

The HOME Edition

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Third Quarter 2010

Community of Stars Celebrated at Annual Banquet



Left, Resident Council Presidents accepted the Community Leadership Awards that were presented to HHA Resident Councils; above, Tim Seckinger (left), Interim President & CEO; Dan Rodriguez, Program Center Coordinator, HUD Houston Field Office (center); and Lorraine Walls, Public Housing office, HUD Houston Field Office (right) congratulate new homeowners Kimm Perez, Sharlonda Partee and Chanda Derrow.

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Our Mission:
To improve lives by providing quality, affordable housing options and promoting education and economic self-sufficiency.

The Houston Housing Authority celebrated its “Community of Stars” at the annual resident recognition banquet on October 15. More than 175 public housing residents, community partners, special guests and HHA staff attended the event that recognized Resident Council officers, volunteers and community partners.

Tim Seckinger, Interim President & CEO, presented Leadership Awards to the Resident Council Presidents along with Service Awards to outstanding resident volunteers, Achievement Awards to several residents who had participated in the Family Self-Sufficiency program and achieved their goals (including three who had bought their own homes), and Awards of Excellence to five outstanding community partner organizations.

The Award of Excellence was presented to the Sam Houston Area Council Boy Scouts of America, Frost Bank, the Greater Houston Builders Association, the Houston Police Department Blue Santa Program and the Houston Texans YMCA.

The keynote speaker was Marcus Davis, founder of The Breakfast Klub restaurant, which is often referred to as the “best breakfast in Houston.” As he related his story of overcoming adversity, he encouraged the audience to have vision and faith – and then do the work – to make their vision a reality.

“We also recognize the great job that our 70 community partners are doing as we work together to transform lives. We are so fortunate to have people who care and provide their time and resources to making a difference in people’s lives,” Seckinger said.

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Bobbie Figures Appointed Resident Commissioner



Bobbie Figures, an 11-year Resident Council officer at Forest Green Townhomes, has been appointed to the Board of Commissioners by Mayor Annise Parker.

Commissioner Figures has been the Resident Council President since 2000 and works hard to keep the Forest Green community active and involved with

regular meetings and resident security patrols. She has started many programs there, including adult literacy, parenting, after-school tutoring, computer classes for older children, summer meals for school children, a monthly food pantry and recreation for seniors, to name a few!

She has started Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts and Ventures (for 14-20-year-olds) troops in collaboration with the Sam Houston Area Council Boy Scouts of America. These troops that help shape boys' and young men's lives also include some youth from the area, but are mostly made up of Forest Green residents. To help teenagers and younger children with reading skills, she is working with a woman resident who tutors every Saturday – and also offers low-cost haircuts. And Commissioner Figures is restarting a GED class, which also will be open to area residents.

Other activities include a Bible class, which is offered every Thursday night, and a young minister who's attending school at Prairie View A&M preaches every fourth Sunday on Youth Day.

With the help of the Resident Council officers and other residents, she has organized a security team to watch out for the neighborhood to help prevent gangs and drugs, as well as general lease violations.

“I stick my neck out for my residents,” she says. “I communicate regularly with our special meetings, and I encourage attendance and participation in the activities that count as community service.”

A mother of four, Commissioner Figures has 18 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren. She grew up in Jefferson, Texas, before moving to Houston in 1949, then returned to Jefferson to finish school. Her husband was in the military, and the moving from base to base made it hard for her to complete college. But she took classes at community colleges when she could and graduated from Texas Southern University and taught school (English and math) for several years.

In appointing Commissioner Figures, Mayor Parker said, “As someone who lives in public housing, Ms. Figures' experiences are so important. She is a visible leader who cares a lot about her community. Her unique perspective will be of great value to the rest of the board.”

“Mayor Parker made an excellent choice in filling the resident commissioner seat on the board,” said David Minberg, Chairman of the HHA Board of Commissioners.

“I love the experience of being a commissioner,” Commissioner Figures says. “I'm learning so much, and I hope to accomplish some changes. I'm already seeing positive things happen.”

Community of Stars, continued from page 1

Seckinger also acknowledged the Public Housing and Client Services departments that coordinated the event. “I am very honored to work with such a wonderful group of people! I thank all of them for their continued hard work, caring attitudes and their dedication to providing our customers with an inspiring experience,” he said.



Client Services Director Cheryl Rivers (center) visits with Shirley Brownlow (left) and Wantha Wilder, Telephone Road residents.



Marcus Davis, keynote speaker

From left to right: LaTaysha Ruffin, Tiffany Skillern and Matthew Thompson



Intern Program Provides Learning Experiences

Nineteen high school and college students gained valuable experience this summer working in HHA's six-week paid intern program. The students, residents from both Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher Program and all with a required grade average of 3.0 or above, supported HHA's operations working in almost every department. HHA also provided professional development opportunities, from career planning and scholarship and financial aid information to guest speakers and current events discussion.

