Unity Park Rentals
Work progresses through the winter on CHN’s largest development ever

It was 22 degrees the December day we broke ground on our largest development to date, the 32 scattered site, single family, lease-to-purchase Unity Park Rentals in Pontiac.

We are making a nearly $9 million investment in the neighborhood and building on properties that were once abandoned or held blighted homes, thus revitalizing the neighborhood.

The development will help address the severe need for affordable housing in the area, which was at a tipping point prior to the economic crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Unity Park Rentals will offer two-, three- and four-bedroom homes available for working families earning between 30% and 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Eight of the homes are designated for supportive housing. A community center will also be constructed, housing the leasing office, the supportive services offices, a community room for the maintenance person.

Funding for the development comes through a housing tax credit reservation through Michigan State Housing Development Authority. The development includes project-based vouchers and a mixed-income structure.

The day of the groundbreaking was followed by near-record cold and snowfall. The weather was no match for the large equipment, and now most of the lots have sewers and some of the lots now have rough framing complete. Spring will bring a flurry of work and we are on target to have the first homes ready for occupancy in June.

Throughout the winter, plans were also made to enhance the community garden we built last year in Unity Park. This year, the garden will feature a walkway, making the property more accessible and inclusive for everyone, thanks to a grant from the Michigan Disability Rights Coalition. We have also received a PNC grant to develop a Unity Park website, provide the quarterly newsletter, install a water source in the garden, provide a beautification grant and launch neighborhood safety initiatives.

The quarterly Unity Park newsletter was started by our Unity Park community revitalization coordinator and distributed with help from volunteers from our community partner, Habitat for Humanity. Plans are also being made for a clean-up day in the area, as well as an outreach with Habitat for Humanity to identify other owner-occupied homes that need assistance on home improvement.
Honoring Felicia Jackson

Stable housing spurred her to get nursing degree

Felicia Jackson shows what moving from homelessness into safe, stable housing can do for a family. She recently graduated with a nursing degree!

The Emmett Jones Memorial Award honoring a program participant who worked to change their life through one of CHN’s programs was presented to her at Bring it Home 2013, our annual signature fundraising dinner.

Felicia Jackson and her son Maurice on the steps of their new home.

Thanks to our generous sponsors and donors, the evening at the Royal Park Hotel was a great success bringing in $120,119.57. Of that, $19,400 was raised through the live auction for our annual Adopt A Family program.

The Emmett Jones Memorial Award presentation is one of the highlights of the evening as attendees hear the success stories of those we serve.

(A short video of Felicia is available on the video page of our website at www.communityhousingnetwork.org/videos.)

Felicia and her son, Maurice, lived in a neighborhood of “violence and robberies” just before they became homeless. Being homeless “felt safer,” she says, and Felicia was determined to find a better life for Maurice.

The “peace of mind” she receives from stable housing as a program participant in CHN’s programs allowed her to return to school. She now mentors three young women involved in Narcotics Anonymous. Felicia exemplifies the success possible through our programs.

We are proud of our third annual Emmett Jones Memorial Award recipient!

Save the date! Please plan ahead to join us for Bring it Home 2014, 6-9:30 p.m., Thursday, October 16, again at the Royal Park Hotel, 600 E. University Drive, Rochester. Details will be forthcoming soon.

Marc Craig, CHN president, greets guests at Bring it Home 2013.

Guests wave their bidder numbers pledging donations for Adopt A Family.
CHN works to end veteran homelessness

Community Housing Network is now playing a role in the federal initiative to end veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. In October, CHN became a sub grantee of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services for Veteran Families grant. This grant is administered by Southwest Solutions and serves residents of Oakland and Macomb counties.

As of the beginning of March, we had already helped 25 individuals and families. Some of these families had been living in their car, some were in hotels after being evicted from their apartments for not being able to pay rent.

Between October 1, 2011 and Sept. 30, 2012, there were an estimated 267 homeless veteran individuals and households receiving homeless services from county providers. This statistic is widely accepted as considerably lower than actual numbers since veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness don't readily self-identify at the point of contact.

One of the families we worked with is family of five - a veteran father, his wife and their three children - who lost their beautiful home through foreclosure and moved into a one-bedroom apartment when he was let go from his employment. The veteran had been diagnosed with brain cancer, his employer did not want to pay for catastrophic insurance, and he has been unable to find a new job. He served in the Air Force for 11 years, through three eras: post-Vietnam, Desert Storm and post-9/11. The two sons are now adults, one following in the military tradition and is in the National Guard Reserves. With CHN’s help through SSVF, the family was recently able to move into apartment to suit their needs.

SSFV is able to assist veteran families with short-term rental assistance and other supportive services to transition a veteran family out of homelessness or to prevent a veteran family from becoming homeless.

CHN has four people working on the SSVF program and our work includes providing financial education and budgeting help to assist veteran families in achieve housing stability.

If you, or someone you know needs help in a housing crisis, please contact our Housing Resource Center at 248-928-0111 or toll free 866-282-3119.

‘Without Adopt A Family, my kids wouldn’t have a Christmas’

Tanya Williams, a single mother of two small children, broke down in tears loading the Adopt A Family gifts for her children into her vehicle.

With your generous help, we were able to provide holiday gifts to 706 people this year through our offices in Troy and Wayne! For many, their wish list included sheets, towels, cleaning supplies, hats, boots and mittens.

Many of the Adopt A Family recipients were recently homeless. The annual program, which marked 10 years in 2013, helps provide basic necessities and a wish or two for our program participants.

Tanya wanted to make sure the donor for her family knew of her thanks. There is a short video of her thank you available on our website: www.communityhousingnetwork.org/video. She says, “Without Adopt A Family, my kids wouldn’t have a Christmas. Such a blessing. My kids are going to be so happy. I’m so grateful. Thank you. God bless.”
Marc’s Message

Dear friends,

We are excited about the work going on in the Unity Park Rentals development. (See Page 1.)

Concentrating our efforts and resources in this neighborhood, six blocks by eight blocks, is building momentum. We see it transforming not just the lives of the residents currently living there, but also the lives of residents in the surrounding neighborhood. Replacing abandoned homes or empty lots with new homes creates a safer, more vibrant community.

Connecting in any community is important. That is the impetus behind Connecting for a Cause, a young professionals event Thursday, May 15, 2014, 5-7:30 p.m. at the Troy Marriott, 200 W. Big Beaver Road, Troy. Attendees will learn how to engage with CHN and make an impact in creating sustainable communities, as well as hear from Don Jones, senior consultant to the New Economy Initiative for Southeast Michigan. Registration, $15, includes two drink tickets for beer and wine. Appetizers provided. Registration is $20 at the door. For more information, please contact Hailey Noonan at 248-824-7313 or HNoonan@chninc.net.

As always, thank you for all the ways you contribute to our work providing housing for those who need it most.

Marc Craig
President