

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**2**  
**Message from the Board Chair**

**3**  
**Message from the Executive Director**

**4**  
**Mission & History**

**6**  
**Capital Campaign Begins for the WE ACT  
Environmental Justice Center of New York**

**8**  
**WE ACT's Community Organizing Philosophy**

**10-23**  
**Programs**

- 10/Environmental Health & Community-Based Research**
- 14/Sustainable Development**
- 16/Environmental Justice Advocacy & Government Accountability**
- 19/Movement Building**
- 22/Youth Leadership & Development**

**24**  
**Awards & Recognition**

**25**  
**Publications**

**26**  
**Funding Stream**

**28**  
**Financial Statements**

**32**  
**Staff Directory**

**33**  
**Board of Directors**

**34**  
**WE ACT Timeline**

## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

It is not often enough that one is privileged to be part of a movement that seeks to both save and improve the lives of thousands of individuals through a concerted effort involving ordinary citizens, government bodies and a few committed community leaders. As Chairman of the Board of Directors of WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (WE ACT) for the past five years, I have seen first hand what dedication to a worthy cause can do, how it can uplift community residents into assuming roles of leadership which ultimately result in major change.

Since its inception in 1988, WE ACT has worked tirelessly in the interests of environmental justice in communities of color. The issues prevalent in this field are well known: the disproportionate siting of polluting plants in predominantly African American and Latino communities and the asthma epidemic among children in Northern Manhattan where WE ACT is based. WE ACT was born out of a need to address these issues, and exists today only through the dedication of its Board and staff, the recognition by community residents that the work we do is both just and necessary, and the support of individual, foundation and government funders who clearly see the changes that are realized through the work we do.



The past year has seen a significant growth in our resources, a marked expansion in our services, and a realization on our part that beyond our advocacy and organizing roles, there is also the need for comprehensive follow-up to hold government accountable for the promises it makes to improve the environmental health of African American and Latino communities in New York City. Recent grants have enabled us to build the capacity of the organization to address numerous environmental issues and to work with youth in the science fields to help them enter careers in the environmental arena. And we don't plan to stop there.

Over the next three years, WE ACT will be conducting a capital campaign to raise funds for the creation of the New York City Environmental Justice Resource Center. In addition to being WE ACT's new home, the Center will serve as a major resource for supporting the advocacy, organizing, research and education work of environmental justice activists locally, regionally and globally. Equally important, the Center will demonstrate green building principles and educate homeowners, contractors and developers on the benefits of green building design while demystifying the technology for all.

We remain optimistic that policy makers will make environmental justice an integral part of their decision-making process in working with communities of color. We will continue to provide them with alternative policies that are economically feasible and responsible, while simultaneously improving the quality of the lives of those who reside in communities of color.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dennis Derryck".

**Dennis Derryck, Ph.D.**  
**Chair**

## **MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**W**E ACT is representative of the vision, vigor and strength passionately exhibited by hundreds of community residents of color in the United States and abroad who are working within the multi-racial Environmental Justice Movement. This environmental, economic and social justice uprising is a young and dynamic one that has redefined the word “environment” to embrace all the habitats where we live, work, play and learn.

We raise our voices to declare that all residents do not have access to clean water and clean air, equal environmental enforcement and protection, and equitable land use and zoning. Many are sick and dying from disproportionate exposure to pollution, toxins and policies that have scarred the health and quality of life of residents in low-income communities and in communities of color, especially children and the elderly.

To address the increased risk of environmental pollution and poor outcomes within our communities, over the past 16 years WE ACT has worked with government bodies like the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to help define the environmental health research agenda nationally and locally. Additionally, through our development of community-academic partnerships with Columbia University, we are able to assess community-identified concerns and address these real and potential health impacts through community-based participatory research. Our partnerships enrich the sciences and research ethics, develop strategies, interventions and broad coalitions, help translate research into policy and practice, and communicate the findings in culturally appropriate ways.

Building power and democracy is at the heart of building robust communities that speak for themselves. It is at the heart of our own sustainability - how we will evolve as a planet, a nation, and as individuals.



**Peggy M. Shepard**  
Executive Director





*The North River Sewage Treatment Plant.*

## MISSION & HISTORY

***WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE. (WE ACT) is a non-profit, community-based, environmental justice organization dedicated to building community power to fight environmental racism and improve environmental health, protection and policy in communities of color.***

**W**E ACT accomplishes its mission through community organizing, education and training, advocacy and research, and public policy development. As a result of our ongoing work to educate and mobilize the more than 600,000 residents of Northern Manhattan on environmental issues affecting their quality of life, WE ACT has become a leader in the nationwide movement for environmental justice, influencing the creation of federal, state and local policies affecting the environment.

WE ACT was founded as a volunteer organization in March 1988 by Vernice Miller-Travis, Peggy Shepard and Chuck Sutton to address ongoing West Harlem community struggles around the poor management of the North River Sewage Treatment Plant and the construction of a sixth bus depot in Northern Manhattan, across from an intermediate school and a large housing development. The North River plant problem proved to be a rallying point with residents, who complained about the foul odors emanating from it, and about suffering from respiratory problems since it began operating in April 1986. Using strong community mobilization tactics and a key civil disobedience strategy, the "Sewage Seven" - then West Harlem District Leaders Peggy Shepard and Chuck Sutton, State Senator David Paterson, former Councilmember Hilton Clark and three others - were arrested for holding up traf-

fic at 7 a.m. on the West Side Highway in front of the North River Sewage Treatment Plant on Martin Luther King Day, January 15, 1988. Gas masked, placard carrying community residents held up traffic across from the plant on Riverside Drive to dramatize the unbearable situation.