LaTaysha Ruffin, a senior at Scarborough High School, worked in the External Affairs/Communications Department, helping with both the publications and the Houston Housing Resource nonprofit organization. "I learned so much, including great communications skills, and I had

fun doing it. I encourage any one who wants to be in the program to apply."

Tiffany Skillern, a senior at Hightower High School, worked in the Human Resources Department and says she didn't know what "human resources" really meant. "When I got in there, I was amazed at how much they do," she said. "We have to be on top of everything. Everything is really confidential so you have to learn to be discreet."

An intern veteran, Matthew Thompson is a sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin, preparing for a law degree. He worked in the Corporate Integrity Department and said it was a great experience because it has a lot to do with public policy and government relations. "I learned about the standard operating procedures and how the agency must comply with federal regulations. This summer was one of the great summers I've had with HHA," he said.

COMMUNITY CHAMPION:

KIERRA LEE



Kierra Lee's name and story are familiar to many HHA clients. The Oxford Place resident who graduated as valedictorian from Yates High School had a busy freshman year at Texas A&M and an active summer before she returned to school for her sophomore year.

Kierra, who worked as an HHA intern for several summers, was raised by her grandmother, Gloria, and overcame the challenges of Crohn's disease which caused her to miss many days of school. It's a challenge she still faces today at college, since she lives in College Station now, about 90 miles from her doctor's office in Houston. But, she says, "I'm dealing with it, everything is stable, and I'm feeling OK."

Kierra faced the usual transitions during her freshman year. "In college you're accountable for everything you do – homework, classes, grades, getting enough rest, and choosing between studying and parties, wrong from right," she said. That transition also included changing her major to sociology, with plans to attend medical or public health school after graduating from TAMU. And she's planning

for that next school to be outside of Texas to gain that experience.

Her first year of college also included a trip to London during Spring Break with an academic scholarship group to experience the British culture while identifying with her own culture. As a recipient of a Magic Johnson Foundation scholarship, Kierra traveled to Los Angeles this summer to the Life Skills Leadership Conference, which included workshops, career panels and guest speakers to help motivate and empower scholarship recipients throughout their college experience. As a sophomore this year, she was selected to participate in the African-American Student Leadership Institute at TAMU.

She's also interested in working with children, as she has been doing with volunteer activities. She volunteered this summer teaching Bible studies to children at her church.

Kierra continues to thank the Houston Housing Authority for giving her the opportunity and confidence she needed to fight for her future. The volunteer opportunity to work with some of the elderly residents when she was an intern "changed her life forever," she said. "The Housing Authority gave me responsibility, and I saw that I could do it."

Grandparents Day a Special Day at Lyerly

Creatively decorated flower pots, children and other volunteers, and Lyerly residents filled the community room at Lyerly Senior Apartments to celebrate Grandparents Day on September 11. About 150 pre-decorated flower pots were provided by the children at Oxford Place, The Greater Channel Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., Northland Christian Middle School girls and members of Evercare's Provider Services Department. In addition, about 100 pots were decorated onsite by volunteers from these groups and residents of Lyerly.

The pots were then filled with soil and a flowering plant, with many delivered to the 196 "grandparents'" apartments. While the grandparents received the flowers, the best "gift" was probably what the children received by doing this community service project, as explained by these Jack and Jill members:



"This is the best Community Service Project I have done. I need to go back and visit Mr. Brown!" – *Tyler Bryant*

"One of the residents requested that I paint a pot for the Houston Texans, so I painted it red, white and blue with footballs. He was very pleased and it made him feel good." – *Trey Bennett*

"It was fun to paint and pot the plant. It was a different Jack and Jill experience, and it made me want to decorate a pot for my grandmother." – *Amber Bennett*

"At least Grammy will have a pot because you know she is going to kill this plant. (LOL)" – *Mom Armissa Bennett, quoting son Trey*

Fraud Investigation Report

During the third quarter, the Fraud Investigation Division completed these activities for Public Housing and Section 8 properties:

- Fraud cases investigated: 101
- Clients terminated due to fraud: 27
- Background checks: 7,257
- Program terminations: 75

To report suspected program abuse you may:

- Call the Fraud Hotline at 713.260.0724
- Fax the information to 713.260.0828, Attn: Fraud/Compliance
- Mail allegations to the address listed on page 8, Attn: Fraud/Compliance
- Select "Fraud Program Abuse" on the Contact Us page at www.housingforhouston.com

HHA Staff Participate in Grads within Reach Walk

HHA staff participated with Houston Independent School District and city officials, parents and others at the seventh annual HISD Grads within Reach walk (formerly known as Reach Out to Dropouts) in September. These volunteers, including Tim Seckinger, HHA Interim President & CEO, visited homes of drop-out students to show that they care about the students' futures, encouraging them to complete their high-school education.



