

**Special
Edition
September 2000**

Building Better Communities -
Neighborhood by Neighborhood



The Advocate

NJ Department of Community Affairs ♦ Division of Housing and Community Resources

Welcome to the Governor's Conference on Housing 2000



**Jane M. Kenny
Commissioner**

Greetings from the Governor's Conference on Housing 2000. On behalf of Governor Whitman, it's my pleasure to welcome you. Our conference organizers have once again delivered a program that will inform and inspire. Our exhibit floor, meanwhile, gets bigger and better each year. Be sure to see it all.

This past year provided many reasons to celebrate. Neighborhoods across New Jersey are experiencing a remarkable renewal. The urban housing boom continued,

bringing development to neighborhoods at a scale not seen in decades. Communities everywhere are stronger than they were a year ago. Everyone in the housing field, whether from the private, public or nonprofit sectors, should feel a sense of accomplishment.

Of course, it helps to have a governor who has made affordable housing and community development top priorities. That support is evidenced by a whole tool kit of programs backed by meaningful resources designed to revitalize cities and older suburbs.

Consider our new construction code for older buildings, the Rehabilitation Subcode. Rehabilitation work in New Jersey's five largest cities, Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, Elizabeth and Trenton, has nearly doubled in the two years the rehab code has been in effect, rising 92 percent from 1997 through 1999. Success like that gets noticed. Our rehab code captured the Ford Foundation's prestigious Innovations in American Government Award. Now other states are following New Jersey's lead. Maryland recently passed legislation to create its own version of the rehab code. Similar legislation is pending in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

The new Downtown Living Initiative, meanwhile, is helping cities attract and retain the middle-class by enabling developers to build market-rate housing. Backed by \$15 million in state funding, Downtown Living is responsible for building the first market-rate housing that some neighborhoods have seen in a generation.

Another new tool in the tool kit is the New Jersey College and University Homebuyers' Program, which encourages employees of New Jersey's public colleges and universities to buy and improve homes in their host cities.

The "Too Good, But It's True," program, which provides 30-year mortgages at a fixed five percent interest rate with zero points, is allowing many first-time homeowners to pay less for a mortgage than they paid in rent. To date, the Too Good program has provided 300 mortgage loans totaling more than \$25 million, while the Urban Homeownership Recovery Program provided financing for more than 2,250 homes.

That's just a sample of the tools that are rebuilding New Jersey. It takes more than programs to rebuild a community, though. It takes men and women who are committed to a vision of creating good places to live, work and raise a family. You are those people, and I know I speak for all of you when I declare that we are determined to make the coming year even better.

Jane M. Kenny

Simply the Best...Again

Best Practices 2000



Accepting Best Practices award from left to right are Jackie Grabine, Assistant Bureau Chief; Roy Ziegler, Assistant Director, Division of Housing and Community Resources; and Fran Lawton, Supervisor, ROC Program.

DCA Captures Consecutive Awards for Housing Innovation

In a rare back-to-back feat, DCA has won its second

"Best of the Best Practices Award" in as many years from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for its innovative Section 8 housing initiatives.

At the same time, the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (HMFA) also captured a HUD "Best of the Best" award in 2000.

"These awards speak to the dedication of our housing staffs at DCA and HMFA," said DCA Commissioner Kenny. "The Whitman Administration is committed to providing innovative programs to meet the housing needs of New Jersey's families."

From a pool of 2,800 entries, the DCA and HMFA programs were chosen by HUD as two of the top 100 best practices in housing.

The Section 8 program won the 2000 award from HUD for its implementation of the Regional Opportunity Counseling (ROC) program.

HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo presented the award to Division of Housing and Community Resources Assistant Director Roy Ziegler, Assistant Chief Jackie Grabine and ROC Program Supervisor Fran Lawton at a Washington, D.C. ceremony.

The ROC program assists Section 8 Housing Program participants who wish to relocate from high poverty neighborhoods to better quality housing by providing housing counseling, advocacy, transportation, tenant education and landlord outreach for participants. More than 130 households have obtained better quality housing since the program's inception in 1988, and 400 families have received housing counseling.

In granting the award to DCA, HUD noted that although the DCA program operates with limited staff, it partners with public and private entities to address the needs of both Section 8 participants and landlords traditionally reluctant to become involved in the voucher program.

In 1999, DCA's Section 8 program won the HUD "Best of the Best Practices Award" for its effective administration of the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, which has helped more than 100 families escape the welfare system. A total of 53 families have become first-time home buyers with the help of the program, and some 650 families have accumulated a total of \$3 million in savings accounts.

