

Transforming a Community in East Boston

Families Begin Moving into New Maverick Homes

What a difference a couple of days can make. In the span of just two days, the Turner family moved only a block down the road, but the difference couldn't be more palpable. The family, who had lived in the old Maverick Development since 2000, relocated from the slowly deteriorating site in East Boston to what could be considered one of the best new public housing developments in the United States.

"It's amazing," exclaimed Cheryl Turner. "Over [at the old site] we were just grateful to have a roof over our heads, I can't even describe the difference."

Looking around her new apartment, Cheryl's mother Christine explained, "It's like the old story of the ugly duckling that turned into a swan; this is the swan."

(Continued on page 7)



Residents Christine Turner (left) and daughter Cheryl (right) pose with relocation specialist Jessica Stetson in their new home.

Kids Sing Praises of Children's Chorus

On an early December afternoon, a group of young children braved the driving rain and trudged their way through puddles to huddle together in the First and Second Church in Boston for their weekly practice. The kids are part of the Boston Children's Chorus, a multi-cultural, musical, after-school program, founded in 2001.

Participation in this class is immediate and enthusiastic. The children sway their arms, mimicking the sound of the music as they sing. They sit up straight, hanging on every word, each student intent on learning the craft. On the teacher's lead, their angelic voices rise and travel harmoniously and in sync through the Church.

When a child falls behind, an assistant is there to aid him and offer personalized instruction to get him back on track. The teachers take great interest

(Continued on page 6)

| CONTENTS | |
|--|---|
| Camden Makeover..... | 2 |
| Spring Street Honors Vietnam Veterans..... | 3 |
| Operation Sleep Tight..... | 3 |
| BHA Spreads Holiday Cheer..... | 4 |
| Public Safety Delivers Turkeys..... | 5 |
| BHA Honored by JCHE..... | 5 |
| Residents Become Health Advocates..... | 8 |

Camden Development Gets a Makeover

The barren concrete that once encompassed the Camden Development in the South End has been replaced with lush green grass, trees, shrubs and flowers. On October 28, the Boston Housing Authority's Capital Construction Department celebrated the newly designed landscape during a small get together with residents of the development and Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) staff members involved with the project.



BHA Administrator Sandra Henriquez and DHCD Associate Director Marc Slotnick plant bulbs at Camden.

"I just want to thank everyone, it's just beautiful," said Julia Butler, who has lived at Camden since the buildings opened in 1949. "I'm glad I lived long enough to see it."



The revamped Camden Development

The BHA received financial assistance from DHCD for the project and, in addition to landscaping the courtyard, contractors also replaced the underground utility line and created spacious walkways.

At the event, attended by DHCD Associate Director Marc Slotnick and BHA Administrator Sandra Henriquez, staff joined with residents to plant bulbs, which will bloom in the spring, further adding to the site's newfound beauty.

"I think it's beautiful, it makes this place so nice," said longtime resident Queenie Young. "I saw the flowers and thought, what beautiful plants."

Prior to the planting, staff and residents shared coffee and donuts in the computer room.

BHA Receives Free Basketballs

Good Sports, a non-profit organization, donated 25 Spaulding basketballs to the Boston Housing Authority for use at its developments.

Pictured is a group of children from BHA sites across the City of Boston who will be benefiting from the generous donation, along with members of the Community Service Department.



Spring Street Honors Vietnam Veterans

Spring Street Task Force President Leo Murphy was staring out the window of the community center on a cool September morning when it dawned on him; it has been 25 years since the last Vietnam Veterans returned to West Roxbury. He immediately began to write down names of soldiers from the area and commenced planning for a dedication ceremony to be held to once again honor the fallen heroes.

Thanks to Murphy and others the event was held on October 15 and many local politicians and community leaders were on hand.

The ceremony began with the raising of the American flag, followed by the group reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Massachusetts State Representative Mike Rush proceeded to read off the names of the deceased, followed by a moment of silence.

The event culminated with the playing of "Amazing Grace" and refreshments were served in the community center where everyone gathered to reminisce and share stories of the soldiers.

The memorial, a large stone set between two large bushes and surrounded by flowers and

two American flags, is emblazoned with the names Pfc. Joseph A. Friel; Sgt. Robert J. Hartley; S. Sgt. Paul Keefe; S. Sgt. James F. Hiltz; Sp. 4 Joel M. Magrass; Pfc. William F. McLaughlin; Capt. William A. McMahon; Lcpl. Paul Francis Reid and Sp. 4 Henry Joseph Servent, Jr.



Spring Street Task Force President Leo Murphy (center) organized a dedication for Vietnam Veterans. A number of politicians and community leaders attended.

