

In Buffalo's West Side

How Partnering with a Bank Helped Lift a Community

West Side residents of Buffalo, New York, many of whom don't own cars, faced an obstacle that many urban residential communities share: lack of banking options within walking distance of their community. With no banks in the neighborhood, West Side residents were forced to pay for transportation to use banks elsewhere, or use local ATMs, with expensive withdrawal fees.

West Side residents have also been drawn to sources of predatory lending offered by local retailers, including "pay-day lending" and costly check-cashing services.

Even students of the West Side's D'Youville College, some of whom are community residents and others commuters, had to deal with the neighborhood's lack of banks. But with more than \$50 million in college improvements in recent years and expanding student housing in the neighborhood, many D'Youville students, faculty, and administrators pressed for a bank in the community.

West Side Neighborhood Housing Services also was affected, and Executive Director Linda Chiarenza became determined to increase banking options for the West Side community.

In hopes of solving the problem, Chiarenza initiated a partnership with Greater Buffalo Savings Bank. The bank soon realized the ongoing revitalization and restoration of the West Side neighborhood. "West Wide NHS," accord-

ing to the bank's Eric Gadley, "has been paramount in revitalizing, developing and energizing this diverse and unique community." Gadley is an assistant vice president of residential lending.

In addition, the bank realized the need for banking services on the West Side, and in turn initiated a West Side Banking Development District in December 2005. Gadley also is Greater Buffalo Savings Bank's banking development district coordinator. The purpose of a banking development district is to encourage bank branches in areas with a demonstrated need for banking services.

In addition to forming the banking development district, Greater Buffalo Savings Bank also is constructing a new bank office on Connecticut Street, directly across from West Side NHS. West Side residents soon will have a bank within walking distance, and will be less likely to fall victim to predatory lending and expensive ATM banking.

With construction of the new office scheduled for completion this fall, the strong relationship forged between West Side NHS and Greater Buffalo Savings Bank has created new opportunities for West Siders. The bank has become attuned to the needs of West Side residents, and the partnership is yet one more step in making the

West Side a community of choice for its residents.

Says Andrew W. Dorn Jr., president and CEO of Greater Buffalo Savings Bank, "Our full-service branch currently under construction on Connecticut Street will provide us with a platform to provide a full menu of banking services to low- and moderate-income residents of this rapidly redeveloping inner-city neighborhood. By partnering with the West Side Neighborhood Housing Services, a proud NeighborWorks® organization, we will be a catalyst to the continued growth of homeownership and financial literacy in one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city of Buffalo."

Creating a Homebuyers' Team

TRIP Helps Homebuyer Wanabes Become Real Homeowners

By Hilary Lamishaw

Homeownership counselors at the TRIP NeighborWorks® Homeownership Center, based in Troy, New York, found that preparing



TRIP HOC staff Stephanie Lane (foreground) and Cindy Candelario (back) register a customer for a door prize at their "House Hunters" event. Courtesy TRIP

people for homeownership is not always enough to make potential homeowners take the plunge.

Any number of obstacles can interfere, but the “readiness factor” is a big one. Just being knowledgeable about the home-buying process doesn’t mean that one is emotionally ready or knows the steps necessary to look for the right home. Additionally, the lack of available and affordable housing can also stop educated homebuyers from becoming successful homebuyers.

We realized that our challenge was to move some of our mortgage-ready HomeBuyer Club graduates into happy homeowners. The solution: assist homebuyers to “create their team to achieve their dreams.”

While there are a variety of professionals who can help potential homebuyers, we know it can be overwhelming for someone to find the right people without an awful lot of work. Consequently, we created a House Hunters Mixer, a “speed-dating”-like event to enable potential homebuyers to meet Realtors® and lenders in an informal setting at the TRIP HomeOwnership Center.

Our HomeBuyer Club grads who had not yet purchased were invited to the mixer, along with a handful of Realtors® and lenders. Lenders were prepared to pre-qualify anyone who was interested. A “passport” to be stamped by each vendor was entered for a prize drawing, ensuring that customers met all the Realtors® and lenders present.

More than 20 families attended, obtaining a wealth of information and creating new relationships in the process. Attendees were so

enthusiastic about the mixer that we are in the process of planning the next one – months sooner than we expected.

Educating Realtors®

Benefits were realized by the participating Realtors® as well as by TRIP. While lenders have long partnered with TRIP, Realtors® had not. They were largely uninterested in “low-end” customers, who ultimately might be un-mortgageable or unable to close for other reasons.

In designing this event, however, we were able to educate Realtors® about our customer base – such as their preparation through our prepurchase counseling program, our results in increasing credit scores to an average of 720, and our landlord training program that assists those interested in purchasing one of Troy’s many multifamily units.

Furthermore, we were providing Realtors® a golden opportunity to market their services in an easy venue to a ready audience.

Homebuyers had further reinforcement of their right to have a Buyer Broker, and met a number of interested experienced brokers.

