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East Akron Neighborhood Development Corporation

Celebrating a Marketplace's Grand Opening

Ronald Wheeler, board president of East Akron Neighborhood Development Corporation (EANDC), is proud of the work EANDC has done over 22 years. But little could match his excitement over the October opening of Middlebury Market Place, a \$12 million retail shopping center anchored by the first supermarket the Middlebury community has seen in eight years.

"Neighbors around here couldn't wait for it to open," said Wheeler, a lifetime resident. "It's very vital to this area."

Just how vital was underscored by Ossie Gordon,

senior vice president and corporate CRA officer for First Merit Bank. "You knew when you saw senior citizens getting off the bus with eight grocery bags that it was pretty clear something needed to be done," he said.

Not having to trek almost five miles to the next-closest grocery store is just one of the many benefits of Middlebury Market Place. Jobs, additional retail services, banking services and – perhaps most importantly – a renewed sense of pride are just a few of the assets Middlebury Market Place brings to Akron's most diverse and least affluent community.



Community Role

Like EANDC itself, Middlebury Market Place had its genesis in community activists. Among them is Ethel Chambers, president of the Perkins Street Block Club.

Neighborhood residents were angry that the site of a former grocery store had long remained a vacant eyesore. More importantly, Chambers said, “People got upset and couldn’t understand why they couldn’t have a grocery store” in their immediate community.

Along with fellow block club leader Janice Sturkey and others, Chambers started campaigning, “talking, talking, talking” to city administrators and anybody else who would listen. “And out of that,” she said, “a store was born.”

That’s the condensed version. Middlebury Market Place’s grand opening in October is a testament to years of hard work and planning by EANDC staff and supporters. They in turn were aided by the continued support of resident leaders like Ethel Chambers and strong partnerships with city government and the private sector.

Grady Appleton has been EANDC’s executive director since its founding in 1982. He led it through years of steady growth and progress. The results include millions of dollars of investment in single-family and multifamily housing construction and renovation; weatherization, lead-based paint abatement, and other services to make homes safer, more energy efficient, and more affordable; and economic development activities that provide capital, technical assistance, and training to small businesses. (See “EANDC’s Other Accomplishments,” page 35.)

Even so, Appleton said, one need remained “very apparent.”

“We needed a retail core,” he said, “and especially a supermarket. We had heard about other CDCs successfully developing retail centers and saw a potential opportunity here.”

So in 1995, EANDC began to work seriously on turning a prominent but unutilized corner of East Akron’s Middlebury neighborhood into a showcase.

A Nine-Year Journey

EANDC’s vision of what would serve its community well took a great deal of work – and a lot of persistence and dedication – to actualize.

After EANDC completed a feasibility study and secured a lease with a supermarket operator, the city backed the project 100 percent, Appleton said. The city took the important first step of purchasing and removing contaminants from the EPA-designated brownfields site, which had been vacant for 10 years. The clean-up was made possible by a grant from the Clean Ohio Fund, a \$400

million state program designed to preserve green space and farmland, improve outdoor recreation, and revitalize blighted neighborhoods by redeveloping polluted properties.

The land is leased to EANDC for 20 years, after which EANDC will own it.

EANDC also pulled together other partners who proved to be critical to the effort’s success, especially when it came to piecing together the complex financing typical of such ventures.

“Everybody wanted the bank to be on board first,” said Ossie Gordon of First Merit Bank, “which got other lenders on board and made the city comfortable that the project would be financed.” As a board member of EANDC and experienced lender on previous development corporation projects, Gordon helped pull together a loan package that led to a first-mortgage approval.

Once this was done, then other partners were elicited. These included state government, federal agencies such as the Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Health and Human Services, banks (notably First Merit Bank, which provided the first mortgage), Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation (which contributed a \$100,000 capital grant to the project), and several private funds (including the Akron Development Fund and the Ohio Community Development Finance Fund).

Next came establishing a strong development team. It included EANDC (owner of the shopping center), O’Connor-Abell Inc., a consulting company that has studied successful shopping-center developments by nonprofit organizations around the country, and Neighborhood Revitalization Partners Inc., a for-profit housing and commercial property developer. The team also included city planners and architectural engineers, all with experience in this kind of development.

Architectural drawings were completed and approved, and a ribbon-cutting ceremony took place in October 2003. Once winter came and went, Appleton said, construction on the 67,500-square-foot complex went into full swing.

Landing a Supermarket

It was this back-story that ultimately attracted Dave’s Supermarket to the site.

Dave’s is a family-owned company based in Cleveland that developed and operates a chain of six (now, seven) stores in the region. According to Dan Saltzman, who’s in business with his father, Bert, brother, Steve, “and about 800 very hard-working associates,” Dave’s has focused almost exclusively on urban markets.

“The Akron site and opportunity seemed to fit well with



At the grand opening, Dan Salzman of Dave's Market is at the microphone. With him (from the right) are Grady Appleton of EANDC, Anthony Rego of Seaway Foods, and Ethel Chambers of the Perkins Street Block Club. PHOTO BY A.P. BOLEN PHOTOGRAPHER

Chambers said. "SUMMA Health Services is building a critical-care unit; Akron University is building in a 40-block area. All of this will help build the area up. It will all be great for the community, bringing in jobs and other opportunities."