Three months later, WE ACT formed three key objectives: to force the City of New York to fix the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, to participate in determining future siting and planning decisions in West Harlem, and to affect the public policy agenda by positioning environmental justice as a major political issue. The organization has had great success in meeting these objectives over the past sixteen years. The campaign around the North River Sewage Treatment Plant picked up momentum when a key elected official - David Dinkins - began to respond to community concerns about the plant's operation. WE ACT encouraged then Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins to hire noted environmentalist Barry Commoner to research and submit a study of the operation of the North River Sewage Treatment Plant. The resulting document armed residents with facts and figures critical to fight this complex problem and gain greater media credibility.

WE ACT met with numerous City and State offi-

cial through the years in an effort to exact a plan of action for correcting the plant's operational flaws. However, it took a lawsuit to ensure the City's response. On December 30, 1993 WE ACT reached a settlement of its lawsuit against the New York City Department of Environmental Protection for operating the North River Sewage Treatment Plant as a public and private nuisance. The settlement, negotiated by WE ACT's pro bono legal counsel Mark Silberman and Alan Birnbaum of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind and Wharton, as well as Eric Goldstein of the Natural Resources Defense Council (a co-plaintiff), called for the creation of a \$1.1 million fund, which was subsequently established to address community concerns related to health, environment and service delivery. WE ACT hired its first three staff members with a grant from the settlement fund.

Today, WE ACT has 17 staff members and an annual budget of \$1.2 million. WE ACT carries out its work through five specific program areas that address current priorities: ***Environmental Health & Community-Based Research, Sustainable Development, Environmental Justice Advocacy & Government Accountability, Movement Building and Youth Leadership & Development.***



*Peggy Shepard and Chuck Sutton march in Martin Luther King, Jr. Day rally against North River Sewage Treatment Plant.*



WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE  
WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

# CAPITAL CAMPAIGN BEGINS FOR THE WE ACT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CENTER OF NEW YORK

## **A New Home...**

**I**n 2004 WE ACT initiated a capital campaign to support the construction and programming of its new home: The WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York. Scheduled to open its doors in January 2007, the Center will be a 4-storey, state-of-the-art “green” building located at 459 West 140th Street in the Hamilton Heights Historic District of West Harlem. The Center will serve to expand WE ACT’s capacity to fulfill its programmatic mission, as well as demonstrate environmentally sustainable design techniques in a residential-size building, techniques that can be replicated in other homes and workplaces. It will also provide space for convenings, organizing and training to advance the work of community residents and environmental justice advocates throughout the world, and will dedicate an entire floor to the environmental leadership development and education of youth.

To turn the concept of the Center into a reality, WE ACT has put together a stellar design team comprising the Harlem-based firm AQ Crusor Architects and the award-winning international engineering firm ARUP, with Tishman Construction Corporation providing project management.

## **A Unique Community Resource...**

The WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York will support the advocacy, organizing,

research and education work of local, national and global environmental justice activists using its 6,210 square feet of space, its community conference rooms, and its telecommunications, videoconferencing and computer equipment.

## **A Singular Destination...**

The WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York will house a distinctive environmental resource library, making it a destination point for environmental justice advocates throughout the nation and from all around the world. The library will provide hard-to-find books, journals, periodicals, environmental and environmental health publications. Multi-media materials such as video and audiotapes, documentary films, slide shows, and archival records will be available for use in schools as well as by researchers. Workshops and trainings that facilitate community organizing, policy development, strategic planning and sustainable development will be offered at the Center.

## **A Model of Environmentally Responsible Design...**

In keeping with WE ACT’s goal to promote environmental responsibility, the physical structure of the WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York will address energy efficiency, incorporate replicable environmental technologies, utilize environmentally responsible building materials and employ sustainable construction practices. Educational tours demonstrating the building’s



*Harlem brownstone (third from right) slated to become the WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York.*

green features to the public will encourage Center visitors interested in environmentally healthy homes and workplaces to utilize such sustainable design techniques in their

own construction and renovation projects. Brochures and seminars created to document the process of developing the building and its components will be made available to the public.

# WE ACT'S COMMUNITY ORGANIZING PHILOSOPHY

**F**ounded on the principle that the affected make the best advocates, WE ACT's "people-first" Community Organizing Philosophy places the community's fate firmly in the hands of its constituents. With six diesel-bus depots, two of the city's largest sewage treatment plants, several sanitation diesel vehicle garages, and two outdoor New York City Transit Authority train yards, Northern Manhattan plays host to a hefty share of less than wholesome sites. But by demanding community participation in the decision-making processes that affect residents' health and quality of life, WE ACT ensures that bad policies and noxious facilities are not foisted on our communities.

Taking such concerns directly to the community through a variety of its institutions - schools, churches, businesses, tenants' associations and a host of community-based groups - WE ACT draws residents from their homes to supply the know-how, input, and vision to transform their environment. Turning the typical model for dealing with underserved communities on its head, WE ACT equips residents with the vital training and education needed to articulate and advance a clear, unified vision.

Through coalition building, door-knocking, fundraising, and training, WE ACT amplifies an increasingly restive voice. The overarching goal is to craft and sustain a space that enables and empowers residents to demand environmental justice.

WE ACT is guided by the conviction that communities are not waiting to be advised, administered, and ultimately, delivered by outsiders. Not awaiting pronouncements and prescriptions from officialdom, WE ACT harnesses the extant assets of the community, forging bonds between families, activists, clergy, professionals and academics. In this milieu, problems are identified, ideas are born, and change becomes inevitable.

Not a purveyor of empty rhetoric and platitudes, WE ACT is the impetus for ACTION. But the community is, and will always be, its bearer.



