TXU Energy Plants Hope in Pasadena

On April 12th, the BakerRipley Pasadena Campus hosted representatives from TXU Energy and the Pasadena Advisory Committee for a tree-planting ceremony at our Pasadena Campus! Through TXU’s Energy Trees for Growth program, we received 18 donated trees which were planted on the campus along Fairmont Pkwy. The donation included a 90-gallon oak tree which was placed at the new entrance of our expanding campus. The donated trees helped beautify the campus as well as generate environmental savings and health benefits for our Pasadena neighbors. We are grateful for our continued partnership with TXU and especially for Program Impact Committee Member Kim Campbell, who was in attendance and helped make it all possible!

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month

Recently, BakerRipley partnered with the United Way and Air Products company for Service Day and volunteers helped distribute approximately 8,877 pounds of food to our neighbors at our BakerRipley Greater Hobby Harbach Campus. The Program Resource Development Team has collaborated with other current and prospective volunteers to maximize our engagement efforts which in March resulted in 304 volunteers dedicating 5,095 hours for a value add of $145,431. The total volunteer engagement for the first quarter of 2022 included 682 total volunteers giving 38,682 hours for a value add of $1,103,993.

From all across Houston, our volunteers give their time and energy to keep Houston a place of opportunity.
Youth Program Receives $10k Grant for Youth Digital Equity

The BakerRipley Gulfton Campus Afterschool Program received $10,000 from the United Way of Greater Houston through the Out2Learn Barrier Buster grant program which aims to increase digital equity for youth. The funding will make it possible to purchase thirty laptops for our youth program where we aim to serve 60 students in afterschool programming and 80 students in the summer camp program.

Urban Garden at Greater Hobby Harbach Campus Gets Spring Revitalization

On April 1st, Cristo Rey Jesuit and the Nature Heritage Society provided 31 volunteers - 26 students, 2 teachers, and 3 parents - who came out to pull out weeds, plant fruit and vegetable seeds, beautify the butterfly garden, and rebuild plant beds. Bruce Young, a BakerRipley volunteer, and the Nature Heritage Society secured a donation of $500 for supplies and material. Our Master Gardner, Janice Brown, who has been volunteering with BakerRipley since 2014, was on-site and provided guidance and coordinated the gardening and work assignments.

Greater Hobby Harbach Campus Citizenship Forum

On March 26th, our Immigration & Citizenship Program held its first Citizenship Forum of the year at our Greater Hobby Harbach Campus. The forum was made possible because of our partnership with the NALEO Educational Fund and the City of Houston. Neighbors lined up early seeking support and guidance in completing their Naturalization Applications and following the process with the Department of Homeland Security. Our Immigration and Citizenship legal team helped 85 neighbors during the forum.
ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

GED Student Shared Inspiring Words for Future Classes

Daniel Hamilton enrolled in our GED classes in April of last year and since then he has completed the GED Social Science test getting him one step closer to obtaining his GED certificate. Daniel says that he has learned a lot from the course work and class material but in addition “enrolling in this program has pushed me to learn about myself and tools I can use to maximize my productivity, and to know when to ask for help.” Daniel is a husband and a father of a child with a cognitive disability, and he admits there have been challenges to staying focused and finishing on time and he considers passing the test as a personal milestone. When asked about his motivation to keep going, he said, “my family - I admire my wife for how supportive she’s been to me, and all I want to do is pay her back”. Daniel has received valuable coaching from Maria Torres, a BakerRipley Student Support Services team member who helped him get financial aid and helped him to “set and prioritize goals and build productivity habits.”

When asked what advice he would give students, Daniel’s response is - “study and believe in yourself; if you’re doubting yourself, you’re already losing.”

BakerRipley Woman Entrepreneur for Women’s History Month

March is Women’s History Month and we would like to highlight Alejandra Sandoval, owner of CLIO VIP Beauty Salon, and an alum of the BakerRipley Entrepreneur Academy. Alejandra started the academy in 2015 and reached out to BakerRipley for support with the permitting process, the certification process, and for help in identifying an ideal location for her future beauty salon. In the middle of the pandemic Alejandra enrolled in our Technical Assistance Program, and opened a second business, the CLIO VIP Professional Beauty School, a beauty school which provides instruction in Spanish.

When asked what Women’s History Month means to her, Alejandra said, “I want to be an example for women who want to pursue their dreams but are nervous about starting. Through my salon and school, I can support my clients, educators, our students, and women who wake up every day fighting for a better future for their family and community.”
HEAD START

Week of the Young Child

Starting April 2nd, BakerRipley’s Head Start Division celebrated the Week of the Young Child, an annual national awareness celebration sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The Week of the Young Child focuses public attention on the needs of young children and their families. In addition, it recognizes the early childhood programs, services, and team members which provide critical and quality early care and education.

The BakerRipley Head Start team members hosted family connection opportunities, mindfulness activities, and daily themed educational resource events (Music Monday, Tasty Tuesday, etc.) during the week. Students, families, and team members had a great time celebrating our work and its impacts on our communities and our families’ commitment to staying engaged with our programs, all the while bringing attention to the importance of early care and education!

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Reopening of the Senior Health and Wellness Centers!

Our Senior Health and Wellness Centers had been closed for two long years due to the pandemic but on March 21st, after getting the green light from the City of Houston, we re-opened our 15 BakerRipley Senior Health and Wellness Centers! The Senior Health and Wellness team members were eager to welcome our seniors back and planned additional celebration activities.

