



Mutual Housing
Association
of Southwestern
Connecticut

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Welcome to
Mutual Housing
Association of
Southwestern
Connecticut's
NEW
newsletter!

Rebuild, Renew, Sustain

Renew, Rebuild, Sustain was the theme of the Community Leadership Institute meeting that was held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in mid October. Nearly 1,000 grass roots leaders from across the nation came to participate. The community team attending and receiving training on behalf of Mutual Housing were: Virginia Maize, John Holland, Sorcire Velasquez (Trinity Park residents), Julia Wade (Program Coordinator for the Stamford Partnership), Nelia Medley (Parkside resident), Eugene Campbell (Executive Director of Yerwood Center), Cora Chiru (Resident Services Coordinator–New Neighborhoods) and Robert Owens, MHA property manager.

The community leadership teams met to discuss, debate, brainstorm, share and learn about community engagement opportunities



that can transform and revitalize their neighborhoods. William Caplan, Training Director for NeighborWorks America said, “These are not the leaders of their community, but residents who work on the day-to-day business of knowing their community and working to make it better.” We look forward to hearing from the MHA team as they share the ideas and strategies they have learned. They will be creating an action plan for a project to take place in Stamford’s West Side. Stay tuned! **M**

Beginning our 20th year!



The Home Page

Mutual Housing Association of Southwestern Connecticut, Inc.



Connecticut Housing Coalition Annual Conference

The CT Housing Coalition held its Annual Conference in Hartford on October 7. MHA staff and board members attended the conference and Larry Kluetsch, MHA Executive Director, participated in a panel entitled “Yes In My Back Yard,” that focused on communities that are planning and building affordable housing around the state. MHA has developed affordable housing in Trumbull and Fairfield and is currently working on plans for building housing in Darien and Wilton. At the Conference, Larry reviewed the plans for the redevelopment of the Darien Library for affordable condominium units. MHA was selected to be the developer by the Town of Darien. **M**

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Merton House Construction Begins

E In a partnership with Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, MHA has begun construction on 22 units of affordable/supportive housing located in the Hollow Neighborhood of Bridgeport Connecticut. The Merton House supportive housing development consists of two separate sites: the primary site located at 65 Madison Avenue will house services and property management activities; the second site is at 152-168 Catherine Street. The total development will be 22 units with 15 two bedroom units and 7 three bedroom units.



The total development will be 22 units with 15 two bedroom units and 7 three bedroom units.

Mutual Housing Association will be the owner of record and property manager for these newly developed units and support services will be provided through Catholic Charities of Fairfield County. The team will include a multidisciplinary team of professionals lead by a Senior Case Manager and services will be culturally competent and gender-specific.

Funding for the Merton House development comes from the City of

Bridgeport HOME, State Housing Tax Credit Contribution Program, United Way and the CT Next Steps program. The Next Steps program provides capital funding for construction, rental subsidies through the RAP program and services support through the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Priority households for Next Steps housing are families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and who have a head of household who is disabled by mental illness or chemical/substance abuse disorders or both. **M**

MHA Merges with Norwalk’s Action Housing

At a special meeting of the MHA Board of Directors in September 2009, the Board voted to merge with Action Housing of Norwalk. Action Housing Inc. was organized as a non profit corporation in 1965 for the purpose of developing ownership housing for low and moderate income families. Over the years, Action housing developed over 270 single family, condominium and cooperative ownership housing units.

As a result of the merger, 2 Action Housing board members will join the MHA Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting in November. MHA will assume title to a property at 23 Leonard Street in Norwalk. The building had been used by Norwalk NHS and MHA staff in the past. MHA is considering options for development of the property for affordable housing. **M**

MHA Board of Directors 2008/2009

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The Insurance Exchange

Samone Wright

The Workplace, Resident

MHA Remembers CAROLYN WELHOUS

In August, MHA lost a long-time member of the Board of Directors, Carolyn Welhous, from Norwalk. Carolyn came to the MHA Board from the Board of Directors at Norwalk Neighborhood Housing Services following the MHA/NHS merger in 2003. We remember her beautiful spirit, her sense of humor and her dedication to her community.

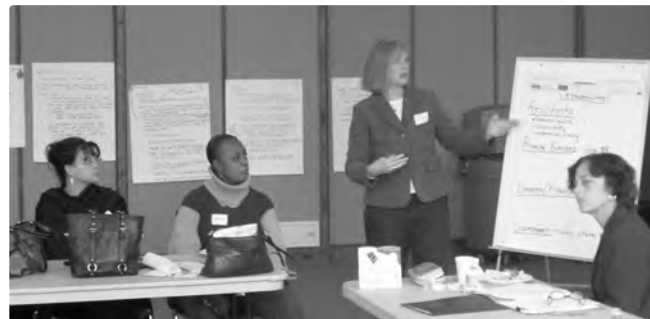
Resident Survey Results Are HERE!