*Participants in a WE ACT-sponsored planning workshop listen to the disadvantages of reopening the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station.*





*Peggy Shepard (front center) stands with community residents protesting the MTA's 100th Street Bus Depot.*



*WE ACT's community conference on "Breast Cancer, the Environment & Communities of Color" draws Northern Manhattan residents and public health professionals.*

# PROGRAMS

## Environmental Health & Community-Based Research

Science, technology and research are indispensable tools for creating a safe and sustainable environment. Acting as a bridge between community residents and the scientific community, WE ACT's Environmental Health & Community-Based Research Program builds the capacity of communities of color to identify and reduce the disproportionate risks posed to their health by environmental hazards. Driven by locally defined needs and priorities, the Environmental Health program addresses key community health concerns including asthma, childhood lead poisoning prevention and children's environmental health throughout Northern Manhattan. The program partners with the Columbia Mailman School of Public Health and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to bridge the gap between activism and academia through cutting-edge initiatives.

### Current Initiatives

- Delivering an **Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training** program modeled on the curriculum of the core Environmental Health Science course taught to graduate students at Columbia University, but structured to reach a community audience of varying literacy levels. The training builds community leadership and capacity to fight

for environmental health and justice by providing the scientific and regulatory foundation of environmental health issues affecting community residents. The training also provides basic organizing and advocacy skills in the context of environmental health and justice, and is being delivered in col-



*NIEHS Director Dr. Kenneth Olden speaks at WE ACT's national conference on Human Genetics, Environment and Communities of Color.*



*WE ACT Community Organizer R. Basilia Gomez speaks at a press conference following the adoption of New York City's new lead poisoning prevention legislation.*

laboration with the NIEHS Center for Environmental Health in Northern Manhattan based at the Columbia Mailman School of Public Health.

- Working to ensure that City policies related to environmental health are informed by the latest and most relevant research. For example, WE ACT collaborated with the Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health (CCCEH) on the study of the effects of pesticide exposure on a

cohort of mothers and newborns in Northern Manhattan. The findings of that research indicated that exposure to pesticides during pregnancy results in unfavorable birth outcomes (low birth weight and reduced head circumference) in children. WE ACT turned these findings into the foundation for an educational initiative conducted by our organization and other environmental advocates for key New York City Council members. That initiative led to the proposing of two new laws.



*Graduates of WE ACT's Environmental Health and Justice Leadership Training program.*

- Organizing a citywide **Housing and Health Advocacy Campaign** that will cultivate a cadre of motivated leaders and advocates trained in the science related to housing and health. These individuals and organizations will publicly advocate for lasting improvements in and enforcement of legislation and policy related to pollutants in the built environment. The campaign offers trainings to health-affected individuals from across the City, parents, public health professionals and staff from community-based organizations. It also complements and builds on the work that WE ACT is carrying out with CCCEH to assess the indoor effects of pollution on children's health, and translate the resulting research into policy and action in collaboration with the community.
- Collaborating with the Columbia Community Research Group to educate researchers and community members on the best practices for bolstering human subject protection. This is being accomplished through WE ACT's **Developing an Effective Community Ethical Review Model** initiative, which seeks to develop, implement and evaluate a replicable model for ensuring effective community review of gene-environment and non-therapeutic environmental health research.

- Measuring traffic-related particle exposure among New York City adolescents and its association with respiratory symptoms, working to reduce asthma rates among children in Harlem and educating Northern Manhattan residents on the links between environmental pollution and breast cancer.

### **Past Successes**

- Negotiated with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region II to conduct the first assessment of Northern Manhattan's air quality which gathered data that helped inform the national fine particulate standard for PM<sub>2.5</sub>, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2001.
- Initiated and helped implement a pilot study of a group of Harlem schoolchildren which found that 75% had visible traces of a substance indicating potential exposure to dangerous diesel fumes in their bodies. Another study found that the level of diesel pollution in the air was directly related to bus traffic, with the highest levels of air pollution found around the Manhattanville Bus Depot. This data was used to support residents' demands that the MTA invest in alternative fuels.



- Exerted leadership within the New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning (NYCCELP) to enable the organization to develop into an all-inclusive group that welcomes organizations of color and low-income parents to participate in its deliberations and campaigns. WE ACT worked to organize and train Latino and African-American parents to testify at hearings, meet with their council members, participate in negotiating sessions, and brief the media. This in turn led to the generation of a significant amount of Latino print and television coverage and ultimately, to the passing of Local Law 1 of 2004, a strong lead poisoning prevention bill.

- In 2002, convened the first national conference on the ethics of the ethics of human genetics research related to environmental health and its

implications for communities of color. The conference was attended by over four hundred community advocates and researchers, and submitted policy recommendations to appropriate agencies and policymakers.

- Initiated and served as the first community organization to co-edit a special issue of Environmental Health Perspectives, an NIEHS peer-reviewed scientific journal. The issue, published in April 2002, was entitled “Advancing Environmental Justice Through Community-Based Participatory Research” and featured twenty-five research articles reporting results from community-based participatory research and encouraging researchers to partner with communities to address disproportionate environmental exposures in underserved communities.



*WE ACT's Research Associate Deepti K.C. installs an air monitor in the home of a volunteer in Northern Manhattan who lives across from a diesel bus depot.*



# PROGRAMS



*Urban Planner Mitchell Silver facilitates a planning session on the Harlem Waterfront Park.*

## Sustainable Development

The goal of WE ACT's Sustainable Development Program is to develop and apply tools that empower the residents of Northern Manhattan to plan, design and achieve a healthy, sustainable and environmentally just community. WE ACT and the residents of Northern Manhattan are able to address irresponsible development proposals with community-based planning and development of sustainable, proactive initiatives.