Each year, local HUD offices recognize outstanding community achievement with a Best Practices designation. The programs selected as Best Practices are chosen for their positive impact, creative use of resources and partnership with government agencies, non-profit groups and private businesses. The programs must be models that can be duplicated elsewhere. The Best of the Best Top 100 housing programs are selected from among the local winners.

NJ's College & University Homebuyers' Program a Success

A new state initiative that encourages employees of select, urban public colleges and universities to live in target areas near campus has shown success in its first six months. The New Jersey College & University Homebuyers' Program has so far resulted in 24 home sales, with 17 additional sales pending.

The program offers \$10,000 in down payment assistance to full-time faculty or staff who buy homes in target areas established in Camden, Jersey City, New Brunswick, Newark, Trenton, and Vineland. These cities were selected because they participate in the Urban Coordinating Council and have a public college, university, or community college based in them.

In addition, faculty and staff who already own homes in a target area could apply for up to \$5,000 in state matching funds to make improvements to their homes' exterior. Additional benefits, such as below-market mortgage rates and other HMFA incentives, are available for employees who meet certain income and purchase price limits.

Pre-Development Loan Partnership to be Honored

By Ronald Intile

The Pre-Development Partnership Loan Program, a collaboration between the Department of Community Affairs and financial institutions doing business in New Jersey, was created in 1996. The program was designed to provide nonprofit housing producers with a source of interest free loans to support their pre-development activities. To date, this highly successful program has lent more than \$4,000,000 to 65 nonprofit organizations and lead to the production of more than 2,500 housing units.

Partnering with us in the Pre-Development Loan Program are: The Chase Manhattan Bank, The Reinvestment Fund, Dime Savings Bank, First Union Bank, First Union Foundation, Fleet Bank, New Jersey Community Loan Fund, Sovereign Bank, and Summit Bank. Commissioner Kenny of the Department of Community Affairs will honor our partners for their service and commitment to affordable housing at the Governor's Housing Conference.

For more information on this program contact Ron Intile at (609) 292-9470.

Ronald Intile is Program Manager with the Department's Division of Housing and Community Resources' Office of Housing Advocacy.

What Devon Taught Me

By Donna W. Turner



Governor Whitman poses with Devon, his sister Kristina and best friend, Ivan Vasquez.

I first met Devon Fuentes when he was eight years old. I was working as a volunteer at the Millville Police Athletic League (PAL) when his mother wheeled him inside. Not having been introduced yet, I watched with horrified fascination as it took three people more than 40 minutes to get Devon from his seat in the family van into his wheelchair and up the ramp into the PAL building. He was sur-

rounded by so much equipment and so many hoses that I couldn't even be sure who I was looking at - until he came inside.

His mother Carol introduced herself, her other children, and then Devon, her second oldest child. I just then remembered reading about him a few years before - how he was hit by a car at the age of five and was virtually left for dead. Miraculously, after spending nearly seven months recuperating at the DuPont Institute, Devon came back home - but in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the neck down. Carol told me that she brought Devon to PAL because he was a lucky boy. Several local businesspeople had raised money to buy Devon a computer that would allow him to communicate better - and Devon insisted that his old computer be donated to PAL so that some other less fortunate child would be able to play on it. Although this happened years ago, I vividly remember this moment.

Recently, I received a frantic call from Devon's mom asking me if I knew of anyone who might be able to help the family. After years of paralysis, Devon's spine had become dangerously curved and was pressing on his lungs, greatly diminishing his lung capacity. Even with the respirator, Devon's health was rapidly deteriorating and he needed immediate spinal surgery. Carol said that once the surgery was over Devon would need more space to accommodate his new equipment, which had to be replaced due to Devon's recent growth. Devon's condition required more than 75 large boxes of medical supplies each month and around the clock nursing care. The Fuentes' modest house, which was already overcrowded due to Devon's condition, would just not be large enough to make adjustments needed for the growing child. Carol said she talked to everyone she knew and nobody was able to commit to helping her.

Under the direction of Chair Marj Stullenburger, AHOME, Inc., a faith-based nonprofit developer in Millville, had been substantially renovating homes in the city's residential area for affordable home ownership for more than ten years. After receiving administrative grants from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs' Office of Housing Advocacy, which helped sponsor board of director training last January, AHOME agreed to expand its mission to include community building. When asked by David and Carol Fuentes to help their son, the AHOME board agreed to take on a major fund raising project to build a critical care addition onto their home, in a project now called "Devon's Room."

Raising the \$80,000 that it was estimated to cost was a daunting task, but not nearly as daunting as the life that Devon lived. He had recently undergone a successful 12 hours of spinal surgery, during which time AHOME had collected more than \$13,000. This was a great start, but we needed much more, so we decided that a major fund raising project would be started.