Our team hosted themed parties (Western, Hawaiian, Mardi Gras, etc), a crawfish boil, and a memorial to those we lost during COVID. On the first day or reopening more than 600 seniors showed up opening week celebrations, confirming our recent surveys, where seniors said that they have missed the in-person services and activities, quality time with their friends and neighbors, and the sense of belonging they get from participating in our program.
**BAKERRIPLEY COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

**BakerRipley Community School Summer Plans!**

The BakerRipley Community School team members are excited and preparing for the big launch of a summer program. Funded by the Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports (TCLAS) grant, the summer program will provide additional opportunities for students to engage in remediation and intervention during the summer and will also include enrichment opportunities such as theatre, art, music, and physical education. The program will serve 120 students, grades PK-5, at the Gulfton and Ripley House campuses and will run for twenty-five days beginning the second week of June through July.

**REGIONAL INITIATIVES**

**Changes in program rules in our Utility Assistance Program**

In March, the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) approved two changes to our Utility Assistance program - the first change allows BakerRipley to process one (1) utility assistance payment to the utility provider for the total annual award amount for an eligible customer; the second rule change allows us to provide a grant amount for the full year (Jan-Dec) regardless of the month when the neighbor applies. Through March 2022, we have assisted 3,035 households in Brazoria, Galveston, and Harris Counties with $4.8M in payment assistance for electricity and gas bills. The average benefit amount is $1,581.

**Water Bills added to Utility Assistance Program**

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) approved funding for BakerRipley to administer the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) for Brazoria, Galveston, and Harris County. The funding is for $7.6M and will help neighbors with assistance in paying of their water bills when they are facing disconnection of water services. Our Utility Assistance team is in the process of executing vendor agreements with water utility providers and the program will start within the next 30 days. This is the first time a federal water assistance program has been offered in our region and we expect to help up to 5,000 neighbors through this new program.
Rapid Re-housing Program helps Samantha get the keys to a new life.

Samantha (Alias) is in her 40’s and was in an abusive relationship when she decided to leave her husband for a better life for her and her school-age daughter. She told us “I knew I had to be brave; I had to get myself and my daughter out of that abusive household,” as she went on to say that she walked out and hasn’t looked back since. As she was looking for housing during the pandemic she told us, “It was difficult finding a women and children’s shelter due to COVID restrictions. It took about a week before we got accepted into one. It was really a godsend because I was broke after paying for a hotel.”

Samantha was staying at the Bay Area Turning Point shelter, a crisis intervention center serving survivors of family violence and sexual assault and it was there where she met Trennie Henry, a BakerRipley Rapid Re-housing Program Caseworker. Trennie helped Samantha get approval for placement in a new apartment through our program and Samantha states, “In less than 30 days, after walking out of my abusive situation, my daughter and I had the keys to a new home (furnished apartment).” BakerRipley has served close to 150 neighbors in our Rapid Re-housing Program.

“I am really blessed to have found BakerRipley and Ms. Henry. She really believed in me when I wasn’t sure I believed in myself.”

Niagara Water Hiring Event at Workforce Solutions Baytown

Workforce Solutions Baytown hosted Niagara Water, a product of Niagara Bottling, for an in-person hiring event on March 2nd. Niagara Bottling is a family-owned and operated leading beverage manufacturer that has been in operation since 1963 and is expanding its footprint in Texas.

Niagara had 36 openings to fill at their Baytown plant and we had an overwhelming number of job-seekers attend the event. Already 18 of the 36 positions have been filled and the remaining hires will be completed by the end of April.
Gulf Coast Workforce Solutions Executive Director Retires

Mike Temple, Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Workforce Solutions Board, retired on April 8th. Mike has been unwavering in serving the people of the 13 county Gulf Coast Region, and he has had a remarkable 41-year career with the Houston Galveston Area Council. He took a bureaucratic, outdated, workforce model and transformed it into a customer-focused, employer-driven, accountable, and measurable public workforce system which became the envy of every workforce board in the country. Mike leaves behind more than a dozen agency contractors, hundreds of dedicated workforce professionals, board members, and a region committed to continuing the legacy of his life’s work.

Nick Natario and ABC13 honored as Workforce Solutions Partners

On Thursday, March 31st, Workforce Solutions recognized the partnership between ABC13 and Workforce Solutions. Throughout the pandemic, journalist Nick Natario hosted a weekly webcast called ABC13 Who’s Hiring Virtual Job Fair, which has connected job seekers with employment. Fort Bend County Judge KP George named March 31st, 2022, as Nick Natario day in Fort Bend County to recognize his efforts to help the people of the region seek and secure employment. The BakerRipley Workforce Professionals on the Virtual Job Fair Team supported these efforts and provided viewers with virtual one-on-one services, resume writing and interview preparation, customized job search assistance, connection to specific jobs, apprenticeships, education opportunities, and support services such as child care.

Summer Youth Employment Program Planning

BakerRipley and Workforce Solutions is gearing up to participate in the Hire Houston Youth Summer Program. We are spreading the word to our neighbors on how they can enroll and participate. Our community centers will provide employment to some of these youth and our Workforce Solutions offices are targeting to help 6,000 youth find jobs with employers across the region. Certain jobs with employers can be completely wage subsidized by Workforce Solutions.

For more information on hiring youth: https://hirehoustonyouth.org/employers/. Youth can apply at: https://hirehoustonyouth.org/youth/.