

# The RHA IN FOCUS

Newsletter 2020

SEPTEMBER



## YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Throughout August, Rockford Housing Authority provided the opportunity for residents to register to vote with the League of Women Voters assistance.

Thank you to League of Women Voters for allowing newly registered Rockford residents to use their voice in the upcoming election. Your vote matters, voting is the most important way to make your voice heard on the issues that concern you. Decisions are made on your behalf every day, healthcare, education, housing, global issues like defense, environmental issues, and issues in your hometown. Voting allows you to be a part of that decision making that will affect you, friends, family, and community.

When preparing to vote, you want to be informed and talk to people. Research to make an educated decision, your one vote can make a difference not only to the whole election but also to your state. Especially if you're voting in a swing state.

This year voting is going to be a little different due to COVID-19. Voting will be either mail-in votes with the last day to register being October 29th, drop off boxes, more information coming on where these will be located locally,



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or polling stations with limited capacity and wearing a mask.

To make sure your ballot is counted:

- **Register to vote:** In most states, you can do that online.
- **Follow directions:** “If it says fill in the oval, fill in the oval,” Amber McReynolds of the National Vote at Home Institute told NPR.
- **Send it back:** Make sure to mail in your ballot well ahead of the deadline.
- **Rockford Housing Authority encourages all Rockford residents to register to vote and let their voices be heard in the upcoming election on November 3rd, 2020. Remember, your vote matters.**



## REFLECTION OF LABOR DAY

Recently most celebrated Labor Day which is known as the unofficial end of summer and when children go back to school. The history of Labor Day is more than just a day off work. Labor Day, usually the first Monday in September, is a formation of the labor movement and is dedicated to American workers' social and economic achievements. Constituting as a yearly national tribute to the contribution's workers have made to America's strength and well-being. The first recognition came through an ordinance passed in 1885 and 1886. A movement developed and secured state legislation, the first to become law for Labor Day to become an official holiday, was passed in Oregon on February 21st, 1887. More states followed, including Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York. On June 28th, 1894, Congress passed an act making the first Monday in September of each year a legal holiday, Labor Day.

The first Labor Day celebration was held on Tuesday, September 5th, 1882, in New York City. Labor Day celebrations may look like parades, picnics, barbecues, fireworks, and other public gatherings. While COVID-19 and social distancing are still in practice, celebrations may look slightly different this year, but Labor Day still holds the same message and gratitude from the first Labor Day. “The nation pays tribute on Labor Day to the creator of so much of the nation's strength, freedom, and leadership – the American worker.” – U.S Department of Labor.





# CDC HALTS EVICTIONS THROUGH THE END OF THE YEAR

The White House issued a statement to announce the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will halt evictions through the end of the year per the agency's directive in the executive order issued on Aug. 8. Deeming that widespread evictions pose significant risk to the spread of COVID-19, the CDC published the new agency order in the Federal Register.

In order to be eligible for the moratorium, however:

1. Renters must not exceed the thresholds for receiving an Economic Impact
2. Payment under the CARES Act.
3. Renters will also be required to demonstrate to their landlord or property manager that they have:

Experienced a loss of income, Made best efforts to pay rent, Attempted to obtain relevant government assistance, and, If evicted, would likely become homeless or forced to live in congregate housing

Please be aware that Tenants may still be evicted for the following:

- Engaging in criminal activity on the premises;
- Threatening the health or safety of other residents;
- Damaging or posing an immediate and significant risk of damage to property;
- Violating any applicable building code, health ordinance, or similar regulation relating to health and safety; or
- Violating any other contractual obligation (other than late fees, penalties, or interest)



## ROCKFORD HOUSING AUTHORITY AND RENEWAL TURNING POINT

On August 21st at Fairgrounds Valley, Rockford Housing Authority partnered with Renewal Turning Point, a nonprofit in Rockford. The event had a backpack giveaway and other school supplies for the Rockford community for the upcoming school semester. While most students are going back to school, some schools are offering virtual learning. The donation of school supplies is appreciated now more than ever. At the same time, COVID-19 shut businesses down in our community. Many families are found without jobs, and this giveaway makes the burden a little easier for families and our community's children. The Rockford Renewal Turning Point Program has done many great things for the Rockford community. For example, taking children to Magic Waters for the day or helping out with passing out food during the pandemic. We are proud to have them partner with the Rockford Housing Authority and provide opportunities to Rockford residents.



## ROCKFORD ART INSTALLATION



The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is a private, nonprofit, established in 1984. They promote efforts to make Rockford a visitor's destination and create economic growth for the city.

