

HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS

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The HACC's Housing Choice Voucher Program Receives "A" from HUD

Over the past three years, the staff at the Housing Authority of the County of Cook (The HACC) has been working diligently to improve the operations of the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program. Below are some of the results of our efforts.

The HACC has received high marks in two of the most important measures of HCV Program performance: wait list selection and leasing, and expanding housing opportunities in opportunity areas. As a federally funded program, there are numerous rules and regulations that govern administration of HCV Programs. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) evaluates HCV Programs through its Section Eight Management Assessment Program (SEMAP).

SEMAP measures 14 key indicators. Key indicators include inspections, rent reasonableness determination, utility allowances, payment standards, calculation of family income and rent portions, wait list selection and leasing, family self-sufficiency, and expanding housing opportunities in opportunity areas. For the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, the HACC achieved a score of 99% on SEMAP.

Our hard work has also resulted in a higher voucher utilization rate. With the decline in the economy and more people out of work, there has been a tremendous increase in the need for affordable housing. Since January 2011, we have expanded rental assistance to an additional 1025 families bringing the number of families participating in the voucher pro-

gram to more than 12,400. Maximum utilization of vouchers is also good for landlords and the local economy. Landlords were able to fill vacant units with the increase in the number of families served by the program.

In addition to improvements in operational efficiency and compliance, we increased the number of families living in opportunity areas. This is significant because the underlying objective of the HCV Program is to empower families to improve their quality of life. All families that are issued vouchers attend a briefing where they are given information on our Mobility Program. Families are encouraged to explore all housing options and select a neighborhood that offers better services such as good schools, public transportation, and job opportunities. We are proud to report that at the end of March 2011, twice as many families moved to opportunity areas as in the previous year.

It is critical that we receive high ratings from HUD, and it is equally critical to receive high ratings from everyone that we serve. HUD has rated us a "high performing" agency and with our continuing efforts, we are confident that our clients and landlords will, too.

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I'd like to extend a warm hello to all of the HACC's clients, partners and stakeholders. It is my distinct privilege to have been recently named the Executive Director of the HACC.

I've been in public service my entire career, and believe strongly that government can be an agent of good. I've served in a number of capacities at the federal and local levels of government, and have seen, first-hand, time and again, the extraordinary impact programs such as ours have.

At the same time it is important to understand that all entities, be they public or private, must operate efficiently if they are going to survive and flourish. That means you must look at your core mission. How well are we serving our clients? Are we fulfilling the public trust?

I am pleased to report that we have taken some very meaningful steps in this regard.

Our core program, Housing Choice Vouchers, has served 1025 more households this year. Providing more affordable rental housing in the private marketplace, especially during these difficult economic times, is critical to both our clients and landlords alike.

We will be leasing more units in the coming months to veterans who have served our country and those with special needs.

Similar strides are being made in our own housing stock. Units throughout the HACC, including in our family communities in Ford Heights and Chicago Heights, have been remodeled and leased. A total of 154 families and seniors were placed into quality housing.

This is only a start. There is much to be done, but there is no doubt in my mind that the HACC can become a leading force in housing county-wide.

I am a big believer in listening and learning. The best feedback and ideas generally come from the people who work, live, or otherwise interact with the HACC. I've already received a number of excellent ideas from our workforce, many of which have implemented already or are in the process of doing so.

I'd like to hear what you think. Feel free to contact me at rmonocchio@thehacc.org.

Sincerely,

Richard Monocchio, Executive Director
The Housing Authority of the County of Cook

HACC Rehabilitates And Leases 154 Units in 60 Days

The Housing Authority of the County of Cook has just completed its largest lease up effort in recent memory. More than 154 apartments, throughout the region, were repaired and rented to families and seniors taken from the waiting list. The majority of the units were leased at Turlington West, Sunrise, and the Vera Yates developments. All told, over 150 households have been housed during this intensive three-month effort.

It is not a secret that funding for social programs is facing serious cutbacks in Washington – all the more reason to ensure that we make as many units as possible in the County available for leasing.

