

HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS

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New Leases on Life for Residents of Celina Blake, Edward Willett Homes

With two teenagers and a baby on the way, Raven Johnson felt uneasy in her apartment in the Celina Blake complex in Ford Heights. Public transportation, jobs and shopping were far away, her building needed renovation and she worried about her children's safety.

Now, the future is bright for Johnson as one of the first HACC clients to take advantage of the opportunity to move from Celina Blake to an apartment in Chicago Heights.

Her apartment, which she found online, is close to Metra and Pace lines as well as the grocery store. She and her children also feel safer. "I used to live here a long time ago, and now I see a lot more patrolling of the police. They have a lot more neighborhood watch, cameras on the poles. I can't wait to move in."

Her new apartment is a three-bedroom unit, as was the one she left, but, she added with delight, "Everything is brand new. It's a new environment," said Johnson. "It's a lot better."

Johnson's opportunity arose when HACC decided to demolish Celina Blake and the Edward Willett development in Robbins since the cost of renovation far outstripped the resources available. Each development is more than 30 years old, built prior to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). HACC estimates that it would have taken about \$100,000 per unit to make needed repairs and bring the units into ADA compliance. Once operating expenses are taken into account, HACC has about \$1,157 annually per unit to make capital improvements.

Under HUD regulations, residents whose buildings are demolished can move into comparable



Kim Cole (story on p. 3) packs up her apartment at the Celina Blake Homes in Ford Heights.

units in another development or take a Section 8 voucher. Of the 110 families affected, most, including Johnson, opted for vouchers.

Executive Director Lorri Newson said the effort to move residents out of racially-isolated, economically-struggling communities dovetails with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's new strategy and goals. She referenced a video prepared by HACC, showing a young girl in Ford Heights, who, when asked about her dreams, replied, "I don't dream."

"This child doesn't dream because she doesn't see things that are desirable within her community," Newson said. "Now, when we talk about the possibility of demolishing units and moving families into opportunity areas that will provide better schools, jobs and social and recreational facilities, those are the things that the kids must be exposed to in order to dream."

Just as the relocation presents opportunities for the residents, it also presents opportunities for the communities they leave behind.

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Message from the Executive Director

“He who hesitates is lost.” That old American proverb comes to mind when I think about the new strategic plan developed by our parent agency, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD’s plan is an aggressive new direction for providing housing assistance and support services to low-income families across the country. At the

Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC), we must align ourselves with HUD to keep pace with those changes or miss the opportunity to help the many families who could benefit from HUD’s new programs.

Through its five-year strategic goals, HUD is bringing new tools to its efforts to expand mobility options for low-income families, lessen their isolation and broaden their access to communities with better schools, jobs and vitality.

HACC and the Village of Robbins have already applied for a grant for the community of Robbins under a new HUD program called Choice Neighborhoods Initiative. Through this program, we hope to provide much-needed social services, job assistance and educational support, including early childhood programs, to a community that has been challenged by high poverty and chronic disinvestment.

Several of the goals outlined in HUD’s strategic plan are already part of HACC’s current policy. HACC has already committed to about 350 project-based vouchers to help create additional affordable housing and mixed-income communities.

As outlined in this issue, HACC is preparing for the demolition of a total of 200 isolated units at the Celina Blake Homes in Ford Heights and the Edward Willett Homes in Robbins, both of which are in racially and economically segregated communities. The majority of affected residents have elected to take housing choice vouchers to seek better environments for their families.

HACC is also building relationships with many other organizations in efforts to redevelop struggling communities, improve public safety and provide opportunities for everyone, including small businesses, job-seekers needing additional training, and children looking for recreational and educational opportunities.

HACC has retained North American Management to assist in developing our strategic plan, the first phase of which will prepare HACC for the radical changes that HUD will make over the next five years and increase our capacity to successfully implement HUD’s new initiatives and programs.

HUD has charted a new course for the future of housing assistance programs. We, at HACC, know that to meet the needs of the families we serve; we must follow HUD’s lead. We will not hesitate. Too many opportunities would be lost.

Sincerely,
Lorri Newson
Executive Director



The Housing Authority of Cook County

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New Leases on Life for Residents of Celina Blake, Edward Willett Homes (continued)

“We hope to explore the possibilities of what can take place around that site,” said Robbins Assistant Village Administrator Napoleon Haney in regard to the site of the Willett Homes. “We’re looking forward to seeing: what are the possibilities?”