### Current Initiatives

- A community vision for a Harlem Waterfront Park that will provide a recreational space while simul-

taneously increasing access to the Hudson River in Northern Manhattan has been adopted by the New York City Economic Development Corporation through development of a master plan. To support this sustainable development project, WE ACT is creating the **Harlem Waterfront Council** - an independent 501 (c)(3) collaborative of community organizations, educational institutions, businesses and other key stakeholders in Northern Manhattan that will work to develop and oversee the programming, promotion and maintenance of the Harlem Waterfront Park.

- **The Harlem Corridor** - the area between 116th Street and 135th Street, from the East River to the Hudson River - is part of a federal Empowerment Zone and has in recent years become a "cash cow" for commercial developers building in its densely populated neighborhoods. WE ACT, in collaboration

with Environmental Defense, is working to ensure that developments in the Harlem Corridor are planned in collaboration with community residents and stakeholders to address community and environmental needs impacted by the projects.

- WE ACT is creating the **WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York**. The Center, now in the planning and design phase, is a Harlem brownstone that WE ACT will renovate as a state-of-the-art green building. In addition to serving as WE ACT's new home, the Center will be a major new resource for supporting the advocacy, organizing, research, training and education of environmental and community-based activists locally, regionally, nationally and globally. (To read more about the Center please see pages 6-7.)

## Past Successes

- In partnership with Community Planning Board 9, WE ACT initiated, funded and facilitated a community planning process that organized 200 Harlem residents and stakeholders to develop a vision plan that resulted in the decision of the New York City Economic Development Corporation to base its master plan for waterfront redevelopment of the Harlem Piers (125th Street and the Hudson River) on the community-generated vision. WE ACT's collaborative problem-solving and coalition building between the community, government agencies and elected officials has resulted in commitments of over \$11 million thus far to project construction.



*Community residents brainstorm over plans for the Harlem Waterfront during a WE ACT-sponsored community meeting.*

# PROGRAMS

## Environmental Justice Advocacy & Government Accountability

For almost two decades WE ACT has been fighting polluters in the predominantly African-American and Latino neighborhoods of Northern Manhattan. Often when one hears the phrase "fighting the polluter" the image that comes to mind is one of a big bad corporate polluter. But in New York City, and in many of the older Northeastern urban centers like it, the polluter of record is often the government. Nothing better illustrates this point than WE ACT's earliest

struggles around the sewage treatment plants operated by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, the diesel bus depots, operated by the state-chartered Transit Authority, or the garbage marine transfer stations, operated by the New York City Department of Sanitation. WE ACT launched its Environmental Justice & Government Accountability campaign to give a voice to those who are most impacted by the government policies that have resulted in disproportionate environmental burdens but have been for too long shut out from the environmental decision-making process in New York City, New York State and nationally.

WE ACT's Environmental Justice Advocacy & Government Accountability program builds community power through organizing to impact policy and



*Father Robert Castle (formerly of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Harlem) speaks at a press conference announcing the launch of WE ACT's MTA Campaign.*



*WE ACT hosts a citywide transportation summit co-sponsored by the US Department of Transportation.*

systems change. Monitoring key legislation on the State, local and national levels, WE ACT alerts the community to developments that impact their health and quality of life. Interfacing with City Councilmembers, State legislators and Federal officials, WE ACT facilitates access from the streets and barrios to hallowed halls and state houses and empowers residents to speak for themselves. WE ACT's work on government accountability has led to demonstrable changes in government practice, leveraged real resources to ensure the protection of the environment and human health in communities-of-color, and has developed replicable models for change that has been implemented by other similarly situated communities.

### **Current Initiatives**

- Conducting a **“Lion’s Share, Fair Share Campaign”** around New York City’s proposed Solid Waste Management Plan. Up until very recently, the plan called for the rebuilding, three-fold expansion and reopening of the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station (MTS), which would have meant additional pollution and increased traffic from trucks bringing waste into the area. WE ACT organized with community residents to ensure that the disproportionate negative impacts of this proposal were not born by the Northern Manhattan community, and in October 2004 the Mayor announced that the 135th Street MTS would not be

reopened. WE ACT is currently working to make sure that the New York City Council supports the Mayor’s decision.

- Bringing together community businesses, organizations, residents and elected officials to form an **Uptown Diesel Leadership Council** that will monitor and advise the MTA’s operations to help safeguard Northern Manhattan communities from the negative health effects of diesel pollution.
- Creating the **Northern Manhattan Environmental Justice Coalition** (NMEJC) to organize a community-wide response to the Mayor’s proposed Solid Waste Management Plan that calls for the expansion of the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station in Northern Manhattan. The coalition has taken on the task of developing strategies and tactics to demonstrate the community’s disapproval of that plan, including implementing an English/Spanish postcard campaign to Mayor Bloomberg. To date, over 1000 postcards have been mailed.
- Working with the New York City Council and other city-based environmental justice groups to develop a **New York City Environmental Justice Policy** to address the disproportionate burden of pollution borne by communities of color, which has resulted in glaring health disparities.
- Creating **POWER** - an independent 501 (c)(3) membership organization that will become the



local organizing branch of our operations, and will spin off into a separate entity when it no longer needs to be incubated by WE ACT. The mission of POWER is to serve as a community-based, direct-action, direct organizing entity dedicated to holding government and corporations responsible for environmental degradation in communities of color.

### Past Successes

- Organized hundreds of Harlem residents in a sustained 5-year government accountability campaign utilizing direct action, civil disobedience and nego-



*A community resident protests the increasing asthma hospitalizations in Northern Manhattan.*

tiation to convince the City of New York to commit \$55 million to abate environmental pollution from a (then) newly constructed, “state-of-the-art” local sewage plant - the North River Sewage facility. (This campaign, as we mentioned earlier, was the catalyst for WE ACT’s creation.)