All in all, a win/win strategy.

Hilary Lamishaw (Hilary@triponline.org) is director of community affairs, Troy Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (TRIP) Inc.

Homeowner of the Year

Determination, Patience Pay Off for Utica Single Mother

UNHS NeighborWorks HomeOwnership Center® of Utica, New York, has named Marva Campbell



Courtesy Utica NHS

its 2006 HomeOwner of the Year.

When Campbell arrived at The HomeOwnership Center (HOC) in 1998 as a recently divorced mother of two, she was working full-time and swamped in debt. All she could afford was a tiny apartment with two bedrooms, giving one room to her son and sharing the other with her daughter.

Campbell was in transition, changing careers and attending college. It was not the best time for her to buy a house, so her participation with the HOC’s program ceased for a few years.

That all changed in 2001, when Campbell came back to the HOC with the determination to change her life and her children’s lives by improving her credit and purchasing a home. She continued to work full-time, attend school full-time, repair her credit, and move into a new career.

She was so determined and successful in accomplishing her goals that she no longer qualified for any of the products the HOC offered. Instead, the HOC’s first-

time homebuyer loan coordinator referred Campbell to a banking partner and secured a mortgage product that was perfect for her.

Now ready to buy, Campbell started to look at the market. “I saw a lot of houses,” she said, “but I wanted a home.” she said. She missed out on one or two, but kept working with her Realtor®.

When she first saw the house on Sunset Avenue, she wasn’t quite sure. From the outside, “it didn’t appeal to me,” she said. “But once I went inside, it grabbed me. This was my home.” The first floor featured gorgeous hardwood floors, and an elegant natural wood staircase led to the second floor.

The rest is history. Campbell closed on her home this year on her birthday in February. She, her two children, and her mother moved into a spacious home they could truly enjoy and call their own.

“I love this place, and I love coming home,” Campbell said. “This was a huge blessing. Thank you.”

Affordable Senior Housing
**The IMPACT!
 Group Opens
 152-Unit
 Huntington Court**

Among the challenges facing Georgia’s Gwinnett County outside Atlanta is a lack of safe and decent affordable housing designed for senior citizens, particularly those with modest financial resources. One of the county’s responses – Huntington Court Senior Residence – celebrated its grand opening this spring, in the company of the community leaders who championed the project.



Photo by Emily Hill

Huntington Court Senior Residence is a 152-unit apartment home built on 11 acres in Buford, Georgia. To date, approximately half the units have been leased to active seniors aged 62 and older. The property boasts amenities including a fitness center, wellness room, beauty/barber shop, rocking chair porch, lighted central courtyard, library, and media center. The \$14 million development, in which The IMPACT! Group, a NeighborWorks® organization in Duluth, Georgia, played a key role, was funded by Gwinnett County HOME funds, Low Income Housing Tax Credit equity, and private investments.

The IMPACT! Group was part of the development team for Huntington Court, along with Progressive Redevelopment Inc. and NorSouth Companies.

As part of the grand opening celebration, the library was dedicated to Jack and Emery Gantz of the Gwinnett Council for Seniors, and the media room to John McCrory of J. Mack Realty – both members of The IMPACT! Group board of directors.

Gwinnett County Commission Chairman Charles Bannister praised The IMPACT! Group for its continued efforts to provide fair and affordable housing to elderly residents in the county. He designated April 2006 as Fair Housing Month.

Also speaking were Commissioner Kevin Kenerly, whose district includes Huntington Court; Mary Presley, deputy director of the HUD’s Atlanta office of community planning and development; Craig Goebel, director of the Gwinnett County Community Development Office; Bruce Gunter, president of Progressive Redevelopment Inc.; and Shawn Turpin, IronStone Bank senior vice president and IMPACT! Group board treasurer.

“We just love it here!” exclaimed Huntington Court residents Eileen and Robert Giselbach, who described themselves as avid horseshoes players and participants in the Atlanta Senior Olympics. “We train in the fitness center just about every day. We’re probably going to wear out all the equipment.”

Laconia Area CLT Executive Director Named 'Remarkable Woman' of 2006

Linda Harvey, who was hired in 1993 as the Laconia Area Community Land Trust's first paid staffer and founding executive director, was featured in the May New Hampshire Magazine as a New Hampshire Remarkable Woman of 2006.

The magazine's May issue profiled 18 women who make it happen in New Hampshire, described as advocates, activists and agitators. Harvey is featured among the six advocates, who, according to the magazine, "know the ropes, are attuned to the subtle plays of politics and diplomacy, can speak the languages of the adversary and the ally, and have mastered the tools of coalition building."

Over time, Harvey expanded the Laconia Area CLT, a NeighborWorks® affiliate, with strategic strength, pace, and thoughtful planning, responding to community needs. Community organizing and relationships are the essence of her approach.

