

From Jamaica to Connecticut

Achieving the Dream of Homeownership

by *Novlyn Hall*

I am celebrating my first year as a homeowner – through the support of NeighborWorks® America and the Mutual Housing Association of Southwestern Connecticut's Homeownership Center!

Twenty-three years ago, I left Jamaica, where I worked as a teacher, and arrived in the United States to pursue an education in finance and accounting. I first learned about Mutual Housing and Stamford, Connecticut's, West Side after attending a West Side United Neighbors annual summer picnic, where I was involved with their Summer Youth Employment and Recreation Program. I fell in love with the neighborhood and eventually became a resident at Parkside Gables, the first mutual housing community built in Connecticut.

I liked the concept of resident participation and leadership at Mutual Housing and became an active member of the board of directors, serving on the executive and finance committees. I also served on the development committee, where I was actually involved in the planning and design of my future home, West Side Commons, 19 affordable condominiums developed by Mutual Housing and Neighborhood Housing Services of Stamford. I also served as building captain and on the resident council, and participated in NeighborWorks® community development training.

I became an active member in the neighborhood, serving in numerous leadership roles to help improve the quality of life for residents on Stamford's West Side. As president of the West Side Action Movement, I was part of the steering committee to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for the West Side called the "West Side Story."

I also served on the board of directors of the Yerwood Center, a community center named after Dr. Joyce Yerwood, the first African-American woman family physician in Fairfield County, who dedicated herself to healthcare, the needs of low-income women and children, education, and social and political justice issues.



Courtesy MHA Southwestern Connecticut

Currently, I serve as treasurer and finance chair for the Mill River Collaborative, an initiative to develop a world-class park and greenway in the city of Stamford in collaboration with the Trust for Public Lands. I am also serving on the Mutual Housing Stamford community relations committee to plan future affordable housing development activities.

Preparing for Homeownership

The West Side neighborhood is my home, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to become a first-time homeowner at West Side Commons. Having an affordable rent at Mutual Housing helped me accumulate savings to become a homeowner, and the Mutual Housing Homebuyer's Club prepared me for this big step by helping me to set workable goals, budget, and save. With that support, I achieved my goals, am now a proud homeowner, and have rolled up my sleeves to serve as treasurer of our condominium association.

Especially rewarding is knowing that my former apartment at Mutual Housing is now helping someone else who needs an affordable place to live like I did. Maybe they too can become a first-time homeowner, with the future affordable homeownership opportunities to be developed by Mutual Housing.

I recently made a trip back to Jamaica to the little village where I came from. While sitting in the small room where I grew up, I felt deep gratitude for how far I have come. Thank you so much for helping me achieve the "American Dream" of homeownership.

Novlyn Hall is a homeowner at MHA of Southwestern Connecticut's West Side Commons.