

# First County to honor grant recipients

**Richard Lee, Staff Writer**

Every penny counts for nonprofit organizations in lower Fairfield County as they are under increased pressure to serve a growing number of clients impacted by the economic downturn.

Twenty-six of them, who received assistance this year from Stamford-based First County Bank Foundation's \$50,000 small grant program, will gather Monday at the Stamford branch of the University of Connecticut to share their stories. In its first year, the small grants program was started because of the high number of requests submitted by smaller nonprofit groups hit hard by the economy.

They will be among representatives of more than 100 nonprofit organizations that will be honored at the event.

"This 'Celebration of Mutual Partnership' that the bank hosts every year is meant to showcase some of the great work our nonprofit organizations do for the local community," said Rey Giallongo, the foundation's president, adding that the bank is committed to aiding area nonprofit groups.

The foundation issued the last of its 2010 funds to local nonprofits in November. For many, it was the first time they applied for funds from the foundation. Since mid-April, 26 groups were awarded grants in amounts of \$500 to \$2,500.

Roberta Eichler, executive director of the Volunteer Center of Southwestern Fairfield County, said he has felt the funding pinch, and lauded the foundation for his efforts to aid small nonprofit agencies. The foundation gives her agency \$5,000 a year for its volunteer management training series.

"People aren't feeling confident and not writing the big checks like they used to," said Eichler, adding that small nonprofit organizations suffer from a lack of name recognition. "We've got to do better marketing."

The \$50,000 small grant program is part of a foundation initiative that granted more than \$570,900 to 101 nonprofit organizations in lower Fairfield County, starting with its first grant this year in March to the United Way of Western Connecticut.

Since its creation in 2001, the foundation has awarded more than 450 grants totaling more than \$4 million.

"The small grant program was a welcome addition to our foundation's giving plan and enabled us to attain our goal of helping more communities in lower Fairfield County," said Katherine Harris, foundation vice president, adding that through the program, nonprofit groups can receive an answer to a request within two days. "We have a mini-grant application. It's a very shortened form."

One of those recipients is New Covenant House, a Stamford soup kitchen with a \$700,000 annual budget, which has seen an increase in demand and expenses.

"This year, we're experiencing a decrease in grants and donations. It takes some pressure off," Director Brian Jenkins said. "Food costs are on the rise. We're not sure every year where the money is coming from. This year has been a lot more difficult than other years."

Typically, New Covenant House receives \$125,000 to \$150,000 in grants annually, but this year it has received nearly \$50,000, said Jenkins, adding that other grant requests are pending.

To be eligible, organizations must have nonprofit tax exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and be located in Stamford, Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Norwalk or Westport.

The 26 grant recipients include: A Better Chance in Darien Inc., Bartlett Arboretum, Builders Beyond Borders, Center for Children's Advocacy, Circle of Friends, Easter Seals, Food Bank of Lower Fairfield County, Friendship Ambassadors Foundation, Girls Inc., Greenwich Arts Council, High Road School of Norwalk, Liberation Programs, Connections for Independent Living, Malta House Inc., The Maritime Aquarium, Mikey's Way Foundation, New Covenant House, Norwalk Symphony Orchestra, Stamford Symphony, Stamford Youth Foundation, Stepping Stones Museum, The Links Inc., Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care of SWCT, Women's Mentoring Network Inc., YMCA of Norwalk and The Stamford Family YMCA.