Tim Seckinger (left) participated in the walk with HISD Superintendent Terry Grier (right).

Back to School Bashes Help Students, Parents

School children at several developments received school supplies at Back-to-School Bashes to begin the new school year in August. The Oxford Place Resident Council organized their event, with the assistance of the HHA, where more than 60 children each got a bag with paper, folders, pens, pencils, crayons and glue. The children and their parents also enjoyed refreshments, along with music and an air balloon for children to jump in.

The event at Irvinton Village was coordinated by FAVA with God Ministries Church, Greater Discipleship Church and the Resident Council, who donated clothes, school supplies and their time in order to send the children back to school prepared. Bags of school supplies were provided to

156 students who range from elementary to high school age.

Resident Councils and community partners at Clayton Homes, Cuney Homes, Historic Oaks of Allen Parkway Village and Wilmington House also held bashes, providing school supplies and refreshments to help students and parents prepare for school.

Kids Saddle Up and Ride at Cuney Homes

City kids became urban cowboys and cowgirls for an afternoon at Cuney Homes in October. Commissioner Rev. Myron Cloyd partnered with the Tri-City Riders and We Ride with Jesus groups to bring horses to Cuney for three Sunday afternoons. Children learned about caring for horses, safety tips for riding and the basics of grooming, saddling and mounting. And most fun of all – they got to ride!



Commissioner Rev. Myron Cloyd leads riders to Cuney Homes.

Resident Council President Dianne Sheffield, an older "kid," enjoys her ride.

National Night Out Marked at Several Communities

The residents of Telephone Road Senior Apartments observed the annual National Night Out on October 5 with an ice cream social, fun and games, including the resident scavenger hunt. This was the highlight of the evening, as it gave residents an opportunity to truly get to know their neighbors.

Resident Council officer Fred Washington said, "I now know things about my neighbors I wouldn't have known otherwise!" Several new residents were recognized and given a personal welcome by the other attendees. Precinct 6 Constable Victor Trevino made an earlier visit to stress the importance of personal and community safety.

Several other communities also held National Night Out activities, including Victory Place, where Resident Council members went door to door in an effort to get the residents involved in their community.



Maria Compean and Gladys Cole participate in National Night Out activities at Telephone Road.

AARP Foundation Offers Job Search Programs

The reality today is that the retirement age is changing. The recent downturn in our economy has dealt a heavy blow to many Americans' retirement dreams. Many workers older than 50 are postponing retirement and heading back to the workforce.

In a recent study, 70% of workers ages 45-74 reported that they plan to work well into their retirement years. Let's face it, in today's world, pensions, Social Security payments and personal savings are no longer enough for most folks to live on.

Returning to the workforce after 50 is oftentimes easier said than done. Older workers generally take longer than younger workers to find a job, and when they do find employment, their pay is very often reduced.

As daunting as the situation may seem, The AARP Foundation, through its WorkSearch program, stands ready to support older workers. WorkSearch takes adult job seekers through the entire job search process: from online skills assessments and training to connections to community employers with actual jobs. Try it out at: www.aarpworksearch.org

In addition, for low-income job seekers age 55 and older, the AARP Foundation's Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) helps provide training to re-enter the workforce. Using grants from the U.S. Department of Labor, SCSEP puts people to work in temporary, part-time jobs where they receive on-the-job training. The goal is to turn this training and work experience into finding full-time employment. To learn more about this program, visit: www.doleta.gov/seniors/

AARP is also hard at work encouraging employers to hire workers older than 50. The AARP National Employer Team currently features 41 employers, including Home Depot and the Internal Revenue Service, who recognize that workers 50-plus make up a very important part of the workforce. They are interested in hiring older workers because they know that they bring leadership, experience, and skills to the workplace.

Visit www.aarp.org/realrelief for more information on AARP programs helping workers 50+.



Helen James

Earl Biggins

Jacob Hamilton

Sunday Onomivbori

Telephone Road Residents Stay Active on the Job

Four residents of Telephone Road Senior Apartments are taking advantage of programs that offer opportunities for employment that not only help add more money to the monthly budget but that also offers a chance to help others.

Helen James is putting her work experience to use at Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital in volunteer training for expectant mothers, which is part of the AARP Retirement Work program. For the past six months, she has been helping mostly low-income women, many of whom can't understand or speak English very well, through some of the classes offered there. And when needed, she says, she just offers a hug. "Everybody understands a hug," Helen says.

Her work history includes working as a teacher's aide, at the former Houston Lighting & Power, in a hospital payments office and in the Houston Zoo membership department.

