

Public show of support at Capitol for CT Pardon Team

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NORWICH — It was a proud moment for an organization that has struggled for resources and recognition since 2004. On Jan. 10, founders of the Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc. joined with the African-American Affairs Commission at the Capitol to jointly announce their new partnership.

The press conference was attended by several state legislators who have helped the tiny organization make a big impact on the lives of those trying to make a fresh start in life.

The Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc. provides free guidance to help people through the pardon process.

Eligibility for the program includes having completed one's sentence without stipulations, or having completed parole or probation – and the applicant must be violation-free for five years.

Founder and chairwoman Jacqueline Caron was inspired to create this program while struggling to obtain a pardon for an offense committed more than 20 years ago. After grappling with the confusing and expensive application process, she decided there had to be a better way. — Besides Jacqueline Caron – who also serves on the Norwich City Council – the Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc. includes Executive Director Dianne M. Daniels, legal advisor Linda J. Sullivan, and Caron's husband, Richard A. Caron, who serves as treasurer.

"We didn't expect to be where we are, at this moment," Caron said, and expressed gratitude for the help the program has received from many quarters.

The team recently received its taxexempt 5013C status, which will allow them to apply for grants and other support. "And it looks like we might have a homebase office in Norwich," Caron said.

Forums held statewide

The Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc. – in partnership with cities and towns – hosts forums aimed at familiarizing potential applicants with what they can expect during the pardon process.

The team has conducted forums throughout the state, including one in Waterbury that drew more than 500 people.

Another in New Haven, that was held in cooperation with Senate Majority Leader Martin M. Looney, was also broadcast on National Public Radio.

There have been several forums held in the Norwich and Hartford areas, as well, but there's a real need for community support in Northeastern Connecticut, including Willimantic, Caron said.

"All we need is a meeting space – it could be a community center, or an auditorium – and possibly donation of coffee. Otherwise, the rest we pay for ourselves," Caron said.

Forums are usually held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on a Wednesday or Thursday.

After this initial orientation, for those who choose to go forward with the process, there is an intensive workshop.

"We go through the application page-by-page. At that point, they have their application, letters of reference, all their records, all the papers they need from probation, and we go over their questions," Caron explained.

The team also helps applicants with the process of getting copies of their records.

Atty. Linda Sullivan attends the forums in order to "demystify a process that can be intimidating," Caron said.

Another important piece of information offered by the team is how to reinstate one's voting rights. "Most think that because they were a convicted felon that they can never vote again. Some people haven't voted in 40 years," Caron said.

Strong support

"We are very grateful for the outpouring of support and interest from our elected representatives and community organizations,"

Caron said at the press conference.

“Many Connecticut legislators have come forward to request that forums be scheduled in their service areas for their constituents including Representatives Douglas McCrory, Marie Lopez Kirkley-Bey, Denise Merrill and Kenneth Green, and Sen. Eric Coleman and Sen. Donald J. DeFronzo, Caron said.

“We have made great strides in a short amount of time, and it is partly due to support from people like Sen. Toni Harp and Sen. Edith Prague,” she added.

“We also have considerable support from people like Andrew Clark, who is the administrator for the Institute for the Study of Crime and Justice at Central Connecticut State University, where we were honored to take part in the ‘Building Bridges’ conference in January,” Caron said.

Many state agencies have also bolstered the growth of the program, said Dianne Daniels.

“We are very grateful to have had the support of the Department of Corrections, and the Board of Pardons and Parole from the very beginning,” she said.

“With their continued assistance, as well as that of our legislators and community organizations, we are committed to bringing this life-changing information to as many Connecticut residents as possible during 2007,” she said.

The partnership with the African-American Affairs Commission will give the Connecticut Pardon Team even greater exposure, Caron said.

“They are putting our information out on their Web site, and they are someone who can help us get the word out about our forums,” she added.

The next forum, held in cooperation with Sen. Donald J. DeFronzo, is scheduled for Feb. 22 at the New Britain Public Library, 20 High St. Advance registration is strongly encouraged and can be done online at the Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc.'s Web site [http:// www.connecticutpardonteam.com](http://www.connecticutpardonteam.com)

(click on “pardon information” link), or by calling toll-free 1-866-251-3810.

More information about the African-American Affairs Commission is available on its Web site at <http://www.cga.ct.gov/aac/>.



A worthwhile struggle. Dianne M. Daniels, executive director for the Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc. (left) and Jacqueline Caron, the program’s founder and chairwoman (right) are hopeful about reaching more residents who need help making a fresh start with their lives. Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Caron.



Giving back. Jacqueline Caron (left) now serves as a member of the Norwich City Council, as well as chair of the Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc. Her husband Richard A. Caron, Sr. (right) serves as the program's treasurer. Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Caron.