The MHA Board of Directors distributed survey questionnaires to residents at 10 MHA managed rental properties during August. Door to door interviews were also conducted for some units at Maplewood and Yale Street Commons in Bridgeport. A total of 106 responses were received, with an overall response rate of 26%. All properties, including supportive and senior, are well represented in the responses.

Here are some of the main findings from the survey:

- ✓ MHA residents are most pleased with the affordable rent, their neighbors and the safety of their housing environments. Residents are least pleased with utility charges.
- ✓ Many residents would like Board Members attend Resident Council meetings.
- ✓ Most residents believe that Resident Councils are necessary with a focus on discussions of property management issues and organizing clean ups.
- ✓ Parking is an issue for residents at Huntington, Greenfield, Parkside and Yale Street Commons.
- ✓ Residents would like more information about preventive maintenance, resident clean-up activities and capital replacement plans for their properties.
- ✓ Residents would like MHA to present workshops including: Rights and Responsibilities of Renters, 1st Time Homebuyers, Getting Out of Debt.
- ✓ The Survey results will be incorporated into the new Strategic Plan that will be presented at the MHA Annual Meeting in November, 2009.

MHA Strategic Planning



Lesley Higgins-Biddle leading a group discussion, with Board Member Debbie Joyner and staff member Sandra Rodriguez.

the process included 5 sessions, with additional surveys of MHA residents and stakeholders, including our funders. The October 17 wrap-up session included a presentation and discussion with Lesley Higgins-Biddle from the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) where the participants discussed the environment we are working in right now—from the perspective of residents, funders and government agencies.

A final report on the Strategic Plan will be presented at the MHA Annual Meeting on November 16. The overarching goals for MHA are: Serving Fairfield County well and Strengthening Our Organization. Over the next three years, MHA will be looking to increase the stock of affordable housing, sustain the portfolio we own and manage and support the residents of MHA housing. **M**

On October 16 and 17, the MHA staff and board wrapped up the Strategic Planning process with two retreats. The staff met as a group on October 16, followed by a final retreat including Board of Directors and Staff members on Saturday October 17. Overall,



Staff members Sandra Rodriguez and Magaly Rivera at the staff training.



The Benefits of Mutual Housing

This article was written by Robert Owens, MHA Property Manager, Stamford

What are the benefits of being a Mutual Housing Tenant? First and foremost, affordability. Most people know that Fairfield County is an expensive place to live. But just how expensive and how affordable Mutual Housing is in comparison to market rate housing is often overlooked.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition’s annual report, OUT OF REACH, found severe housing cost problems across the country. The report

ranked the Stamford-Norwalk area as the third most costly rental market in the nation! The out of reach report concludes that for many families, full time work does not provide enough income for a family to afford a typical apartment. The report noted:

- The monthly fair market rents for a two bedroom unit in Bridgeport and Stamford are \$1,214 and \$1,703.
- At the market rents, a Bridgeport family needs to earn \$84,800 to afford a two bedroom unit; in Stamford, the needed family income is \$122,300.

At Mutual Housing we are committed to building and keeping our housing communities affordable. On the average, MHA residents in Bridgeport pay approximately \$750 for rent for a 2 bedroom unit; in Stamford, they pay approximately \$900, including utilities.

Sometimes it is easy to forget the real cost of living in Fairfield County and what it takes to create and keep housing affordable. We hope that all residents will get involved in their communities and work with their neighbors and staff to keep MHA housing affordable. **M**

Conger House Visit

In late September, members of the Fairfield Collaborative toured affordable housing sites in Bridgeport CT. It was a beautiful day and MHA Property Manager Greg Dunn joined James Earl Jones and Joe Miller on the porch of Conger House to show their appreciation of the Collaborative support for MHA. Conger House, located on Washington Park in



Once a year, the residents at Conger House “give back” to the neighborhood by sponsoring a clean up of Washington Park.

Bridgeport, was developed by MHA and is currently managed by MHA, with case management services provided by Catholic Charities. Both James and Joe noted how they enjoy Conger House’s location, with the park across the street and the food pantry and meal program at the church next door. Once a year, the residents at Conger House “give back” to the neighborhood by sponsoring a clean up of Washington Park. Joe has this to say: “It’s certainly good here”. James thanks Mutual Housing and Catholic Charities for making Conger House a reality. **M**



Trinity Park Celebrates at Annual Picnic

As usual, Trinity Park celebrated the summer’s end with a community wide picnic. Virginia Maize, MHA Board Member, is the star of the photos along with John Holland, a long time Trinity resident. It was a great afternoon.

Trinity Park is on Facebook! You can “friend” the site–Trinity Park Apartments–and visit the photos of Trinity Park community gatherings since 1996. **M**