- Conducted an ongoing Clean Fuel/Clean Air MTA Accountability Campaign that created the political will for Governor Pataki and key state legislators to mandate that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) make hundreds of alternative fuel bus purchases and retrofit diesel depots to compressed natural gas. WE ACT’s ongoing campaign has been a catalyst for the MTA investing in diesel retrofits and hybrids. The MTA now boasts that it has the cleanest fleet in the nation. WE ACT is now in a facilitated mediation process with the MTA regarding the management and operation of MTA depots.

- Negotiated with Governor Pataki and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to create an Environmental Justice Advisory Committee which developed a broad set of recommendations to reform the permitting process, some of which were accepted by the state last year as its first Environmental Justice Policy. Some of the policy’s provisions mandate a special process for reviewing proposed projects in “environmental justice communities.” Pending recommendations under consideration include the development of community health profiles to be used in determining approval of permits, as well as amendments to the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

- Provided leadership and recommendations to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as chair of the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council from 2000 to 2002, submitting reports/recommendations to EPA to change government policies on Pollution Prevention, Fish Consumption, Community-Based Participatory Research, and Cumulative Risk and Impacts.

- Organized Northern Manhattan community residents to oppose the Mayor’s proposal to reopen the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station, resulting in an October 2004 announcement that the station would not be reopened.



# PROGRAMS



*WE ACT's Director of Programs Cecil Corbin-Mark (center) marches with environmental justice advocates in South Africa during the World Summit on Sustainable Development.*

## Movement Building

**T**oday, communities of color are experiencing some of the greatest threats to their environment and health. With the ongoing assaults of unregulated development, the cumulative impact of multiple toxic exposures, and widening health disparities, these communities are fighting just for survival in many cases. Those fighting - environ-

mental justice activists and organizations - can be found confronting environmental racism and degradation in cities and rural communities across our states, regions and country. Far too often they are waging these battles in isolation, are reinventing the wheel and are under-resourced, especially in comparison to their counterparts in the environmental movement. The combination of isolation, the lack of opportunities to share successful strategies, and the under-funding of environmental justice advocates was and is a recipe for disaster.

In response to this crisis, WE ACT launched its Movement Building Program with the vision of building lasting and effective networks to strengthen the capacity of the environmental, environmental health and environmental justice movements to more effectively engage communities and policymakers. Through organizing and training, we build the foundation for action, advocacy and change. The program addresses capacity issues within environmental and social justice organizations, provides technical assistance to emergent groups, facilitates the development of strategic alliances and spearheads the continued effort toward reaching critical mass.

### Current Initiatives

- WE ACT co-chairs the **Northeast Environmental Justice Network (NEJN)**, which works with community-based organizations throughout the Northeast to create a common vision and strategy to address critical environmental health and justice issues facing their organizations, communities and the environmental justice movement.
- Since 1996, WE ACT staff have served as the representatives of NEJN to the **Just Transition Alliance**. The Alliance exists to help unite rank-and-file workers and grassroots community residents as they create and promote a just transition from unsafe workplaces and environments to healthy communities with a sustainable economy. The current Alliance is comprised of representatives from six Environmental Justice Networks and representatives from labor in the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Simply stated, “just transition” means fair compensation to impacted workers and communities for economic, environmental and health losses due to changes in production. It has also evolved from the single notion of a national fund to compensate displaced workers in the petrochemical industry, to include compensatory approaches (retraining, relocation, income support, and so on) for all parties affected by unavoidable job losses, property condemnation, and health and environmental damages from economic activities. In New York City, WE ACT staff have invested considerable energy in developing a worker-community partnership with the Transport Workers Union as a means of building power to address community and work-

er health concerns resulting from the operation of diesel bus depots in low-income and communities of color.

- Since 1998, WE ACT has participated as a member of the 23-member initiative known as the **Environmental Justice Climate Change Initiative**. The mission of the Environmental Justice and Climate Change initiative is to educate and activate the peoples of North America to drive the creation and implementation of just climate policies. The primary focus of our work is to change policies and practices in the United States, but our perspective and the context for our work is international.

In summer 2003, EJCC Initiative launched the Climate Corps project, which trained young people to assist the communities most affected by climate change in developing greater awareness about the affects of climate change. Since the project’s inception WE ACT has hosted two Climate Corps Interns and both have advanced the capacity of WE ACT to train local residents and other environmental justice organizations about climate change and how it too can disproportionately impact communities-of-color and/or low income. In 2004, with the support of one of our Climate Corps interns we were able to launch a training program targeting seniors in Northern Manhattan, which reached more than 60 senior citizens at four different senior centers. In the years ahead we hope to work with those that we have trained to develop a community-driven campaign around energy efficiency, renewable energy, and/or conservation policies while seeking equitable measures to protect and assist the communities most affected by climate change.

### Past Successes

- Founding member of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance and in fact housed the initiative when it was first created in 1992. The Alliance has since grown into a citywide network that links grassroots organizations in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their struggle against environmental racism.
- Founding member and anchor group of NEJN. WE ACT organized other groups to help stabilize the network and coordinated it to influence congress-



*Former WE ACT Board Member Zenaida Mendez addresses audience at Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit.*

sional policy and findings on environmental justice and health through coordinated testimony and policy papers.

- Helped to develop and secure environmental justice language in United Nations documents regarding environmental justice and environmental health concerns. WE ACT has also served in environmental justice delegations to and preparatory meetings for the UN Conference on Racism as well as the World Summit For Sustainable Development.
- Helped develop the Principles of Environmental Justice as part of the drafting committee at the First National People of Color Environmental

Leadership Summit in 1991, and chaired the Program Committee at the Second Summit in 2002.