RACVB unveiled a permanent art installation at Davis Park, downtown Rockford. The art piece is a lively 4ft aluminum letter saying "ROCKFORD" following the team's pledge to public beautification and growing the tourist feel.

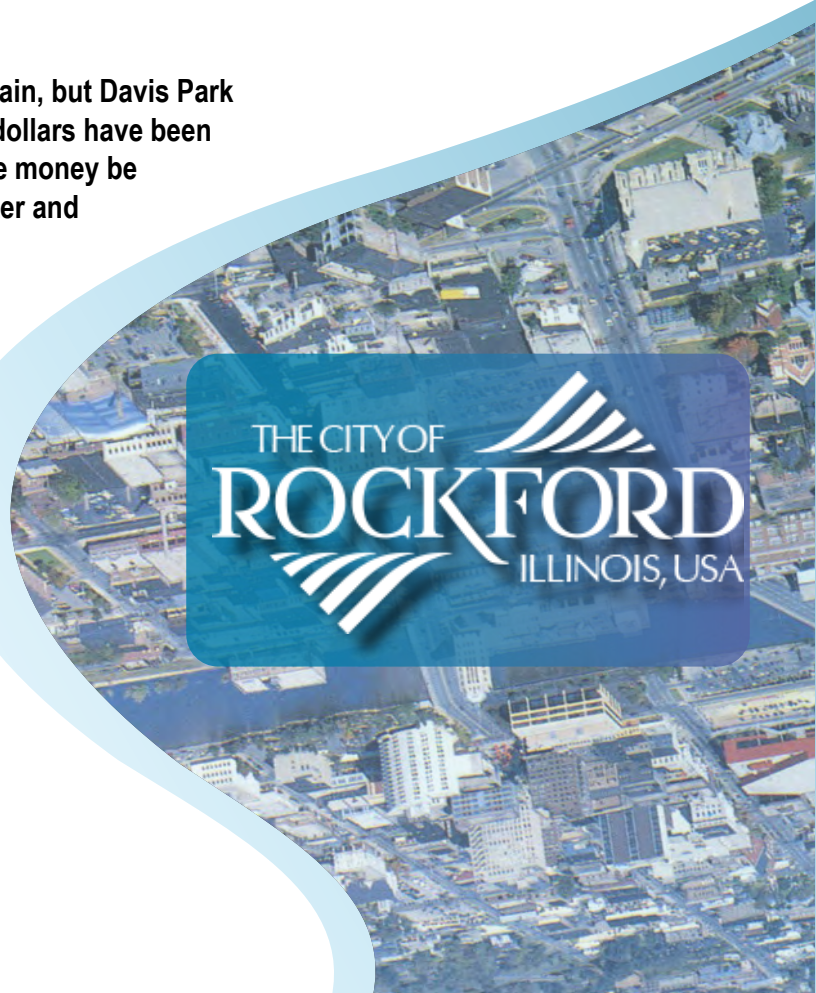
The installation is located by the new Embassy's suites hotel, its sure to grab visitor's attention and create a fantastic photo. "Here in Rockford, the RACVB team continues to look for new ways to bring people together while practicing safe social distancing.

RACVB and Embassy Suites partnered together to offer a Staycation photo contest for Rockford residents and visitors. The contest running from August 11th to September 8th is for individuals of all ages. People are encouraged to share a fun photo if the letters on Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram using the hashtag #HereInRockford for a chance to win a one-night stay at the Embassy Suites valued at \$179 and a \$100 gift card to the hotels The Top restaurant located on the rooftop. "These bold, fun letters will brighten up the backdrop of photos and makes for a perfect spot to have a picnic, take family photos, fly a kite, play frisbee or enjoy other fun outdoor activities," said Andrea Cook, RACVB senior manager of marketing & communications.

Where the art installation is located at Davis Park will remain, but Davis Park could look a lot different in the coming years. Millions of dollars have been ear-marked for improvements to the park. Not only will the money be going to Davis Park but also to the BMO Harris Bank Center and to Transportation.

RACVB has done other projects to brighten up downtown Rockford. In 2019, they received a grant from the State of Illinois to complete eight murals in 15 days. You may recognize these murals around East State, Davis Park, and Rockford City Market area.

Practicing social distancing and during COVID-19 it may be hard to find the light in all of it, this art installation and the murals offer a fun opportunity to get out of the house and enjoy the downtown area of Rockford.





## SIXTH RHA DIRECTORS SPOTLIGHT WINNER 2020 MS. FELICE WOITYNEK!

Felice is a self-motivated, dedicated and extremely helpful employee. She continually volunteers her time to assist our agency in resident programs and events, her dedication to our residents is unmatched. She maintains accountability through her continued professionalism, attention to detail and reliability.

