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ALLEGHENY  
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HOUSING  
AUTHORITY



Community

CONNECTION

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The "Homeownership Express" visits Pittsburgh. Above: Howard Slaughter, of Fannie Mae, gives remarks during HUD news conference. Below: Pictured, left to right, are Frank Aggazio, ACHA Executive Director, Tom Denson (new homeowner), Michael Liu, HUD Assistant Secretary, and Diana Cochran (new homeowner).



### Paving the Way "Homeownership Express" Bus Tour Hits Pittsburgh to Inform, Educate

**R**olling through the city June 6 as part of an ongoing mission to spread the word about family home ownership and empowerment, representatives from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development came to Pittsburgh on board the "Homeownership Express," a month-long national bus tour covering 8,500 miles in cities coast to coast.

The tour — a White House initiative launched by HUD and its partners in June

to kick off national Homeownership Month — made a stop on the University of Pittsburgh campus for a news conference to educate communities and prospective home buyers on housing counseling, down-payment assistance, flexible mortgage financing and other resources.

"The idea of having a bus tour was a creative marketing idea," said ACHA Executive Director Frank Aggazio. "We were pleased that Pittsburgh was one of HUD's stops to help get the word out about home ownership and self-sufficiency."

During the news conference, two ACHA residents saw their dreams of

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### Hard Work Pays Off ACHA Honored by National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials

In recognition of its outstanding efforts in the public housing arena, the Allegheny County Housing Authority received a cluster of Merit Awards by the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) at their summer conference in late July.

The ACHA's winning entries for superior performance in the fields of housing and community development include: Family Forum, a domestic violence

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### "Homeownership Express" Bus Tour Hits Pittsburgh... Cover Story Continued)

homeownership come true as Aggazio and HUD Assistant Secretary Michael Liu presented them with ceremonial keys to their new homes and checks for closing cost assistance. The residents, Tori Denson and Diana Cochran, qualified as recipients through the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Denson, 25, moved into a new three-bedroom home with her three children in Duquesne. Cochran purchased her home in Pitcairn.

"It is our ultimate reward when we see families move from rental assistance into homeownership," said HCVP Director Nancy Wesoff.

According to Wesoff, to be approved for homeownership, applicants must meet the minimum requirements and complete pre-mortgage counseling. In addition, applicants must be employed for a minimum of one year, earning a minimum of \$10,300. Ellen Parker, Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator for the ACHA, said recipients must be credit ready to qualify for a mortgage, with the

ACHA available to provide assistance in credit repair for those who need it.

The news conference also featured a presentation by Robert J. Sahadi, Fannie Mae Vice President for Community Technology, of its Internet-based software program "Home Counselor Online" and a \$10,000 check to Neighborhood Housing Services of Pittsburgh, whose staff provided on-site homeownership counseling services to some 50 potential home buyers.

Also on hand for the festivities were HUD Local Field Office Director Richard Nemoytin, and U.S. Representative Tim Murphy, who lauded HUD and Fannie Mae for removing the barriers that block too many families from homeownership.

"Today, the American Dream of owning a home is closer to being a reality for many of America's families," said Murphy. "Houses are built of brick and mortar, not red tape and regulations."

"Homeownership is a goal that we take very seriously at the ACHA," said

Aggazio, who noted that three more ACHA families have qualified for homeownership through the Housing Choice Voucher Program and will be relocating to their homes in the near future, bringing the total number of ACHA recipients to nine.

The program has proven so successful that President Bush and HUD Secretary Mel Martinez have proposed expanding it to allow even more families to participate. The tour marked the second year in a row the Bush Administration highlighted the full month of June to underscore the importance of homeownership, and to focus national attention on initiatives to expand the American Dream to even more Americans.

Last year, President Bush announced a goal to create 5.5 million new homeowners by the year 2010, and issued "America's Homeownership Challenge," a call to the real estate and mortgage finance industries to work in partnership to help achieve this goal. The Blueprint for the American Dream Partnership, created last year by Martinez in response to President Bush's call, is a coalition involving many segments of the housing industry.

Scene from Meyers Ridge Retreat: Residents, Tomi and Tera Schuler are engaged in a presentation focused on "Bringing Unity in the Community."



### Getting Down to Business Meyers Ridge Residents Hold Important Community Retreat

**O**n July 25-27, a group of 30 ACHA residents from Meyers Ridge town homes in McKees Rocks got down to business during an important retreat aimed at increasing awareness and building fellowship in the mixed-income community.