We understand that more capital repair and maintenance work is required, and that we are constrained by budget-

ary realities. Still, we are making investments in our properties. For example, we are renovating the elevators at Golden Tower I, Victor Walchirk and Wheeling Towers, and seeking funding to complete the facade repairs at Golden Towers, Juniper and Turlington West. This commitment to targeting scarce resources directly to the properties will continue.

This extraordinary accomplishment would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication exhibited by the HACC team members.

Please welcome all of the new families that are now part of our community.

Gardening Project Takes Root at Senior Apartments in Evanston

Residents of the HACC's Senior Apartments in Evanston are hoping to reap what they sow—carrots, beets, collard greens, broccoli, radishes, lettuce and several varieties of herbs. Approximately one dozen residents have planted their fall harvest, as part of "Seeds of Hope – Senior Green Connections," a pilot gardening program.

"If all goes well, we will have a harvest around November," says Athalia Butcher, a resident gardener at Perlman Apartments. "It's fun to watch things grow and develop, and I'm looking forward to some good salads."

"Senior Green Connections" is a partnership between the HACC, the City of Evanston, the Office of Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin, and Family Focus. The project kicked off in August when Evanston Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl and the HACC's Executive Director Richard Monocchio cut the ribbon on the first container garden at Victor Walchirk Apartments. The project was expanded to Jane Perlman Apartments in September.

"I think it's wonderful that they are getting together to do something like this for us," says Janet Parker, one of the first to sign up at Perlman Apartments. "I like that I'm growing the produce myself, that it's fresh and there are no pesticides. I also like that it doesn't cost me more than my time."

The prospect of the project taking root is excellent. Container gardening is just what the name implies: growing plants in pots, boxes and other containers. It is ideal for apartment dwellers and people who don't have time to care for a large landscape. In addition, these container gardens are at varying heights, so it is easier for seniors and those with limited mobility to participate. "Having the containers raised means there's not the stooping and bending that one would normally have," says Ms. Parker. "And then of course, there's the bonus that you can actually grow more because there's such depth available for the roots to grow."



Richard Monocchio, Executive Director, the HACC (l), Elizabeth Tisdahl, Mayor, City of Evanston (c) and Rodney Stidem, Resident, Walchirk Apartments (r) cut the ribbon on the first container garden at Walchirk Apartments

Photo: Genie Lemieux, Evanston Photographic Studios, Inc.

Each site has a master gardener to provide guidance and expert advice and to oversee the project. Master Gardener Charlene Evans meets with residents each week for an hour of tips and instruction and to make sure the gardens are progressing as scheduled. "I couldn't do it without the master gardener because I don't have a great deal of knowledge to be able to do it on my own," says Ms. Parker. "Having a master gardener who is sort of like a coach is marvelous."

Master Gardener Evans has established unofficial goals. "The first thing is gearing them to think organic, not using any chemicals and growing your own food so you know the source," says Ms. Evans. She says the second goal is to explore the possibility of a three-season garden—fall, spring and summer—so that there's a supply of fresh vegetables virtually year round.

"I like working with seniors," says Ms. Evans. "It's good to get them out of their apartments and in the sun and fresh air. I hope this gives them another aspect to their life that they can be involved in and enjoy, make their surroundings look better and just bring a lot of joy and happiness."



2011 Youth Summer Camp Provides Lifetime of Memories

"The best part was the 911 Center. We watched the calls come in and learned how they locate the exact street and send help," says 11-year-old Naleah Moore. "It was cool." Naleah was one of 45 children who participated in the 2011 Summer Youth Camp co-sponsored by the HACC and the Cook County Sheriff's Police Youth Services Department.

During the session, Naleah and her fellow campers were exposed to a broad range of educational and recreational activities that are sure to give them a lifetime of fond memories. Each morning, campers were picked up from their respective family housing developments in Chicago Heights, Ford Heights and Robbins and transported to a Forest Preserve campsite located in Oak Forest. After a morning of breakfast, various workshops and engaging outdoor activities, the campers boarded buses for the day's field trip.

In addition to witnessing the events at Chicago's world-class 911 center, campers visited the Anti-Cruelty Society where they learned how to care for animals, received a crash course in the national monetary system at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, took an architectural tour of Chicago's breathtaking skyline, and received a behind-the-scenes glimpse of WFLD-TV Fox television and WGCI radio stations. There was also plenty of traditional camp fun on the two-week agenda—activities ranging from bowling to swimming and roller-skating to attending professional sporting events.