Earl Biggins works in the training program as a house monitor at Extended Bridge to Life, a transitional living facility for men where they also receive supportive services, and drug and alcohol counseling. He began working with the home through SER Jobs for Progress about seven months ago and helps residents "develop their own way to overcome substance abuse," he says.

Earl has worked in the health profession field, including a research program for heart transplants. "I love this field, helping people and learning."

Jacob Hamilton found work in the cafeteria at Cage Elementary in March 2010 through the AARP program. He had been working in the Houston Chronicle maintenance department for 13 years when he was laid off in June 2009. A resident of Telephone Road since December 2009, he enjoys his work at the school and, of course, the extra money it brings in every month.

Also working at Cage Elementary is Sunday Onomivbori. A Nigerian native, he and his wife, Florence, moved to Telephone Road in May 2008, and he began working at the school a few months later. In Nigeria he worked for an oil company, but, he says, he retired a little too early and his pension needs supplementing each month.

HCVP Homeownership Program Helps Families Achieve “American Dream”



More than 70 former Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) clients have purchased new homes through the HCV homeownership program since it began in 2004, including one of the most recent, Ramona Bowers.

Ramona began the program two years ago, but says she has been interested in buying a house for about five years. With the help of the program and her real estate agent, she was able to find and move into her new home in South Houston in October 2010. “I’ve moved a lot, so just knowing it’s mine and I won’t have to move any more is the best thing,” she said. “

The federally funded program provides monthly homeowner assistance payments in place of voucher rental payments. Applicants must meet several requirements, some of which are being a current voucher holder or newly admitted to HCVP, being a first-time homeowner or not having owned a home in the past three years, being continuously employed for at least one year and meeting current minimum program income limits. For information about the program, contact Bill Ramey, HHA Homeownership Coordinator, at 713.260.0763.

To qualify for the program, eligible families must complete a HUD-approved first-time homeowners class, which HHA provides through a partnership with HUD-approved housing counseling agencies. The workshop helps prepare families for the home-buying process, and provides information about programs that offer down-payment assistance. As part of the HCV program, HHA works with the families to help them become mortgage-ready – and, according to Bill Ramey, “our families are getting loans.” Families are then responsible for finding their home and acquiring financing.

Ramona’s advice for those going through – or considering going through – the program? “Have patience and persistence. You need to know what you’re doing and be ready for all the obstacles. And be willing to learn along the way.”



Clients attend a homeowners class.

Modernization of Kelly Village Units Completed; Four More Buildings Scheduled



Families will soon be moving into the 16 recently modernized apartments at Kelly Village, and plans are under way to modernize another 31 units in four other buildings. There also will be associated site improvements and a paved parking area at these buildings.

Modernization for all units includes laying new storm sewer lines, completely gutting and rebuilding the interiors and completing exterior modifications to match the other buildings. The new units include Energy Star-rated appliances and energy-efficient windows.

Kennedy Place Residents to Move in Soon



Kennedy Place residents are excitedly anticipating their return home in January when construction is completed on the new Kennedy Place. Returning residents will be setting up their homes in new apartments that include central heating and air conditioning, individual garages, carpeting, washer and dryer connections, energy-efficient appliances and other amenities. Outside, they’ll be enjoying a green area that includes an amphitheater, walking paths, playground and barbecue grills.

“We are so excited about going back – we can’t wait!” said Stephanie Gaston, Kennedy Place Resident Council President. “We’re so looking forward to the new facility and all the new amenities.” In addition to the former residents who will be returning to Kennedy Place, many new families who have been on the Public Housing waiting list will be moving in.

“The Houston Housing Authority is proud of the newly constructed Kennedy Place and is eager to start occupying the property in early 2011,” said Sherri Sengsouvana, Vice President, Housing Operations. “We appreciate the patience of residents during the construction phase and are confident they will be pleased with the end result.”



HOUSTON
HOUSING AUTHORITY

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Lance Gilliam, *Commissioner*
Bobbie Figures, *Commissioner*
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Interim President & CEO

Important Telephone Numbers

HHA Administration:
713.260.0500
Public Housing Operations:
713.260.0701
**Section 8 Housing Choice
Voucher Program Call Center:**
713.260.0600
Customer Service Hotline:
713.260.0377
Fraud Hotline: 713.260.0724
Neighborhood Resource Center:
713.655.1940
City of Houston Service Helpline:
311
United Way Helpline: 211

JANUARY
Alzheimer Awareness Month

1/1 New Year's Day
1/17 Martin Luther King Jr. Day —
HHA offices closed

FEBRUARY
African American History Month
Hearth Month

2/3 Chinese New Year's —
Year of the Rabbit
2/14 Valentine's Day
2/22 President's Day

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