The retreat, which focused on the theme "Bringing Unity in the Community,"

covered a wealth of topics, including conflict resolution, personal money management, and grant writing. The weekend also included important information for residents about the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, with local HUD

representatives on hand to answer questions about policies and procedures.

Contributing to the event was Darius Swinton, an acclaimed motivational speaker and executive director of Swinton and Associates in Richmond, Va. During the workshop, Swinton addressed the Meyers Ridge contingent about personal empowerment and the need to make an immediate difference within their community.

"Residents who were serious about bringing about and increasing positive change in their community attended this retreat," said Swinton, who also served as facilitator throughout the three-day gathering. "In every speaking engagement I do, I try to be truthful and deal with the real world as it relates to the people I address. The Meyers Ridge residents were very receptive and I believe the workshop went very well."

"This retreat should make us stronger and help us get along better, even if we've known each other for years or met just yesterday," said Frances Carter, Resident Council President at Meyers Ridge since 1995. "This retreat gave us a chance to bond together and helped make everyone aware that it's important to have more than one voice heard."

As part of the retreat itinerary, Carter said the residents presented ideas on how to best utilize funds attained for the community through a pair of Ross Grants in the sum of \$200,000. Among the uses discussed were job apprenticeship programs in affiliation with the Black Contractors Association, social programs for

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**Meyers Ridge Resident Retreat  
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children, small business ownership options and continuing education through CCAC for qualified residents.

“Our overall goal is to create jobs,” said Carter. “We wanted to make sure that everyone on the Resident Advisory Board is aware of the Ross Grant money and has a say in what to do with it.”

In addition to the Meyers Ridge residents, ACHA staff in attendance included Frank Magliocco, Assistant Director of Finance, Erin Slattengren, Project Manager, Charles T. Brown, Associate Director of Business and Economic Initiatives for the ACHA and Jacqueline Hill, Resident Services Secretary. ACHA Resident Advisory Board President Lynn Bonner was also on hand to discuss RAB procedures with the residents.

Carter said at least 10 of the retreat attendees were new to the community.

For Meyers Ridge, a mixed-income community comprised of tax-credit homes, low-income housing and Housing Choice Voucher residents which received a \$15.7 million HOPE VI grant for renovations in 1997, the retreat was the first of its kind.

**Work Pays Off  
(ACHA Honored by NAHRO...  
Continued from Cover)**

prevention program; Owners Association and Outreach Program, a Housing Choice Voucher Program landlord recruitment project; Mega Manual, a comprehensive guide for public housing managers; Senior Living Enhancement Program, in which a nurse and social worker are provided for elderly hi-rise communities; Furnished Efficiency Apartments, a marketing effort in which available one-room units are shown with furnishings to increase lease-rates; Homestead Housing Elderly Supportive Service, a medical program working in partnership with UPMC at the Homestead Apartments for senior residents; Furnish-A-Start, a program designed to help families in need of basic furnishings; and the Cultural Liaison Program, in which

an interpreter was hired to improve communication between ACHA staff and foreign language-speaking residents.

According to Mary L. Pike, NAHRO Director of Member Services, the organization presented about 300 Merit Awards during the reception. On July 26, a roundtable discussion was held, in which conference award winners were spotlighted as table hosts during an innovation/information exchange.

**A Closer Look**

*Aggazio comments on the eight award-winning programs:*

**Family Forum:** “[Domestic violence] is a relatively common problem and we’ve shown that we’re proactive in going out and talking about the subject and giving advice to single spouses and informing them of what to look for and who to call.”

**Owners Association and Outreach Program:** “The Housing Choice Voucher Program Department did a remarkable job recruiting landlords, which gives families who have a voucher more of a choice to find units in different areas.”

**Mega Manual:** “Director of Operations, [Assistant Executive Director] Beverly Moore took it upon herself to create a manual which covers every situation for our public housing managers, including rent collection, supervising new sites and maintenance.”

**Senior Living Enhancement Program:** “In this second-year program, the nurse takes blood pressure and monitors all the prescriptions that a senior may have. The social worker provides arts and crafts and accompanies seniors on field trips.”

**Furnished Efficiency Apartments:** “Efficiencies are comparable to living in a hotel room, and people don’t want to live in a hotel room. We’ve been able to convert a lot of efficiencies into large one-bedroom units and added a ‘half-wall’ in others, where you can have some privacy with a small bedroom and a TV/living room. This has worked to make efficiencies more marketable.”