The Village has already created a Transit-Oriented Development area, centered on the Metra station just south of the Edward Willett site. By next year, they hope to build 60 to 70 units of affordable housing, and ultimately want to attract some light industrial and commercial businesses, as well as build parks and recreational facilities, which Robbins currently lacks. In collaboration with HACC, Robbins is applying for a Choice Neighborhood grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and has already received about \$1.7 million in Neighborhood Stabilization funds from Cook County. “Our first long-term vision is sustainable economic development, the type of projects that can generate revenue for a long period of time,” he said. “Second, we want to right-size the community to offer more amenities: parks, recreational opportunities.”

Working with Robbins officials is just one example of HACC’s growing trend toward collaboration with other agencies for the greater good.

“Normally, the housing authority will only deal with housing,” Haney said. “But they [HACC] really look at the holistic side of the resident, and they look at the holistic side of the region where the resident lives. It’s one of those types of partnerships that goes way beyond, ‘Here’s a housing voucher: you can stay here.’ We do a lot more, and the residents of HACC will benefit, as will the residents of Robbins.”

Residents of the two developments are just starting to move. HACC will demolish the buildings once they are vacant, later this year.



Raven Johnson moves into her new apartment.

Kim Cole, who also lived in Celina Blake, used her voucher to rent a single-family home in Sauk Village.

“It’s big,” she said. “I got a huge backyard.” With stores, restaurants and a park within walking distance, Cole and her three children – ages 14, 12 and 11 – don’t expect they’ll miss the old place at all.

“I’m so excited,” she said. “I packed everything early.”



James Jones

HACC’s Longest-Serving Commissioner Retires

In his 25 years as an HACC commissioner, James L. Jones has seen many changes. Jones, president of Jones & Jones Realty, joined the board in 1984, appointed by former county board president George Dunne.

“When we started, we were more like a very quiet organization that functioned very well in processing Section 8 certificates and providing housing for people.

We never really got outside of that realm,” he said. “Later on, the industry was moving toward mixed-income type housing. As the federal government had pretty much exhausted its resources in terms of providing dollars for construction, we have been able to partner with private industry and with certain governmental agencies to provide housing.”

Jones says his background as a real estate appraiser, a realtor and an owner of residential and commercial buildings, has proven helpful. With that insight, he helped

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HACC Teams Up with YWCA to Offer Economic Coaching

The mission of the YWCA is to eliminate racism, empower women and promote peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all. HACC, especially under Executive Director Lorri Newson, strives not only to provide housing, but to empower the families it serves to make their own lives better. Thus, it seems only natural that the organizations would join forces. HACC is now offering its female clients an opportunity to join the YWCA's Economic Empowerment Institute, a broad-based program to help women work toward economic self-sufficiency.

"It's our mission, as well as the YWCA's mission," said Carrie Joiner, special programs manager for HACC.

The YWCA started the Economic Empowerment Institute three years ago on the South Side of Chicago. The centerpiece of its program is one-on-one coaching in which an empowerment coach works with women on the economic concerns they have, from credit repair to career planning.

Jenny Delumo, a resource specialist in YWCA's empowerment services division, says counselors first focus on the client's immediate needs – childcare, employment, credit repair – while also keeping in mind the client's goals for her career and future. For example, if a client needs to take courses for a certification in her chosen field, the counselor will help her find a job that can accommodate her course schedule and vice versa.

We ask, "How do I get you a job that's going to get you the money you need now, while also getting you where you need to go?" Delumo said in an informational session for new HACC clients.

Because the clients have a variety of needs – some may only need credit repair or minimal job search assistance, others may be interested in a whole new career -- the counseling doesn't follow a standard format or length of time. The Economic Empowerment Institute commits to the women for two years although some may need less time, and some more. For those who want to continue their relationship with the Institute, the YWCA has added an alumni program, primarily to address the women's "need to connect to others," said Theresa Salas, director of Economic Empowerment Services for the YWCA. The



Jenny Delumo of the YWCA talks to HACC clients about the Economic Empowerment Institute.

program has forged long-lasting connections, said Salas: two former clients are now employees.