Camp organizers want the camp to be fun, but there is a serious side. The goal is for the children to learn life skills such as how to be a good friend and public safety tips and gain insight into the role of police officers as public servants. For this reason, activities include experiences that build rapport such as sitting in a police car and visits to the 911 center so that they can see how calls are routed and police and firefighters respond.

The summer camp always includes a community service activity. This year, campers visited "Feed My Starving Children," a non-profit organization that recruits volunteers to pack food specifically formulated for malnourished children and distributes the food to 70 countries around the world.

During the two-hour visit to the charity's Aurora warehouse, the campers prepared and packaged 38 boxes



Summer campers and staff with Thomas Dart, Cook County Sheriff

of food that will feed 22 children for an entire year. The children were divided into groups around tables where they assembled food packets that consisted of chicken flavoring, vegetables, rice and a soy product. By all accounts, the campers did a great job. They were mindful of the importance of the work, careful not to spill any of the food.

This was the second year that the HACC teamed up with the Cook County Sheriff's Police to sponsor a summer camp for children, ages 9-11. In 2010, the sheriff's department had difficulty recruiting enough youth from the south suburbs to participate, so the department turned to the HACC for assistance. The HACC marketed the camp to children living in its family housing developments in the south suburbs of Chicago Heights, Robbins and Ford Heights. This year, the program was expanded to include Housing Choice Voucher recipients who live in those towns as well. The sheriff's department underwrites the cost of the campsite and transportation and some of their staff volunteer to serve as camp counselors. The HACC pays for the activities, meals and snacks.

Another successful summer camp culminated with a big barbecue bash at the Forest Preserve campsite, where Cook County Sheriff Thomas Dart spoke to the campers. He stressed that the police are available to help campers and their families. When Sheriff Dart asked if everyone had a good time, the answer was a resounding yes, as indicated by the thunderous cheers and applause.

Perhaps ten-year-old camper, Kiara Ellis, sums it up best. "It was fun, and I would like to go back again," says Kiara.

Paul Paulson: Victor Walchirk's Resident Poet Laureate

The "Seeds of Hope – Senior Green Connections" kicked off this summer with a program at Victor Walchirk Apartments in Evanston, the site of the first container garden. In addition to a ribbon cutting ceremony and remarks from elected and government officials and representatives of the HACC's partnering agencies, guests were treated to the poetry of Paul Paulson, Victor Walchirk's resident poet laureate.

Around Walchirk, Mr. Paulson is well known for his words of inspiration. Every morning, Mr. Paulson prints his poems on his trademark slips of paper and posts them on the lobby bulletin board for anyone to take and share. His anthologies are also in demand—little booklets that he prints, binds and distributes to the residents and to friends and family all over the country.

"I write poems all the time," says the vibrant 84-year-old, "I get inspired so easily. I'm really just selfish. It brings me so much joy when they read my poems or even just glance at them."

But what his senior community may not know is that it has an accomplished poet and writer in their midst. Mr. Paulson wrote his first poem on that fateful day of September 11, 2001. "I was watching TV and the first plane crashed into the tower in New York and a few minutes later the other plane crashed. I was so touched by the event that I sat down and wrote a poem and sent it to a newspaper. That same day, the owner called me and asked if she could publish it in the Des Plaines Journal."

That first poem turned into a regular column called "Poetry Corner." In addition to writing a column, Mr. Paulson has published several books, including "Moments in Rhyme," in 2008.

Beyond his literary accomplishments, his life experiences are on a par with Forrest Gump, the main character of the 1994 film of the same name. Like Gump, Mr. Paulson has traveled around the world, met a U.S. president, run several businesses, and experienced first-hand some of the historical events of the 20th century—from the Great Depression to World War II.

Unlike Gump, he has impressive academic credentials. After passing the General Equivalency Diploma (GED), he says he went on to obtain degrees in several fields, including Creative Writing and Mechanical Engineering. "I have so many degrees. I can paper my walls with them," says Mr. Paulson.