Ossie Gordon agreed the marketplace will have a significant impact. "It's a beautiful plaza," he said. "We know it will make a difference in the neighborhood. Plus, there's a commitment from the grocery store to hire at least 100 people from the neighborhood, and it just adds to the general beauty of the neighborhood."

the niche that we operate in," Dan Saltzman said, "and we liked the fact that the neighborhood and the community have really embraced the project."

But what the Saltzmans really appreciated were the years of hard work that went into the process of creating Middlebury Market Place. "A project like this wouldn't have a remote chance of occurring if the city of Akron and the local development group didn't work in harmony as well as they do," Dan Saltzman said. "They made the deal of doing this a pretty pleasant proposition for our company."

Ethel Chambers is pleased that Dave's Supermarket decided to come to East Akron. "It's a good chain," she said. "They treat people good, keep their stores clean, and have good food in their stores. When I heard they were coming in, I was really satisfied."

Middlebury Market Place will serve several communities in East Akron, including the Akron City Hospital Area, the Goodyear Heights neighborhood, the University of Akron campus, and Middlebury, which Chambers called a "distinct, historic area."

Making a Difference

Chambers believes that residents have yet to understand how good the future will be for this ethnically diverse and relatively young community. She sees the shopping center as part of an overall revitalization effort that will have a big impact on families and neighborhoods.

"EANDC is doing wonderful things with housing,"

"This is the first new plaza in the city in about 40 years," he said. "That alone is significant."

Lease-up of Middlebury Market Place is expected to be complete by spring 2005, according to EANDC Board President Ronald Wheeler, who said the community is really excited about the potential for having its needs served.

"We'll get a lot of customers," Wheeler said. "People are really planning to patronize this place. They know this is something really special." ■



EANDC's Other Accomplishments

Although new to the NeighborWorks® network, East Akron Neighborhood Development Corporation (EANDC) has been successfully revitalizing its community since 1982. It was created by a local citizens' council and members of a local community center, East Akron Community House (EACH), who recognized the need to improve the area's aging housing stock.

EANDC started out primarily as a housing developer for a two-mile area of the center city, according to founding Executive Director Grady Appleton. Over time, it has expanded both geographically and programmatically. EANDC now serves all of Akron, Summit County, and neighboring Stark County. Its programs have grown from preserving and constructing affordable housing to providing energy services to low-income families, supporting small business development, and generating other economic development activities.

In addition to Middlebury Market Place, EANDC's other accomplishments include:

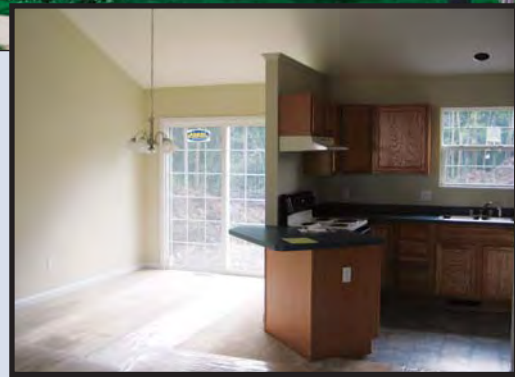
► **New Housing Development.** EANDC has created 400 units of affordable housing – single-family, multifamily and senior. Currently, it's in the fifth phase of its Arlington Homes Project. Fifty new homes have generated \$5 million in investment thus far. Currently under construction as part of this program is Apple Court, 10 homes valued at \$1.4 million. This program makes new homes available to first-time homebuyers who earn 65 percent or less of area median income.

► **Housing Preservation.** Since the early 1990s, EANDC has preserved 208 units of single-family housing.

► **Multifamily Housing Development.** During the years 2002 and 2003, EANDC built Zion Terrace Apartments, a three-story, 40-unit apartment building for individuals or families with at least one member aged 55 or older.

► **Property Management.** The property management division of EANDC manages all IRS Section 42 housing that is sponsored, developed and built from an award of federal tax credits to EANDC through the Ohio Housing Finance Agency. The division currently manages and maintains 331 single-family homes and a six-unit, Section 8 apartment building.

► **Economic Development.** Through its Enterprise Community Fund, a community development financial institution, EANDC provides capital, technical assistance, and training to small businesses. Established in 1996 with



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funding from the city of Akron and seven local banks, the Enterprise Community Fund provides financial services to small business owners and entrepreneurs who normally would not be considered bankable. To date, the fund has made 34 loans.

► **Akron Lead Based Paint Hazard Control Program (ALBPHCP).** ALBPHCP was established in 1997 to assist homeowners, tenants and landlords with lead hazards. To date, the program has successfully completed 175 lead abatement jobs. In addition, EANDC and the Mahoning County Lead-Based Paint Hazard Control Program were awarded a \$2.6 million Lead Hazard Demonstration Grant to help reduce lead and assist with housing rehab at the same time.

► **Home Weatherization Assistance Program (HWAP).** EANDC is in its 12th year in providing weatherization services to low-income families through a federally funded program. Through the Energy Services office, HWAP is also able to provide a limited number of furnace and hot water heater replacements and minor electrical work, in addition to weatherization services, to eligible households in East Akron. ■