- Exchanged information on environmental justice concerns with Caribbean diplomats from Trinidad, Barbados, Jamaica and other CARACOM representatives via the auspices of the Speaker of the Parliament of Trinidad in 1996.
- Participated in an environmental justice tour of Nigeria where we educated non-governmental organizations about environmental campaigns under the auspices of Clark Atlanta University and the United States Information Service in 1998.

# PROGRAMS

## Youth Leadership & Development

The goal of WE ACT's Youth Leadership & Development Program is to prepare the next generation to understand and confront environmental racism by enhancing their leadership skills as well as their ability to understand and value their natural and built environments. Our youth initiatives primarily involve African American and Latino youth in Northern Manhattan, and provide numerous educational and practical learning experiences in the field of environmental justice.

### Current Initiative

- WE ACT's Young Women's Reproductive Rights Program - **DIFFERENTT** (Diverse Individuals Fighting for Environmental and Reproductive Rights Now 'Til Tomorrow) - is developing the leadership potential of young women of color by empowering them to become trained, outspoken advocates for the clean and healthy environment

necessary for good reproductive and overall health. The program has worked with high school-aged women in Northern Manhattan and the South Bronx by offering them training modules covering environmental health, leadership and environmental impacts on reproductive health, and by enabling them to engage in organizing projects around women's reproductive health in their communities.

### Past Initiative

- Between 1993 and 2002 WE ACT implemented the Earth Crew initiative, an environmental education/community service program that involved over 200 youth in community projects resulting in positive impacts on their neighborhoods in Northern Manhattan. The program also addressed issues of the youth's underemployment and educated them about their urban environment with the goal of helping these youth make informed and responsible decisions. Earth Crew taught such valuable skills as critical thinking, public speaking, environmental audits, pollution monitoring, community leadership and community gardening.



*Members of Earth Crew conduct surveys among Northern Manhattan community residents.*



WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE  
WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



*Clockwise: DIFFERENT participant gives a presentation at WE ACT symposium on environmental and reproductive rights. Earth Crew youth pose in front of the 125th Street Oasis they created at the Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. State Office Building. A member of the Earth Crew educates a community resident.*



## AWARDS & RECOGNITION

WE ACT's Executive Director Peggy Shepard has been honored with numerous awards and recognition for her leadership and WE ACT's work in the field of environmental justice. Among them are the following:

**New Yorker for New York Award** from Citizens Committee of New York - 1990

**Life of the City Award** from New York Woman Magazine - 1991

**Environmental Women of Action Award** from Tambrands, Inc. - 1993

**Earthling Award for Environmental Justice** from the City Club of New York - 1993

**People Who Make a Difference Award** from National Wildlife Magazine - 1993

**Susan B. Anthony Award** from National Organization of Women (NOW) NYC Chapter - 1997

**Earth Day Award for Excellence In Environmental Advocacy** from Earth Day NY - 1998



*Peggy Shepard receives award from Dean Allan Rosenfield of the Columbia Mailman School of Public Health.*

**Waterfront Visionary Award** from the NY League of Conservation Voters - 1998

In recognition of our grassroots activism that has resulted in stronger New York City communities, WE ACT was one of the organizations honored in 2000 with the **Union Square Award** by the Fund for the City of New York.



*The 10th Annual Heinz Awards. L to R: August Wilson, Peggy Shepard, Teresa Heinz Kerry, Robert Butler, Mrs. Robert Langer and Julius Richmond.*

In December 2003 Peggy Shepard received the 10th annual **Heinz Award in the Environment**. One of the largest individual achievement awards in the world, the Heinz Award in the Environment honors individuals who have confronted environmental concerns with a spirit of innovation, and who demonstrate a blend of action and creativity in approaching the protection of our environment.

In April 2004 Peggy Shepard was awarded the **Rachel Carson Award** from Audubon, and then in May 2004, she accepted the prestigious **Dean's Distinguished Service Award** from the Columbia Mailman School of Public Health. The award was given in recognition of Ms. Shepard's extraordinary leadership in promoting environmental health and justice and community-based research.

# PUBLICATIONS



**The Uptown Eye:** A bilingual (English and Spanish), quarterly newspaper for the Northern Manhattan community that informs residents of significant quality of life issues. The Uptown Eye focuses on environmental issues impacting Northern Manhattan, and is distributed free of charge to over 10,000 residents at key points within the community.



**Environmental Health Perspectives:** This NIEHS Environmental Health Perspectives supplemental issue on Environmental Justice and Community-Based Research was co-edited in April 2002 by WE ACT Executive Director Peggy Shepard and Environmental Health Director Swati Prakash. Articles include “Advancing Environmental Justice Through Community-Based Participatory Research,” “Evaluating Cumulative Risk Assessment for Environmental Justice” and “Overlooked and Underserved in Harlem.”



**Human Genetics, Environment, and Communities of Color: Ethical and Social Implications:** WE ACT's two-volume conference proceedings in English and Spanish for its 2002 conference of the same title, with substantial information on environmental justice, genetics, environmental health and genetics, web resources, a bibliography on the subject and recommendations from community-based environmental justice groups.



**Harlem on the River - Creating a True Community Vision:** A case study of WE ACT and Community Board 9's efforts to rally community residents to document their vision for the Harlem Waterfront, and the success of that initiative.



**Healthy Homes Handbook:** WE ACT's guide to a clean, energy-efficient environment, published in English and Spanish.



**Race, Poverty & the Environment - A Journal for Social and Environmental Justice:** Published twice annually by the Urban Habitat Program in California, this special issue - co-published and co-edited by WE ACT – focuses on the use of science and research to advance environmental justice.

For copies of WE ACT's publications please call (212) 961-1000 ext. 305.