Felice is extremely supportive to her staff and peers and often is called upon

to assist others and always gladly accepts. She serves our agency with a friendly, helpful and cheerful manner. "Felice is a leader at this agency in both work ethic and attitude as her integrity and compassion exist in every interaction. She personifies our core values and works each day intentionally to make RHA's Vision and Mission a concrete reality. "

We are genuinely proud to have Felice as a member of our RHA Team!

## PRAIRIE STREET LEGAL AND THE COMMUNITY

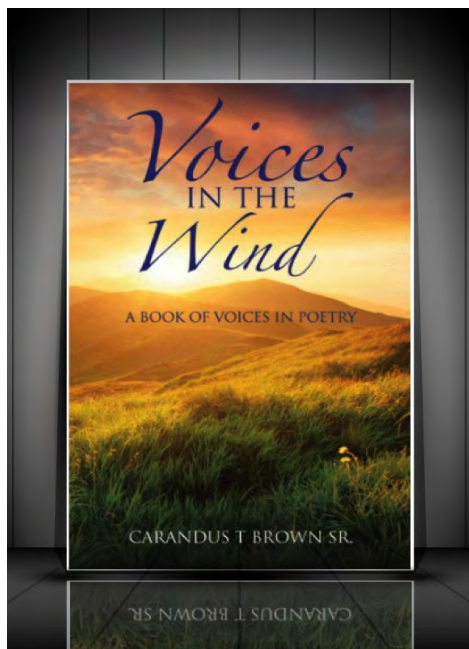
Prairie Street Legal partnered with Rockford Housing Authority on August 20th to help Rockford residents start a new life. Prairie Legal came out to our event at Blackhawk Courts to present ways of getting records expunged and or sealed. With this process citizens are able to receive additional assistance with housing, career, and college education opportunities. The service provided to individuals can help start a new path and leave the past behind them while going on to bigger and better things in life. Prairie Street Legal services has been serving the community since 1977 as a charitable not-for-profit organization and helps provide a fresh start to the life of their clients. They provide free legal services to low income clients and deal with cases such as: divorces, evictions, welfare, social security, driving defenses and more.

Prairie Street Legal's motto is "Equal Access to Justice" and states their mission is "to ensure equal access to justice and fair treatment under the law by providing legal advice and representation, advocacy, education, and outreach that serve to protect basic human needs and enforce or uphold rights. Rockford Housing Authority is proud and appreciates the services they provide to our community and the opportunities they offer.



# CARANDUS BROWN-BOOK OF POETRY

## VOICES IN THE WIND

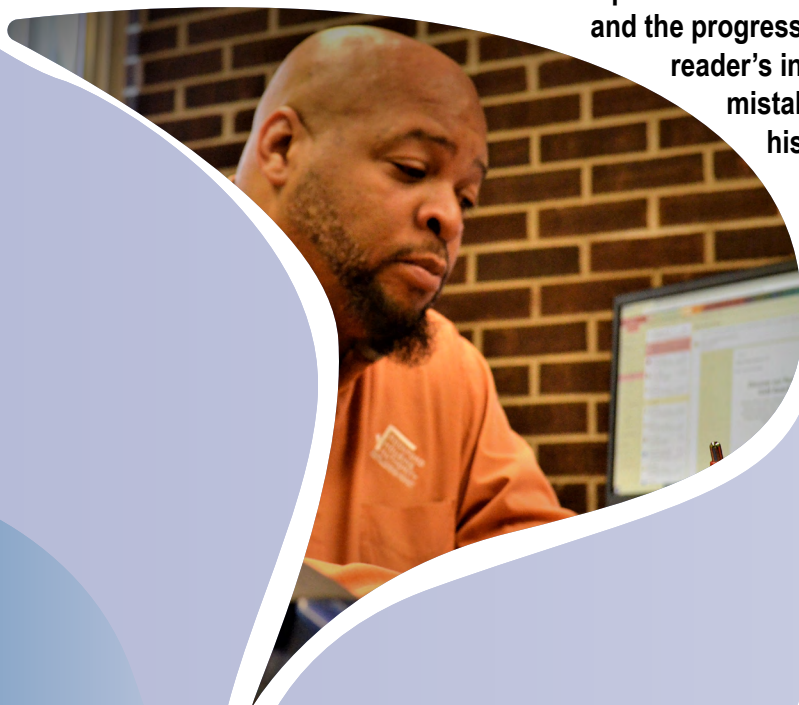


Rockford Housing Authority is proud to announce Carandus Brown; ROSS Program Case Manager has published a book of poetry titled “Voices in The Wind.” The poems are about different aspects of his life and how God has inspired him throughout his life. Writing started for Carandus in 1992 and was a helpful tool for him to learn how to read. With the help of an instructor who realized his potential, he told him to take his pent-up anger and emotions and translate it into writing and help him with his overall reading and writing skills. Whenever Carandus had certain feelings, he would write them down and reflect on how they relate to his day to day situations.

