

# School Community Networking Event

*By Michael George*

What's infinity interesting about putting together a group of people, who basically don't know each other, is that under the right, and relaxed circumstances, you can't help but learn something about that group. The ParentJobNet networking event held on April 6, 2011 at the TD Bank on 68th and Broadway, brought a group of relative strangers together, and, under the coordination of program director Connie Gemson, they didn't leave that way. Gemson, conducted the crowd like she was two blocks away at a podium putting the New York Philharmonic through its paces in Lincoln Center. Gemson, and PJN board chair Helen Rosenthal, who initiated the zone concept which selects schools from the zone and helps them to promote select events, ran the event. Also pivotal in the success of the event were the several parent coordinators that promoted, and attended the event. The event brought together parents and associates from The Computer School, P.S. 87, P.S. 9 and P.S. 452 into a symphony of discourse, and information sharing and everyone had a solo.

"People must start to collaborate," said Gemson before the event. "This is a chance to network, find new options and help each other. It's good helping parents, our target population. We can find ways to help each other in job searches. We have to collaborate and connect and find ways to not see each other as competitors but as collaborators."

Gemson said she was expecting a good turnout and she was right. Over 40 people turned out, and the backgrounds and experience ran the spectrum from shoemakers, to super moms, to architects and pre-paid legal reps. Entrepreneurs, job seekers and the curious were present. In addition there was a real melting pot sort of feeling with several attendees being fairly new arrivals to the United States. The common denominator however was that people, especially after each person shared a bit of background information, were ready to make new connections towards whatever brought them to the event.

"With the current down turn in the economy, I'm not too rigid," said Jay Titus, from Brooklyn via Nigeria. Titus has experience as an architect and journalist, but is looking for work. "There are so many areas where I could fit in, but I would be a receptionist right now. But if I find anything related to architecture, I'd be happy to accept."

Kathleen Hadel, an admitted super mom from Manhattan, was looking to re-enter the job market. She attended looking for inspiration to fuel her return to the workforce.

"I think I have a lot more to bring [to a job] than a young person. I'd be happy to be an administrative assistant. Something in a creative industry like Google or an ad agency. Someplace where people value smartness," said Hadel.

For some attendees this was their first PJN networking events, for others this is a return trip and some come for totally different reasons.

Hilda Jenkins, a former parent coordinator from the Bronx, is seeking a position in vocational counseling or case management. She enjoyed the event; however, she was candid about what she got out of it.

"I like to network and meet people, but I look for things that make you say ummm?!?" said Jenkins. "This wasn't for me, but it's still good, you can pass on information. I don't mind sharing information and networking is all about who you know. This was good because you get to go one on one with people and just talk."

Some people walk away with something more than just good conversation. Manhattan's Esperanza Cruz won a \$50 TD Bank gift card raffle and had a good time as well.

"I love the event," said Cruz, who has attended other PJN events. "There were so many people from different countries. It was impressive and amazing group."

PJN founder, Pat Craddick, created these networking events to bring parents seeking work and those seeking to help in one place to network and exchange ideas. It's been working and continues with the partnership she has built with a variety of banks and Starbucks over the years. Starbucks and TD Bank have been the official partners of these events.

With Starbucks supplying the refreshments and the event well attended, by the end of the two hour session, Gemson's orchestrations had reached the desired crescendo. A cacophony of backgrounds, fueled by interesting discourse, completed the symphony. Gemson knew how it would turn out all along.

"It's not six degrees of separation, it's six degrees of connection," said Gemson.

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