# FUNDING STREAM

WE ACT is grateful to all of its past and current funders and individual donors for their support.

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# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

John W. Davis, CPA  
Certified Public Accountant

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Tel: 718-773-3266  
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312 Ralph Ave, 2 Fl  
Brooklyn, NY 11233

## Independent Auditor's Report

To the Board of Directors  
West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc.  
New York, NY

I have audited the accompanying statement of financial position of West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. as of December 31, 2003 and the related statements of activities and changes in net assets and cash flows for the year then ended. These financial statements are the responsibility of the organization's management. My responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on my audit.

I conducted my audit in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. Those standards require that I plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement. An audit includes examining, on a test basis, evidence supporting the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. An audit also includes assessing the accounting principles used and significant estimates made by management, as well as evaluating the overall financial statement presentation. I believe that my audit provides a reasonable basis for my opinion.

In my opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material aspects, the financial position of West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. as of December 31, 2003 and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year ended, in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

John Davis

Brooklyn, NY  
May 12, 2004

Member of  
American Institute of Certified Public Accountants  
New York State Society of Certified Public Accountants

# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

**WEST HARLEM ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION, INC.**  
**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION**  
**AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2003**  
 (With comparative totals for 2002)

	2003	2002
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 86,864	\$ 61,021
Grants receivable	434,647	294,415
Prepaid expenses		4,057
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>521,511</b>	<b>359,493</b>
Due from Administrator	272,815	272,390
Fixed assets - net	17,627	17,920
Security Deposits	6,838	22,838
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 818,791</b>	<b>\$ 672,641</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>		
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Accrued expenses payable	15,967	22,122
Due to Columbia University	22,685	21,812
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>38,652</b>	<b>43,934</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		
Unrestricted	560,139	578,707
Temporarily restricted	220,000	50,000
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>780,139</b>	<b>628,707</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 818,791</b>	<b>\$ 672,641</b>

# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

**WEST HARLEM ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION, INC.**  
**STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES AND CHANGES IN NET ASSETS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2003**  
 (With comparative totals for 2002)

	Unrestricted	2003 Temporarily Restricted	Totals	2002 Totals
<b>SUPPORT AND REVENUES</b>				
Special events income	\$78,454	\$ -	\$78,454	\$ -
Less direct expense	(61,471)		(61,471)	
Net Special Events	16,983		16,983	
Corporate and foundation grants	15,937	535,000	550,937	503,164
Government grants		482,685	482,685	497,269
Interest income	577		577	6,033
Other income	7,029		7,029	
<b>Total Support and Revenues</b>	<b>40,526</b>	<b>1,017,685</b>	<b>1,058,211</b>	<b>1,006,466</b>
<b>Net assets released from restriction</b>	<b>847,685</b>	<b>(847,685)</b>		
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT AND REVENUES</b>	<b>888,211</b>	<b>170,000</b>	<b>1,058,211</b>	<b>1,006,466</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>				
<b>Program Services</b>				
Public education	146,683		146,683	145,315
Environmental health and community research	404,392		404,392	536,029
Community outreach	110,185		110,185	111,025
Youth Program	110,566		110,566	95,517
<b>Total Program Services</b>	<b>771,825</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>771,825</b>	<b>887,886</b>
<b>Management and General</b>	<b>134,954</b>		<b>134,954</b>	<b>148,940</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>906,779</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>906,779</b>	<b>1,036,826</b>
<b>CHANGES IN NET ASSETS</b>	<b>(18,568)</b>	<b>170,000</b>	<b>151,432</b>	<b>(30,360)</b>
<b>Net assets at beginning of year</b>	<b>587,707</b>	<b>50,000</b>	<b>628,707</b>	<b>659,067</b>
<b>Net assets at end of year</b>	<b>\$560,139</b>	<b>\$220,000</b>	<b>\$780,139</b>	<b>\$628,707</b>

# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

**WEST HARLEM ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION, INC.**  
**STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2003**  
 (With comparative totals for 2002)

	2003	2002
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>		
Changes in net assets	\$ 151,432	\$ (30,360)
Adjustments to reconcile changes in net assets to net cash provided by operating activities:		
Depreciation	4,690	4,250
<b>Decrease (increase) in operating assets:</b>		
Grants receivable	(14,232)	(151,707)
Due from administrator	(425.00)	(3,905)
Other receivable	2,685	
Prepaid expenses	4,057	42,943
Security deposit	16,000	(16,000)
<b>Increase (decrease) in operating liabilities:</b>		
Accrued expenses payable	(6,155)	(424.00)
Accrued payroll payable	(19,794)	
Due to Columbia University	873	(33,254)
<b>Net Cash Provided By/(Used In) Operating Activities</b>	<b>30,240</b>	<b>(205,570)</b>
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES</b>		
Acquisition of fixed assets	(4,397)	(3,030)
<b>NET INCREASE/(DECREASE) IN CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS</b>	<b>25,843</b>	<b>(208,600)</b>
<b>CASH AND CASH AT BEGINNING OF YEAR</b>	<b>61,021</b>	<b>269,621</b>
<b>CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS AT END OF YEAR</b>	<b>\$ 86,864</b>	<b>\$ 61,021</b>
<b>SUPPLEMENTAL DISCLOSURE OF CASH FLOW INFORMATION</b>		
Interest expense paid	\$ -	\$ -



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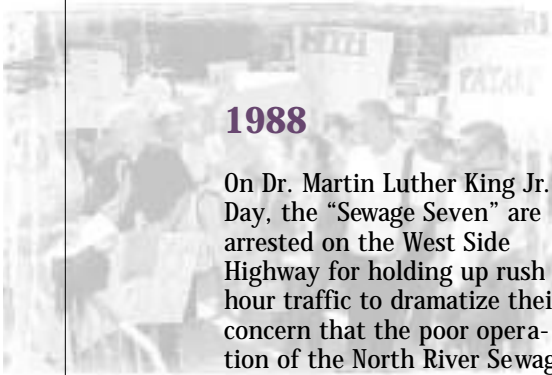
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WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

## WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

# TIMELINE



### 1988

On Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the “Sewage Seven” are arrested on the West Side Highway for holding up rush hour traffic to dramatize their concern that the poor operation of the North River Sewage Treatment Plant was responsible for an increase in incidents of respiratory illnesses being experienced by local residents.