After journaling for a couple of months, Carandus and his instructor decided to put these words and emotions into poetry. “From there, I just took off with it. I started writing throughout the day and night,” Stated Carandus. Writing for Carandus not only started as a way to help with reading and writing skills but also because of his relationship with God;

“Writing poetry also started from my relationship with God, and helped me build a strong relationship.” The ability to write poetry is a way to express emotions and different aspects of life. Carandus stated that his poems transcend into his work and home life. His work life at RHA - is because he is passionate about helping people and helping them make changes in his life. His home life because he is a father of 6 children, which can be tedious at times. He states, “Poetry helps me be able to take a step back and write. I can put everything chaotic and just focus and breath.” “Overall, it helps me be able to relate to people and be able to continue smiling. I am happy every day and helps me stay happy.” Carandus said. Everyone has a method of clearing their mind and relaxing, writing and poetry is Carandus’s. Throughout his book, you can see a sequential aspect to it. The first poem he wrote is

the first chapter in the book; this way, the reader sees his writing advancement and the progression of his emotions and life. The poems are all to the reader’s interpretation, reading the first poem, and seeing his mistakes in writing and going to the last poem and seeing his growth.



The poems are all about different people, experiences, and take an inspirational tone. Full page poems tell stories of things that have impacted Carandus’s life and that people can relate to. The title “Voices in The Wind” came from how God has related to his life and how God has talked to him. The poems are there to “help people think about things” with different poems touching on aspects like racism, violence, love, family, and friends while generalizing God. Carandus’s book of poetry, “Voices in The Wind,” is now available for purchase <https://www.westbowpress.com/en/bookstore/bookdetails/811634-voices-in-the-wind>. He will also be hosting an event, “A Night of Christ in Poetry,” on October 25th, 6:30 to 8:30 at the Norlof Center located at 118 N Main St, Rockford, IL 61101.



## HELP FOR ILLINOIS FAMILIES

The Pritzker Administration, in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, has launched a new plan to help Illinois families access energy assistance and other essential services during COVID-19. These are programs for eligible Illinois families seeking emergency assistance to cover utility bills, rent, food, and other necessities.

The Help Illinois Families initiative is immediately offering an online form <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/a819bd04857144c38430f3b85ca325a7> for individuals and families to request assistance through the LIHEAP and the CSBG programs. It is said that funding may be limited in areas of the state, and the form's completion does not guarantee the funding.

This initiative is available for all qualifying households with low income. The eligible families may qualify for hundreds of dollars of support for the following services: Water/Sewer Payment, Food, Financial Management, Energy Utility Bill Assistance, Rental Assistance, Temporary Shelter, Employment Training/Placement.

The documents needed to prove eligibility are Social Security card, proof of the past 30-day income through a pay stub, check, or copy of the check showing fixed income amount, or other proof of documentation for any income source, and a utility bill if you are seeking assistance for utility assistance, the last thing is a lease is seeking for rental assistance.

Help for Illinois Families is administered by DCEO's Office of Community Assistance. DCEO manages three federal programs; Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Community Services Block Grant Program (CSBG), and the Illinois Home Weatherization Assistance Program (IHWAP). Landlords who participate in the Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program who accept IHDA ERA funding may jeopardize their Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract and may be required to return any funds received.

## ILLINOIS CORONAVIRUS HELPLINE:

Illinois officials say a state helpline has been set up to provide emotional support and quick answers to questions about the coronavirus pandemic.

Illinoisans can text "TALK" to 55-2020 (or "HABLAR" for Spanish), and within 24 hours they will receive a call from a counselor. Residents can also text keywords such as "UNEMPLOYMENT," "FOOD" or "SHELTER," to the same number to receive additional information about those topics.





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## DID YOU KNOW

There are somewhere around 3300 Public Housing Authorities in the United States but the majority of them are extremely small with unit counts in the neighborhood of 50-1000... RHA has more than 1300 Low Income Public Housing units. Public Housing was established to provide decent and safe rental housing for eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Public Housing comes in all sizes and types, from scattered single-family houses to high rise apartments for elderly families. There are approximately 1.2 million households living in public housing units.

