crowne Plaza in Warwick. This year's conference will focus on what it will really take to respond to a changing federal landscape.

To register, click [here](#).



This year's theme for [Higher Ground International's](#) 2026 Cultural Gala and Village Leader Awards is "Rooted in Resilience, Lifted in Joy." The celebration will be held on October 9th at Bally's Twin River.

For more information click [here](#).



Join Empowerment Factory's 10th Annual Healthy Living Community Event

Join the [The Empowerment Factory](#) for a fun-filled day at the Healthy Living Community Event Saturday, August 29, 11am-4pm at Slater Park in Pawtucket.

The 10th annual event is held in conjunction with the Pawtucket Arts Fest. Enjoy a free day of family fun with arts and crafts activities, face painting, bouncy houses, unicorns, games, raffles, snacks, and more. Attendees will also have the opportunity to connect with local organizations and community resources promoting health, wellness, creativity, and kindness.



Resources For POC Grantees

POC recognizes that some organizations have more resources and capabilities than others, especially when it comes to financial planning, analysis, budgeting and organizational structure. Understanding how to demonstrate smart fiscal management, and operations, when applying for grants from POC or others, can be critical to a successful application.

To help, POC has engaged consultants to work directly with our funded organizations in the areas of financial management and organizational processes.

To learn more, contact Linda Derderian at lderderian@pocfoundation.com

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