BHA Launches Operation Sleep Tight

Boston Housing Authority Administrator Sandra Henriquez recently announced the launching of the "Operation Sleep Tight" initiative. This proactive effort is designed to identify and exterminate bed bugs while simultaneously educating BHA residents and employees about this growing concern.

After a nearly 50-year absence, urban areas throughout the United States, Canada and Europe have recently seen a resurgence in bedbug infestation. Therefore, BHA staff has created a detailed operations protocol that includes a set of procedures to exterminate and prevent the spread of these pests.

We are addressing this issue with aggressive treatments and, at the same time, educating our residents and employees," said Henriquez. "We want to stay ahead of the curve in dealing with the resurgence of these pests."

An informational letter, with a question and answer sheet attached, has been sent out to all BHA households to better inform residents and reduce the spread of these pests. The BHA is also holding a series of educational forums for employees to ensure that they have accurate information regarding this problem.

(Continued on page 5)

BHA Employees Spread Holiday Cheer



Annual Children's Holiday Party

The Boston Housing Authority held its Annual Children's Holiday Party for BHA kids and their families on December 12 at the Teacher's Union Hall in Dorchester.

Santa and his Elves were on hand to distribute gifts and pose for pictures with the hundreds of children in attendance.

The party serves as a safe and fun way to bring together youngsters between the ages of 3-10 to celebrate the holidays. The kids enjoyed an afternoon of entertainment and were treated to lunch.

The event was organized by the BHA's Public Safety Department and BHA employees contributed by donating toys, assisting with the gift-wrapping and giving several hours of their time to help arrange the party.



Several BHA Developments also held their own holiday celebrations. Above is a photo from the Whitter Street event for seniors.

BHA Public Safety Department Teams Up with BC High to Deliver Turkeys

On an unseasonably warm morning in late November, members of the Boston Housing Authority Public Safety Department packed turkeys and canned goods into BHA police cars and distributed them to 15 developments throughout the city.

The canned foods were donated by Boston College High School. The school also gave the BHA more than \$2,200 in order to buy turkeys.



Operation Sleep Tight

(Continued from Page 3)

As soon as the BHA is alerted of the possible existence of bedbugs in an apartment, a professional exterminator will be brought in immediately to assess the situation. An aggressive campaign of inspection, extermination, monitoring and prevention will be undertaken as necessary. An exterminator will treat the apartment from which the initial complaint comes as well as all adjacent units. In addition, monitoring equipment will be placed in all apartments adjacent to those treated to insure that the problem does not spread. The initial treatment will be followed up with both a standard two-week re-inspection and a standard monthly re-inspection for one year, to insure that the problem does not return.

BHA Honored by Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly

The Boston Housing Authority was recently honored by Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly (JCHE). The two organizations have worked together to advocate for quality affordable housing for Boston's low-income seniors.

The BHA was recognized at JCHE's recent annual meeting, *Honoring Our Community Partners*. Alfred Davis (right) and Paul Kaeller (left) accepted the award from JCHE President Ellen Feingold on behalf of the BHA.



Kids Sing Praises of Children's Chorus

(Continued from page 1)

in making sure everyone is learning. Likewise, kids throughout the city have shown strong interest in the program.

Artistic Director Darren Daily has traveled to 40 schools and auditioned about 2,500 kids. He estimates about one fifth are admitted to the program.

The Chorus does not require prior musical experience, but an audition is required. Children are broken into different sections based on their skill, maturity and readiness. Tuition is determined on a sliding scale based on income, but no child is denied for financial reasons and scholarships are available.

"Auditions were hard," admitted eight-year-old Alexandra Maud, who has been in the program almost a year. "But now we sing a lot better than we did before."



A student is given individual attention during a recent practice.

The Boston Children's Chorus is composed of an eclectic group of kids from urban and suburban communities. It was formed by community activist Hubie Jones, who envisioned a way to strengthen neighborhoods through the power of song.

The organization seeks to use music as a catalyst for social change in inner city communities and seeks to empower at-risk youth with a musical education and performance experience. The program hopes to develop leadership, teamwork and

creative skills and encourage kids to be positive ambassadors for their city.

The children recognize the prospects the program offers them. "I've learned confidence," said 9-year-old Richard Roberts. "[The chorus] is a big opportunity for us."

Since the chorus' debut at a concert to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy in January 2004, the group has performed at a number of prominent events including the Democratic National Convention.

"It's a chance for me to become a better singer," said nine-year-old Abigail Anderson. With the self-assuredness the program has instilled in her she proclaimed: "I want to be famous."

Children living in BHA developments are encouraged to apply and participate in an audition. For more information call 617-778-2242 x225. The next round of auditions are scheduled for late January.



Artistic Director Darren Daily leads the children during their weekly session.