Now, LACLT, is a nonprofit developer and manager of 98 units of permanently affordable housing in 38 buildings. It has invested more than \$16 million in public and private funds in redeveloping and revitalizing deteriorating neighborhoods and buildings in the community. An additional six rental units are under construction at the former Mechanic Street School in Laconia, and another 64 units are in the development pipeline. LACLT's rental units are leased to low-and moderate-income families at below-market rents, affordable to families on the wages they earn.

Boston Youth Gains Skills, Experience Through Nuestra CDC

Sixteen year-old Victor Batiz of Roxbury got his first break in the work world the way many motivated young people do – by taking the initiative.



Photo by Jeremy Schwab

When he heard about the Boston Private Industry Council's summer internship program for city high schoolers last spring, he enrolled and was placed in the accounting department at Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation, a Roxbury NeighborWorks® organization.

Batiz so impressed supervisor Ana Boyd with his work that she offered him an after-school job once the summer was over. "He's an extremely dedicated and very intelligent young man," said Boyd. "Not only that – some people can be sharp but have no motivation. He has the motivation."

Once Batiz had demonstrated his talent and strong work ethic, Nuestra staff were eager to help the Boston Latin Academy junior to succeed. Nuestra Resident Services Coordinator Paul Francois told him about an opportunity to enroll in the Marian L. Heard Scholars Program, which teaches students about business and entrepreneurship.

Batiz was accepted into the program, and soon found himself attending weekly public speaking, presentation, and leadership sem-

inars. He and a group of nine peers in the program recently launched a retail business project selling mugs. And who stepped up to handle the finances of the operation? Victor Batiz.

"I am vice president of finances," Batiz said, "and what gave me the confidence to handle this kind of work is working at Nuestra."

Batiz will receive college counseling and a \$5,000 scholarship through the Heard Scholars Program. He says he would like to attend Boston University or another area school to earn a business degree.

"I'd like to own my own business some day," he said. "That's why the Marion Heard program is good for me. It develops leadership and other skills to run a business."

Batiz is the only one in his peer group, he says, who has an office job and is learning high-level skills that will benefit him in the business world.

Staff at Nuestra CDC are proud of his success and proud to have played a part in it. "We have enjoyed watching him grow," said Nuestra Executive Director Evelyn Friedman, "and think he can succeed at whatever he puts his mind to. We hope he becomes a CDC executive director some day."

California Farmworker Families Paint Art Tiles for Their New Homes

In April, some 40 children and adults from Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation's Villa Cesar Chavez townhomes in Oxnard, California, traveled to the



Courtesy Cabrillo EDC

University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) to paint tiles that later will be displayed at the property where they live.

Villa Cesar Chavez residents co-created the tiles with UCSB art students, using their own original designs. The tiles eventually will be placed around a central fountain at the property and at the sign flagging the entrance. Fifty-two farmworker families moved into the new Villa Cesar Chavez development in January and March.

Throughout 2006, Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation, a NeighborWorks® affiliate, is celebrating its 25th anniversary of operations.

USDA's Rural Development Honors Missouri NeighborWorks® Affiliate

North East Community Action Corporation (NECAC), a 12-county NeighborWorks® organization based in Bowling Green, Missouri, has been honored for assuming ownership of the 72-unit Hannibal Apartments as part of a \$10.6 million loan agreement with the U.S.

Department of Agriculture's Rural Development. A total of 20 apartment complexes with 432 family and senior units in 15 Missouri cities is included in the transaction.

"My congratulations go to NECAC for their willingness to be innovative in working with USDA Rural Development to help ensure the preservation of affordable rental housing in rural areas in Missouri," said Larry Anderson, deputy administrator for USDA Rural Development Housing Programs, who toured the site. "This public and private partnership can be a shining example to be replicated in other areas of rural America."

Anderson spoke at a recognition ceremony in Hannibal, honoring NECAC. Among those also attending and speaking were U.S. Sens. Christopher S. "Kit" Bond and Jim Talent and U.S. Rep. Kenny C. Hulshof.

"NECAC is proud of our partnership with USDA Rural Development to make sure more people in Northeast Missouri have an affordable place to call home," said Donald D. Patrick, NECAC's

president and chief executive officer. "We are also honored to be recognized as the first participant in the Multi-Family Housing Demonstration and Revitalization Program."

NECAC plans major renovations of all 20 complexes over a five-year period, Patrick said, with completion no later than 2011. The first round of renovations is underway.

With the acquisition, NECAC will have been involved in the building, renovation, planned construction, or management of more than 900 apartments and homes for the elderly, families, and the disabled, with an investment of more than \$61 million in the development of quality affordable housing in Northeast Missouri.

(Below) At NECAC recognition ceremony are (from the left) Board Chairman Lyndon Bode and Deputy Director Carla Potts, both of NECAC, and Deputy Director Larry Anderson and Missouri State Director Janie Dunning, both of the USDA Multifamily Housing Program. Courtesy NECAC