"What makes our program unique is that they feel like they've got someone who's supporting them," Salas said. One coach says, "I put choices in front of people, and they feel more empowered and in control."

In an effort to reach as many agencies and organizations as possible to support and expand their work, the YWCA contacted HACC, and so far the response has been positive.

Crystal Colford, a new HACC client who is interested in a career in criminal justice, intends to sign up.

"I definitely need to fix my credit," she said. "But I'm also just trying to get my career started and start on school. It sounds like a good program."

The Economic Empowerment Institute is open to all female HACC clients 18 years and older. For more information, or to sign up, call Delumo at (312) 762-2768, or call one of the following locations directly:

- **South Side of Chicago**
(773) 955-3100
- **South Suburbs**
(708) 754-0486
- **West Side of Chicago**
(773) 379-1177
- **West Suburbs**
(630) 580-5710

HACC Supports MBE/WBE, Small Businesses

As an organization focused on helping people achieve financial independence and security, HACC is a firm believer in supporting small businesses and those owned by minorities and women. From January 2008 through November 15, 2010, the Authority awarded more than \$8.6 million for contracts in excess of \$50,000. Of those awarded, more than \$3.6M benefit M/WBE firms, either as direct contractors or subcontractors.

"Any government agency is a body for the people," said Raven Johnson, HACC procurement coordinator. "The way we spend our money should be in a manner that supports as much diversity as there is in the people and communities we serve."



HUD Prosecutes Fraud Cases

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development takes fraud very seriously. In recent months, from Los Angeles to New York City, and from Boston to Jackson, Miss., dozens of tenants and landlords have been charged with or convicted of theft, perjury and/or fraud for collecting housing benefits they were not entitled to receive. These charges stemmed from failure to report income, unauthorized residents, non-residency or incorrectly reporting the relationship of residents.

Four former tenants in Miami-Dade pled guilty to grand theft and were collectively sentenced to 20 years probation and 15 years supervised release, as well as ordered to pay HUD \$123,614 in restitution. They had failed to report income or accurate household composition on housing certifications, and obtained \$253,984 in housing assistance to which they were not entitled.

Other sentences ranged from 2-12 years probation, plus one-to-ten years supervised release. Restitution to HUD or the relevant housing authority ranged from \$12,584 to \$122,064.

HACC urges its clients and tenants to report income of all household members. Failure to accurately report household income can lead to termination of a family's rental assistance and debarment from other federally-subsidized programs.

HACC Happenings Landlord Meetings

March 12, 2011

South Holland Public Library
16250 Wausau Avenue
South Holland IL, 60473
10 am-11:30 am

March 17, 2011

Evanston Public Library
1703 Orrington Avenue
Evanston, IL 60201
6 pm-7:30 pm

HACC's Long Serving Commissioner Retires (continued)

to create the Turnstone Corporation, an affordable housing developer that works closely with HACC.

Jones chaired the HACC board in 1997 when Alicia R. McCray, now Vice Chairman, joined. In particular, McCray praised Jones for his ability to look at long-term effects of planning, and his ability to separate the management question and the governance question. "We're not there to run the organization. But the governance question is about policy, philosophy, and, of course, how we measure our goals," says McCray.

McCray says she was also struck by Jones' desire to work collaboratively and to seek out other opinions.

"I think that's the only way you can successfully run any organization," said Jones, chuckling. "You always want to

incorporate around you people who are brighter than you are. If they get it right, you get some credit for it."

HACC Board Treasurer Karen R. Chavers knew Jones before she joined the board from her days of running a North Shore community organization. She called Jones a trailblazer for his vision to forge public-private partnerships

in affordable housing development. She also was struck by his lifelong commitment to putting the clients' needs first.

"His commitment and passion is not a 'stand-on-the-table, flinging-your arms kind of passion,'" she said. "He's just a real cool guy. He walks softly, but carries a big stick."

December 9th, 2010 marked Jones' last board meeting, and he's confident he's leaving the organization in good hands, with Board Chairman Elzie Higginbottom and Executive Director Lorri Newson. "They have this board moving in the proper direction, so they don't need counsel from me," he said.

At that meeting, he left his colleagues with this advice: "It is critical that you promote from within. Train people and make sure they are well-prepared to carry out the mission and the objectives of the agency."

