Winter 2006

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Fourth Annual Home Giveaway Winner Selected

Cynthia Nealson, a Carolinas Medical Center employee, won a new home during the Home Giveaway drawing of the Charlotte Regional Realtor® Association’s Housing Opportunity Foundation (HOF) on June 8, 2006. Nealson and her two teenaged daughters were later introduced to “Magic” Johnson and the 300 individuals who came to Founders Hall on July 30, 2006 to hear his message supporting urban markets and affordable housing. Don Lucas, Bank of America regional executive of Southeast Carolinas consumer real estate, presented Nealson with a Lowe’s gift card at the event.

To become eligible for the Giveaway, Nealson successfully completed The Housing Partnership’s Homeownership Center of Charlotte’s (HCC) eight-hour class and worked with a Homeownership Advisor on needed preparation for first-time homeownership. The classes and counseling empower consumers to make informed choices and decisions throughout the home buying process, followed by stable long-term homeownership. Information offered through this experience is invaluable because it helps consumers clear up budget obstacles, save money and learn mortgage and home buying basics.

“An educated buyer is a smart homebuyer,” stated Ralphine Caldwell, The Housing Partnership’s Senior Vice-President of Homeownership. More than 100 graduates per year become new homeowners with many, like Nealson, being referred to HCC by other accomplished graduates.

HOF raises money through events to buy the Home Giveaway house outright from the builder. HOF worked with Regent Homes this year to provide the 1,720 square foot home. Additional sponsors who provided gifts for the Home Giveaway participants included Bank of America, Charlotte Epley, Cunningham Mortgage Co., Fair and Affordable Housing Advisory Council, and Pillar to Post. “Bringing together many entities and persons who care about affordable housing and recognize the achievements of The Homeownership Center of Charlotte graduates is significant to Ms. Nealson as well as the broader mission of providing affordable housing in Charlotte,” said Pat Garrett, The Housing Partnership’s President.
The Housing Partnership received $60,000 from NeighborWorks® America to make further improvements on affordable apartments and support housing development. “The grant from NeighborWorks® is an important part of our funding strategy for revitalized rental properties and our ongoing housing development programs,” said Pat Garrett, President of The Housing Partnership.

The Housing Partnership is committed to collaboration with the private sector, neighborhood and government partners in promoting and developing economically integrated neighborhoods. Bank of America donated $15,000 to The Homeownership Center of Charlotte (HCC) for counseling and education. HCC has a counseling agreement with Bank of America’s Community Commitment Program (affordable mortgage product), which allows customers to access homebuyer education programming. Eligible customers must be within 18 months of being mortgage ready. Customers also have access to delinquency prevention counseling designed to help first-time homebuyers address issues and avoid the threat of foreclosure.

On May 22, 2006, the Charlotte City Council unanimously approved the Lakewood Neighborhood Plan. The Housing Partnership is proud to work toward change in this Central District Neighborhood, having commissioned Mahan Rykiel Associates, Inc. to create the plan. This plan follows the 1998 Lakewood Neighborhood Action Plan which focused on safety, housing, appearance, infrastructure, traffic, community service for children and the elderly, jobs, and strengthening the community organization. Issues in the newly approved plan are similar, including the need to increase the percentage of homeownership, inadequate senior housing, lack of concentrated revitalization efforts, crime, and visual appearance.

The Housing Partnership, The Lakewood Community Development Corporation, Habitat for Humanity, and the City are addressing revitalization goals to create affordable housing and positive opportunities for families, such as improving the existing neighborhood park. The design calls for balance by preserving tree canopy where possible for beauty while removing lower limbs to improve lighting for safety, creating new housing while ensuring it is consistent in size with adjacent lots. The City is funding many of these activities.
Three new rental projects were completely leased up, benefiting 355 families. Units under the oversight of The Housing Partnership had an average vacancy rate of 4.1%.
BB&T’s Ebus Rolls Into Rivermere

The Homeownership Center of Charlotte (HCC) acted as host for a BB&T ebus event June 1, 2006. The full-sized commercial bus parked at The Housing Partnership’s Rivermere Apartments from 4-7 p.m. The bus was retrofitted as a self-contained mobile marketing, production and educational center with computer workstations, printers, two-way Internet connection, generator and classroom furnishing. The ebus serves as a community resource center, providing financial literacy and lending information to Charlotte’s underserved communities. Ebus activities include homeownership education, financial literacy, and community outreach, featuring:

- Free credit reports
- Credit counseling
- Pre-qualifications for mortgage and home equity loans
- Homeownership education
- Free checking/savings accounts opened
- Press Conferences

HCC staff was available to counsel customers on their credit report, advise them of educational programming, and offer choices for next steps. The event was beneficial and fun thanks to BB&T’s provision of hot dogs, popcorn, and popsicles.

“The bus was really a great idea,” said Rebekah Baker, The Housing Partnership’s Vice-President of Property Management. “It was wonderful for BB&T to do that – for residents to realize what it takes to get into a house and have our advisors available to provide an opportunity for those who are interested. It is a great concept.”