His adventures started when he left home at the age of 13. He rode freight trains travelling all over the west, working odd jobs from picking oranges to doing "whatever it took to survive." During World War II, Mr. Paulson served in both the U.S. Army and the Air Force. It seems that even back then he had a knack for prose. "Funny thing," says Mr. Paulson. "When I was in the Army, I wrote to a girl I was going with. Then over 60 years later, this old woman, came up to me and said 'Paul, You haven't changed much. I still have your letters.' I said, you're kidding. You still have my letters after 60 years? She said 'I do because they were so beautiful.'" He laughs, as he adds, "I don't put much stock in it. She had been married three times."



Paul Paulson at Walchirk garden ceremony

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(continued....Paul Paulson: Victor Walchirk's Resident Poet Laureate)

When the World War II veteran returned home, he was stationed in Washington, DC where he says he ran into President Harry Truman and chatted with him for a while. A few years later, he met his wife, Charlotte. They raised a family and he began a professional and educational career as diverse as, well, Forrest Gump.

Among his credits, he worked as head custodian of a suburban park district and owned two businesses. He also returned to college to obtain a degree in Mechanical Engineering. "I was working as a tool and die maker, so I went to school at night. I put in 18-hour days for five years, but I had to do that to support my family."

After completing his degree, he worked as a mechanical engineer until he retired in 2001. He has had numerous illnesses including a stroke and cancer. "When I had

cancer the doctor gave me 10 months to live," says Mr. Paulson. "That was 13 years ago. Don't ever give me a time period unless it's definite, like September 16 at 9:00 p.m."

Today, Mr. Paulson spends his days sitting at the computer writing and distributing his poetry and taking his customary three mile walk. While his wife passed away in 1972, he has "an ever growing" family to keep in touch with that includes a combined total of 31 children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

"I just get a kick out of living," says Mr. Paulson. "I love to see people happy, so when I see someone sad, I just give them a booklet and they go to their rooms and read it."

Wait Lists Open at Eight Sites

The following Low-Income Public Housing Wait Lists are open.

Persons 62 years of age and older

Summit Senior Apartments
7455 W. 63rd Place
Summit, IL 60501

Households where the Head of Household, Co-Head or Spouse is 50 years of age and older

Edward Brown
3210 W. 139th St.
Robbins, IL 60472

Juniper Towers
350 Juniper Street
Park Forest, IL 60466

Franklin Towers
9535 W. Franklin Avenue
Franklin Park, IL 60131

Riverdale Senior Housing
335 West 138th Street
Riverdale, IL 60827

Golden Towers I & II
1704 & 1706 East End Avenue
Chicago Heights, IL 60411

Turlington West
15306 Robey
Harvey, IL 60426

Applicants age 50-61 will be offered an opportunity to apply for units in the HACC Senior buildings only if the HACC exhausts its wait lists for persons 62 years of age and older or if units in elderly buildings are vacant for 60 days or longer. Wait List pre-applications can be downloaded on our website at www.thehacc.org or you can call (312) 663-5447

Board of Commissioners

The Board of Commissioners of the The Housing Authority of the County of Cook is comprised of individuals who are appointed by the Cook County Board President and confirmed by the full Board for five-year terms.

Elzie Higginbottom, *Chairman*

Alicia R. McCray, *Vice Chairman*

Karen R. Chavers, *Treasurer*

Joseph Martin, *Commissioner*

Edna Carter, *Commissioner*

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Landlord Meeting Dates

Tuesday, November 15th
6:00pm-8:00pm

Eisenhower Public Library
4613 North Oketo Avenue
Harwood Heights, IL 60706
708-867-7828

2nd floor large conference room,
holds up to 100 chairs auditorium style

Thursday, November 17th
6:00pm-8:00pm

South Holland Public Library
16250 Wausau Avenue
South Holland, IL 60473
708-331-5262

Meeting room – lower level,
holds approximately 200

GO GREEN: Housing Highlights delivered to your inbox

If you are interested in receiving future newsletters electronically, please send an email to newsletter@thehacc.org and include your full name, email address and whether you are a landlord or client.



Summit Senior Building



Riverdale Senior Housing

Serving the Cook County Suburbs since 1948 www.thehacc.org