However, he says he will miss the camaraderie among his fellow board members. "They do come to the table committed to trying to do the right thing," he said. "That's what we're all about: try to leave a mark where you've done some good for society."

HACC Recognizes Employees of the Year

People are the mission of HACC. Helping people find decent, safe and affordable housing, and ultimately helping them move into greater self-sufficiency is what the organization does. That task would be impossible without the people who work at HACC. Their skill, efficiency and even sense of humor can make all the difference in the way HACC serves its clients.

To recognize the important contributions of HACC employees, Executive Director Lorri Newson created the Employees of the Year program, which recently acknowledged its second group of “standout” employees.

“People come here every day and work hard,” Newson said. “They do the best they can do in order to improve the quality of life for the people we serve, and I think they deserve recognition for it.”

Employees in each department voted for the person or people who best exemplified hard work, proficiency and other values HACC stands for. The eleven winners for 2010 are:

- **Finance Department: Alesia Hushaw**, fixed asset accountant. In addition to her enthusiasm and proactive attention to detail, Hushaw was recognized in particular for cleaning up the Fixed Assets Register audit issues and the excellent manner in which she handles the Capital Grant Funds.
- **Housing Choice Voucher Department: Marylita Edwards**, housing specialist. Coworkers praised Edwards’ excellent customer service and said that she welcomes new opportunities and challenges, and is respectful and courteous to clients as well as her fellow employees.
- **Housing Choice Voucher Department: Askeona Hodges**, housing specialist. Described as “quiet but effective,” Hodges was recognized for her “can-do attitude,” professionalism and excellent customer service.
- **Housing Choice Voucher Department: Barry Sturm**, management assistant. Sturm was described as very knowledgeable, and “willing and able to assist with anything.” In particular, they praised Sturm’s taking time to review the Cook County Recorder of Deeds website to assist landlords in getting deeds to show ownership of property.
- **Housing Choice Voucher Department, Inspections: Carol Ryan**, inspector. Ryan’s work received praise not only from coworkers, but from clients and landlords as well. Coworkers described her as extremely professional and very knowledgeable in the area of HQS inspections.
- **Information Technology: Mark Davis**, IT field technician. Coworkers praised Davis’ willingness to take on new challenges as they arise and helping the end user get fast results with resolving their help desk tickets. They added, “He is resolving their issues and always willing to assist with any inquiries – even those submitted at the last-minute or that require him to be on-site before 8:30 a.m.”



Patricia Montenegro, a contractor administrator in the Procurement department, is one of HACC’s Employees of the Year

- **Procurement: Patricia Montenegro**, contract administrator. Described as “the quintessential team player,” Montenegro also received praise for her depth of knowledge regarding procurement policies and past practices of the Agency.
- **Public Housing, North: Muharem Fale**, resident custodian. Coworkers described Fale as “highly competent and knowledgeable.” He is known for his tireless work ethic and commitment to provide excellent services to all public housing residents.
- **Public Housing, South: Calvin Morris**, janitor helper. Though not a lead maintenance worker, Morris has often worked in that capacity, sometimes as the only maintenance person on site, at the Edward Willett Homes, Richard Flowers Homes and Edward Brown Apartments. He was recognized for saving the Agency money by using parts from vacant units to mitigate emergencies, and by attempting to assess problems before calling a contractor.
- **Maintenance, Chicago Heights: Lance Penro**, lead maintenance tech. Penro, was recognized for his skill, willingness to put in extra time as needed and, perhaps most importantly, his ability to keep the staff at Chicago Heights laughing.
- **Public Housing, Waitlist: LaToya Norfleet**, waitlist coordinator. Norfleet received praise for her positive attitude and efficiency, as well as her ability to take initiative with projects, and understand and clearly promote the HACC mission.

The employees were recognized at a luncheon in December and each received a gift card in appreciation of their work.

Know Your Case Manager

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N - S (as of Feb 2011)
T - Z, (S through Jan 2011)
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Newsletter for the Housing Authority of Cook County

Board of Commissioners

The Board of Commissioners of 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*

Joseph Martin, *Commissioner*

Karen R. Chavers, *Treasurer*

Edna Carter, *Commissioner*