WE ACT is incorporated in New York State as West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc.

WE ACT sues the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) over its plans to construct a 6th diesel bus depot in Northern Manhattan.

### 1989

WE ACT convinces Manhattan Borough President David N. Dinkins to hire environmentalist Barry Commoner to research and submit a study of the operation of the North River Sewage Treatment plant. The resulting report arms residents with facts and figures that give credibility to their complaints.

### 1991

WE ACT sends three delegates to the 1st National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C. One of WE ACT’s founders serves on the steering committee and assists in drafting the “Principles of Environmental Justice.”

### 1992

WE ACT files a lawsuit in a bid to force the city and state to correct operational flaws at the North River Sewage Treatment Plant.

WE ACT and four colleagues start the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYCEJA) located out of the WE ACT office.

WE ACT hosts the initial meeting of the Northeast Environmental Justice Network (NEJN).

Mayor David N. Dinkins pledges \$55 million to fix the North River Sewage Treatment Plant.

### 1993

WE ACT, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the Hamilton Heights Day Care Center and seven community residents reach a settlement of their lawsuit against the city. It established a \$1.1 million fund related to environmental health and quality of life. It also gave WE ACT the leverage to ensure that the city completed its 5-year \$55 million fix-up of the plant.

### 1994

WE ACT grows from a volunteer organization with offices in West Harlem and opens its Central Harlem headquarters, hires staff and expand its catchment area to Northern Manhattan.

WE ACT establishes “Earth Crew,” a youth internship project designed to empower community youth with leadership skills and environmental awareness training.

### 1996

WE ACT publishes the premier issue of the Uptown Eye, a 24 page bilingual, bimonthly community-based newspaper.

WE ACT convinces the EPA to conduct the first assessment of Northern Manhattan’s air quality. The assessment reveals that harmful particulates are more than 200% higher than the air quality standards for PM 2.5 (the smallest particles in diesel soot).

WE ACT helps develop the Minority Environmental Worker Training Program (MEWTP) to provide job training & employment opportunities for young adults.

### 1997

WE ACT conducts its Clean Fuel bus campaign to inform residents about the dangers of diesel fumes and to encourage the MTA and the Governor to use cleaner fuels.

WE ACT participates in a pilot study to examine the effect of diesel fumes on the health of 7th graders attending local schools.

WE ACT’s Earth Crew produces its own program for public access television.

WE ACT debuts its premiere public access television program.

## 1998

WE ACT creates a training manual for its Environmental Health & Justice Leadership Training program and graduates the first 24 community participants.

WE ACT sponsors a citywide lead poisoning prevention conference in New York City.

WE ACT participates in a press conference with the Governor to announce that the Manhattanville diesel bus depot will be converted to compressed natural gas.

## 1999

WE ACT's Executive Director is elected co-chair of the Northeast Environmental Justice Network (NEJN).

WE ACT is named the lead community based organization for the Community-University Consortium for Regional Environmental Justice (CUCREJ).

WE ACT and Community Board 9 organize Northern Manhattan community residents to develop a vision for the Harlem waterfront.

## 2000

WE ACT serves as the community partner for the Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health.

WE ACT conducts an asthma intervention program in Washington Heights.

WE ACT wins the Union Square

Award.

WE ACT files a Title VI complaint against the MTA.

WE ACT's organizing efforts lead to the New York City Economic Development Corporation developing a master plan for Harlem waterfront based on the community's vision.

## 2001

WE ACT's Executive Director is elected chair of EPA's National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC).

WE ACT hosts Alternative Fuel Vehicles Workshop for Northern Manhattan to encourage truck and bus fleet owners to switch to clean fuels.

WE ACT sponsors national conference on genetics research and environmental justice.

## 2002

WE ACT staff participate in at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Durban, South Africa.

WE ACT organizes historic conference on Human Genetics, Environment, and Communities of Color: Ethical and Social Implications.

WE ACT negotiates with the US EPA Region II to conduct the first assessment of Northern Manhattan's air quality. Data gathered was used to promulgate the national fine particulate standard for PM2.5, which was subsequently upheld by the Supreme Court.

WE ACT serves as the first com-

munity-based co-editor of a special issue of Environmental Health Perspectives, a peer-reviewed scientific journal of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

## 2003

WE ACT Executive Director Peggy Shepard wins 10th Annual Heinz Award for the Environment.

WE ACT celebrates 15 years of existence and organizes its first annual fundraising event - "A 15th Anniversary Uprising!"

## 2004

WE ACT purchases a Harlem brownstone slated to become the New York City WE ACT Environmental Justice Center of New York and hires a Harlem-based architect to work on its renovation as a LEED Certified green building.

WE ACT conducts an educational campaign around pesticides, targeting the New York City Council and resulting in the proposal of pesticide legislation currently pending approval.

WE ACT's efforts result in staff press conference announcing the passage of New York City's Local Law 1 of 2004, a lead poisoning prevention bill advocated by WE ACT.

WE ACT organizes community residents to oppose the re-opening and expansion of the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station. Mayor Bloomberg announces that the station will not be reopened.



# NOTES