Families Begin Moving into New Maverick Homes

(Continued from page 1)

“It’s always been my dream to have an upstairs, downstairs townhouse,” said Christine Turner. “It’s breathtaking.”

The new Maverick Development, a dream to many for years, was finally brought to fruition thanks to a Hope VI grant from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, which allowed the BHA to completely rebuild the old site. Features include



Phase one of the Maverick Redevelopment

townhouse style apartments, modern mid-rise buildings and individual yard space for some units. The Hope VI program strives to create physical improvements to distressed developments and provide social services to strengthen the community. Some of the programs planned for Maverick are employment and computer training, adult and youth education, and recreational programs.

Residents have also been impressed with the new safety features. With the exception of the mid-



The Boston skyline as seen from Maverick

rise buildings, which are designed like an apartment complex, each unit has its own private entrance and magnetic strips on the screens to prevent break-ins.

“It’s quiet and private,” said Cheryl Turner. “No one can hang around, I feel much safer.”

A few units down, Victor Lopez proudly shows off his new home.

“This is a big difference,” said Lopez, who has lived in the Maverick site for eight years. “I didn’t know they were going to do it like this, it’s a lot nicer and the rooms are much bigger.”

There are lots of changes happening in East Boston,” added Lopez. “There are playgrounds for kids and a lot of other improvements.”

The Lopez’ new apartment also includes a small backyard where his children can play close to home. Also, with its location on the Boston Harbor waterfront, many of the apartments feature a panoramic view of the city’s skyline.



The Lopez family in their new home

The Turner’s and Lopez’ are two of the first families to move into the first phase of the Maverick Hope VI Redevelopment. Upon completion the site will feature 396 new units, 305 of which will remain for public housing residents, with the remaining 91 to be rented at market rate. There will also be a Homeowner Initiative to make 50 homeownership opportunities available to public housing tenants and other eligible applicants. The first two phases, which include 230 apartments, are nearing completion. Phase three is expected to begin in early 2005 and construction is slated for completion during the summer of 2006.

The mission of the Boston Housing Authority is:

- to provide stable, quality affordable housing for low and moderate income persons;
- to deliver these services with integrity and mutual accountability;
- and to create living environments which serve as catalysts for the transformation from dependency to economic self-sufficiency.

Six BHA Residents Become Health Advocates, Prepare to Serve Community

On Wednesday, November 17, six Boston Housing Authority residents received a certificate from the Boston University School of Public Health for their completion of a 10-week training course, as part of the Resident Health Advocate Program.

Participants learned about a wide range of topics including, health assessment, first aid, outreach education and leadership skills. The class is the third to complete the course since the inception of the program in 2002. This year's grads were fortunate to receive guidance from previous graduates who served as mentors and advisors, further strengthening the student's support system.

"Each year we get better and better," said Director of Community Services Rachel Goodman.

At the graduation ceremony, the students were praised for their hard work and dedication during the 30 hours of training.

Gail Douglas, the Associate Dean at the BU School of Public Health, noted that since the course began, the group has forged strong bonds and has gained indispensable knowledge. "You have the potential to be an agent of change in your neighborhoods," she told them.

As friends and family looked on, the graduates received their certificates certifying them as Health Advocates. Each resident is encouraged to go back into her community and distribute the knowledge she has gained to bring public health awareness to public housing.

The Resident Health Advocate program is a collaboration of the BHA, the BU School of Public Health and the Boston Public Health Commission. Together the group forms the Partners in Health and Housing Prevention Research Center (PHH-PRC). The mission of the PHH-PRC is to improve the health and well being of public housing residents through community centered projects and activities. The Community Advisory Board, comprised of residents of Boston Housing Authority and community health and social service organizations, advises the PHH-PRC.



From left to right: Gail Douglas (BU School of Public Health), Rebecca Davila (Charlestown), Barbara Badgett (Old Colony), Rosa Maldonado (Mary Ellen McCormack), Bruce Glover (Mary Ellen McCormack), Erin Gray (BU School of Public Health), Yolanda Ramos (Washington Beech), and Shelley Harper (Mary Ellen McCormack).

BHA Today is a Boston Housing Authority publication and a BHA 2001 initiative.

Editor: Lydia Agro • Stories & Layout: Jim Bentubo • Printing: Bostonian Press

Comments and story ideas are welcome.

Mail to: **Communications Department
Boston Housing Authority
52 Chauncy Street, Floor 11
Boston MA 02111**

Fax to: **617-988-4133**

E-Mail to: **James.Bentubo@bostonhousing.org**

BHA Today staff may also be reached by calling 617-988-4380 or 617-988-4109 (TDD 800-545-1833 x420).

Visit the BHA on the web at www.bostonhousing.org.