AHOME sent T-shirts to celebrities and prominent Americans with a letter asking that the shirts be signed and returned to AHOME for auction. Two weeks later I received terrible news - Devon had unexpectedly slipped into a coma and was clinically dead. At the family's request, I attended the Last Rites at the hospital and watched Devon slip away. As devastated as the family was at this sudden, sad state of events, they took comfort in

(continued on next page)



Lead On the Road

By Stephen Embley

The Lead-Based Paint Abatement Program (LBPAP)'s "Lead On The Road" continues to expand its outreach efforts throughout the State by attending a number of local activities and events this summer and early fall.

In June the LBPAP made a stop in the Borough of Highlands, Monmouth County to participate in the "Fourth Annual Highlands Clam Festival" on June 15-18. The festival was sponsored by the Highlands Businessmen's Association and attracted several thousand festival visitors from all over New Jersey.

The festival featured four days of games, crafts, entertainment, and of course, clams.

The LBPAP staff attended all four days answering questions from tenants and homeowners about the hazards of lead-based paint in their homes. The staff also provided visitors and parents with brochures and handouts for their children on the hazards of lead-based paint.

Local Highlands Borough businessman and owner of the Lusty Lobster restaurant, Doug Douty, partnered with the Department by sponsoring the production of "Lead-Safe Pledge" certificates. Children six years and younger were given "Lead-Safe Pledge" certificates and asked to follow each of the pledge items. The LBPAP recognizes Mr. Douty and Highlands Businessmen's Association for its gener-

osity and efforts in assisting the Department with its outreach efforts.

"Lead On The Road" made its second major stop of the summer in Perth Amboy. On July 1 the LBPAP staff participated in the Feast of St. Anthony at St. Anthony's Church. The feast featured four days of family games, entertainment, and of course great food. The LBPAP in its continuing effort to involve parents and children most affected by lead-based paint hazards asked parents and children to take the "Lead Safe Pledge" and provided them with brochures about the hazards of lead-based paint. The LBPAP staff gave children a "kid's package" consisting of sun visors, sun glasses, and frisbees that were flying high all day at the feast.

August 28 saw the LBPAP score a game winning hit as "Lead On The Road" made its appearance in Augusta, Sussex County as the guests of the New Jersey Cardinals. The Cardinals are a Class A minor league affiliate of the St. Louis Cardinals. In addition to fielding numerous questions about lead-based paint hazards, staff distributed "kid's packages" to the children attending the game.

"Lead On The Road" will be finishing this year's summer run by attending a number of farmer's markets and harvest festivals in Jersey City and the Borough of Highlands. To find out more about the "Lead On The Road" program and other lead-based issues and activities, call the toll free Lead Hotline at 1-877-DCALeAD.

Stephen Embley is a Program Manager with the Division's Lead-Based Paint Abatement program.

Devon...continued

carrying out Devon's last wish that his organs be donated. Five days later, Devon was laid to rest.

During this tragic time, the shirts started coming back - some with autographs, some with gifts, actor Robin Williams sent an autographed script of the movie "Flubber" along with his shirt. Other celebrities who returned the shirts and donated items include Martha Stewart, Olympic Gold Medalist Tara Lipinski, chef Emeril Lagasse, author Stephen King, and Miss America 2000. We expect to receive many more back.

Although there is no longer a need for "Devon's Room," AHOME is moving forward with the auction to benefit the new "Devon's Fund." At the request of Devon's family, the proceeds from the auction, which is expected to take place later this year, will be used to establish a foundation to help other children with permanent, disabling injuries.

The AHOME organization has an all-volunteer board of directors who are dedicated to bringing back the character and charm in the residential areas of Millville. To date, it has helped 21 families realize the dream of home ownership, and in the case of the Fuentes family, to help them any way they can after their devastating loss. They are a group of concerned citizens who have decided to make their visions realities.

Devon Fuentes' very short life had a profound impact on mine. It was his desire to help others that lead him to give his computer away when he was eight years old, and his desire to be an organ donor that has helped at least a dozen others live. This is Devon's legacy.

If you would like to keep Devon's memory alive, and help others, please send donations to: The Devon Fund, c/o AHOME, Inc., P.O. Box 241, Millville, NJ 08332. Your donation will be acknowledged.

Donna W. Turner is the Executive Director of AHOME, Inc.

East Orange Housing Authority FSS Participant Purchases Home

By Rose Crenshaw

An awards ceremony was held on May 19, 2000, in honor of Mr. Russell Ray, a graduate of the East Orange Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS). The FSS Program is a 5-year Program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Program is open to East Orange residents currently receiving Section 8 benefits through the Housing Authority or families who reside at Arcadian Gardens public housing units.

