



FEATURE STORIES

Celebrating Welch Plaza

# Seattle's CADA Completes \$27 Million Mixed-Use Project

BY CHARLOTTE UNDERWOOD

Central Area Development Association (CADA), a Seattle NeighborWorks® organization, has celebrated the completion of Welch Plaza, the largest mixed-use development in the city's central area in more than 30 years.

Welch Plaza consists of three buildings that include 162 units of rental housing as well as 18,000 square feet of commercial space. As a result of the new plaza, residents enjoy many conveniences such as access to major bus routes, schools, health services, food outlets and various businesses.

In the \$27 million joint venture with Lorig & Associates, a leading Seattle real-estate developer, CADA purchased land from the city of Seattle and a long-term ground lease from the Welch family, which formerly owned the neighborhood's Welch Hardware store. The store was forced to close due to unfavorable economic conditions, but in honor of the Welches' longevity and business investment in the neighborhood, the new property was named Welch Plaza.

Other investors in the project included Bank of America, city of Seattle's offices of Economic Development and Housing, and private equity investors. Neighborhood Reinvestment provided critical operating support during the predevelopment and development processes.

On hand to commemorate CADA's grand celebration were Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels, Seattle Seahawk's Shaun Alexander, and Washington Mutual's Bob Flowers, among others.

"I think it's great," said Akilah Stewart, who works across the street from Welch Plaza. "It's been a good addition to the community – it went up quickly; therefore, it didn't inconvenience the neighborhood."

Erica Porter, CADA's assistant project manager, summarized community residents' sentiments this way: "Residents really like the new plaza, particularly because it's so convenient – it has everything they need. Washington Mutual is in the neighborhood now. Residents don't have to go downtown to conduct business."

"Washington Mutual remains committed to deepening our roots in local, urban areas," said Bob Flowers, vice president of community lending and investment. "We're excited to offer financial services to this growing

community."

Welch Plaza's construction brought many job opportunities for a diverse community. Fifty-nine percent of the workers came from low-income households. Many new jobs have also been created as a result of the new businesses in the plaza.

According to CADA Chief Executive Officer George Stagers, "This project epitomizes the dedication of this community to come together and work together toward the future. Everyone in this project has contributed to the revitalization of this neighborhood, one of the steps in the continued growth of this area."

To augment this revitalization effort, which includes revitalization of a major artery in the community, two additional mixed-use and affordable housing projects are planned for the near future. ■

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*For additional information: Central Area Development Association [www.cada.org](http://www.cada.org); Lorig & Associates [www.lorig.com](http://www.lorig.com); Welch Plaza Leasing Office [www.welchplaza.com](http://www.welchplaza.com).*



Guests celebrate the opening of Welch Plaza.

COURTESY CADA

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# Doris Alexander: A Dream Comes True

BY DEB ELZINGA

The work of homeownership creation is no easy task. For many of the people we work with, there often are serious obstacles to overcome before their dream of homeownership can be realized.

Throughout the NeighborWorks® network, there are countless success stories, demonstrating the power of counseling and training. Those are the stories that gratify us and make us proud of the work we are involved in. But, every once in a while, someone really special comes along, whose spirit and tenacity inspire us, and this is one of those stories.

It was last year, about two weeks before Thanksgiving, when the fulfillment of a dream started to come true in Freeport, Illinois. The dream was that of first-time homeownership, and it belonged to Doris Alexander, one of Neighborhood Housing Services of Freeport's homebuyer education graduates. The summer before, Alexander had begun participating in NHS's counseling and education program.

At NHS of Freeport, our approach is one of empowerment and self-investment. We guide and assist people like Alexander, through counseling, coaching and education so they can overcome the barriers they may have encountered in previous attempts to become a homeowner.

Alexander started working with Pat Brown, NHS's loan specialist and homebuyer education coordinator, and, like many of the people who come to us, Alexander really didn't think it was possible at first. But after working with Pat Brown and taking the necessary steps to address her specific challenges, things began to come together for her.

## Steps to Success

Ultimately, Alexander reached her goal of being approved for a loan. She graduated from our eight-hour homebuyer education class, and then she was on her way. She began to look for a home for herself and her two sons, and that's when the excitement began to build.

Within a relatively short time, Alexander found her "dream house." After she signed the contract, she sat in a rocking chair on the front porch of what she hoped would become her new home. She sat there for quite a while, not wanting to leave and interrupt the special moment. In the



Doris Alexander, successful homeowner

PHOTO BY CAROL WALLER

end, her offer was accepted, and Alexander was that much closer to fulfilling her goal.

Then, one day last November, I answered the NHS's phone, and it was Alexander. She said, "Twenty days." I sat there for a moment, clueless as to what she was talking about. After a little pause, she told me that she was counting down to her closing. We both laughed, and when I hung up, I was reminded of why our work is so important, and why I am fortunate to be a part of it.

The "countdown" continued for the next two weeks, and I am happy to report that Alexander and her two sons moved into her home on November 25.

Assisting people like Alexander is truly a collective effort and occurs because of our partnership with the city of Freeport, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, and our local lending partners, along with the generous support of many in our community.

In this particular instance, we also had the opportunity to provide Alexander with some grant funds by way of the HOME Program's Homebuyer Assistance Program, administered by the Illinois Housing Development Authority.

Doris Alexander and her family have proudly joined the ranks of homeownership, and we couldn't be happier for them. We congratulate her for all the effort and hard work she put into making her dream come true, and we thank her for reminding us why we do this work. ■

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