The Program helps its participants by developing a plan to achieve the goal of self-sufficiency. A tax-free, interest-bearing escrow savings account is established in the participant's name and supportive services are matched with the needs of the participants.

Mr. Ray became part of the initial group of FSS Program participants in 1997. He was living in a high-rise apartment complex in East Orange and yearned for the advantages of a home - a vegetable garden for himself and fresh air outdoor activities for his son. Mr. Ray, a single parent, began receiving Section 8 assistance in 1996. His goal was to purchase a home. In February 2000, he purchased a two-bedroom home in Orange using the \$7000 in his escrow account for down payment and closing costs.

Two more participants are expected to purchase homes by the end of the year.

Rose Crenshaw is the Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator for East Orange Housing Authority.



Rose Crenshaw presents Russell Ray with a plaque at graduation ceremony.

Play It Safe

By Drue Kale

Children in New Jersey will be able to play more safely thanks to the landmark playground safety bill signed into law on March 23, 1999. This law requires that New Jersey public school playgrounds and other public facilities meet the safety guidelines set forth from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). New playgrounds must comply when they are built, and existing facilities have a compliance period of five years from the date the law was signed.

Each year it is estimated that more than 200,000 preschool and elementary aged children in the United States receive emergency care for playground product related injuries. A recent report by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons puts this number even higher at 565,000.

There are several factors that need to be taken into consideration for a playground to be considered safe. The CPSC has recommended that a shock-absorbing surface be placed under and around all playground equipment. Height of equipment, depth of loose surface materials and use zones also have to be considered.

The Commission also has a Public Playground Safety Checklist which includes 10 important tips for parents and community groups to keep in mind to help ensure playground safety. For information regarding playgrounds and the Checklist, contact the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. CPSC's toll free hotline is (800) 638-2772, or visit its web site at www.cpsc.gov.

New Jersey has a Barrier-Free Subcode. Emily Templeton is the Code Enforcement Officer for the Division of Codes and Standards within the Department of Community Affairs. For further information, she may be reached at (609) 633-2423.

Drue Kale, Program Manager in the Division's Office of Recreation.

Nonprofit Corner

NORWESCAP's First "Dollars to Dreams" Graduate

By Georjean W. Trinkle

At a small ceremony in Boonton on May 24, 2000, NORWESCAP presented a check for \$750 to Carmela Yodice, the first graduate from NORWESCAP's Individual Development Account Program, "Dollars to Dreams." The program encourages its participants to save toward the purchase of a house by providing a matching grant of up to \$750. There are currently 32 participants in NORWESCAP's region of New Jersey, which includes Hunterdon, Morris, Somerset, Sussex, and Warren Counties.

Carmela Yodice is a single parent of two children who lives in the Morris County area. She enrolled in the Dollars to Dreams Program in September of 1999. She used her savings and the grant toward the payment of closing costs and is now a first-time home owner.



NORWESCAP is proud to help families such as the Yodice family become asset holders. The success of the program is measured by the success of our participants.

Georjean W. Trinkle is the Program Director for NORWESCAP.

Georjean W. Trinkle, Program Director; Carmela Yodice; Deborah Meade, IDA Case Manager.

Scholar Expresses Gratitude

Dear Commissioner Kenny:

I just wanted to thank you for the wonderful experience I had this summer as a First Union/DCA Housing Scholar. The training was comprehensive and packed with information that really helped me to succeed this summer at Community Access. During my time with the agency, I have worked on affordable housing issues, supportive housing for adults with disabilities, and assisted in writing a grant to obtain a shelter for homeless youth. Thank you for giving me the chance to truly impact on housing issues, and I hope more students can be granted this opportunity in the future.

Thank You!

Gina Briscese, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

The Advocate

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The Advocate is a quarterly newsletter produced by the Division of Housing and Community Resources for organizations interested in providing low- and moderate-income housing and community services in New Jersey. For further information, call Janis Ginsburg at (609) 292-9470.

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Department of Community Affairs
Jane M. Kenny, Commissioner

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Office of Housing Advocacy
Meyer Pincelli, Administrator

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

OCT. 2000

26-27 Main Street New Jersey's DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INSTITUTE Seminar 4 of 4, Promoting Downtown. Contact Jef Buehler at (609)633-9769 or MSNJ@Juno.com.

DEC.

8 Second Annual Conference on Supportive Housing. Theme: "Opening the Doors to Independence." Jamesburg, NJ. For additional information call (908) 931-1131 or www.shanj.org.

JAN. 2001

Tax Credit Application Workshop. For additional details contact. Marty Bershtein at HMFA (609) 278-7579.

FEB.

Deadline for HMFA Tax Credit Application