**Homestead Housing Elderly Supportive Service:** “Not everyone who lives in Homestead is eligible for the LIFE Center, so we provided the offices and exam rooms for UPMC on site to service others.”

**Furnish-A-Start Program:** “Sometimes we learn a family has moved to an ACHA residence with very little to no furnishings, so we try to assist them by partnering with Furnish-A-Start, a South Side-based organization.”

**Cultural Liaison Program:** “At the Homestead Apartments, we have a large Russian population, so we hired Julia Houkam, an interpreter, part-time to help us talk to them about relocation and other issues as we continue to renovate the community.”

**ACTION-HOUSING  
PRESENTS EXCELLENCE  
AWARDS TO FOUR KEY  
ACHA LEADERS**

Pittsburgh’s ACTION-Housing recently presented its 2003 Awards of Excellence to four key Allegheny County Housing Authority leaders at its annual luncheon at the Omni William Penn Hotel.

As stated by John Zimmer, Executive Director of ACTION-Housing, the awardees were selected for honors “because of ACHA’s exceptional performance in recent years and the substantial progress that has been made by the current leadership in modernizing and redeveloping ACHA’s Housing stock.”

The awardees were ACHA Executive Director Frank Aggazio; Board Chair Michelle Pagano Heck; Former Board Chair Deborah Booker; and Resident Council Leader Frances Carter, of McKees Rocks.

In its selection, Zimmer also noted two consecutive high performance awards to ACHA from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and added, “What makes this accomplishment even more extraordinary is that just ten years ago, ACHA received a failing grade...the current leadership has obviously made a difference.”





## Getting the Word Out

*The impact of the ACHA LIFE Center is Presented to U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee*

**V**ying for the attention of a U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee at a congressional hearing in Washington, D.C. is no easy task for any public housing authority. One look at the itinerary of the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee for May 14, 2003, provided ample proof of this fact, as only one housing authority was listed to testify among the 18 designated five-minute slots, with the rest of the slate filled by corporations, universities, physicians and various non-profit directors. That lone housing agency was the Allegheny County Housing Authority.

ACHA Executive Director Frank Aggazio, along with Homestead LIFE Center Director Ransom Towsley, spoke to the subcommittee to emphasize the importance of the ACHA's LIFE (Living Independently For Elders) Center program, discuss its success in Homestead and the surrounding Mon Valley, and bring to the forefront a funding request to build an additional center in Tarentum.

"These types of committees get thousands of requests for their time," said Aggazio. "They don't pick too many [organizations] to give direct testimony. So it makes me feel proud of the work we do, because when we requested to speak with them two-and-a-half months ago, we caught somebody's attention."

The LIFE center opened May 6, 2002 on the first floor of the revitalized Homestead Apartments. The center is home to a large activity room for crafts and companionship, as well as an adjacent kitchen. For adult day care, a medical suite for routine examinations and minor medical treatments is available, plus a physical and occupational therapy suite — all tailored to the needs of the elderly and disabled in the Mon Valley and beyond.

"We're trying to replicate what we did at Homestead," said ACHA Executive Director Frank Aggazio. "We testified about how successful it is, about the importance of co-location of services and housing together, which it offers. Because we have three hi-rises for the elderly in the northeast section of the county [Rachel Carson Hall, Golden Towers and Brackenridge Hall], we feel a new LIFE center in that area will be ideal for those communities."

"We're trying to replicate what we did at Homestead," said ACHA Executive Director Frank Aggazio.

Aggazio said the exact location for the new LIFE center has not been determined, but stressed that it will serve an important niche for communities with many elderly living on steel industry pensions.

"The benefits are evident," said Aggazio, who noted that Allegheny County ranks second behind Florida's Miami-Dade County for oldest median age in the country. "It's a quality of life issue, not only for the residents who live in the [on-site] community but also for the residents who live nearby. Transportation to the facility is provided as part of the LIFE Center registrant's health insurance coverage. It's just a great concept. A lot of housing authorities are coming to us looking at what we've done in Homestead. So if you have a chance to replicate it, you do it."

"We're hoping congress will set aside \$1.5 to \$2 million to build the facility," said Walter MacFann, ACHA Director of Real Estate Investments. "We're at the mercy of congress to pass all their appropriations based on their timetable, but we're hoping the new center will be approved by summer or the end of calendar year."

Aggazio said the success of the Homestead LIFE Center, currently operating 90 percent in terms of numbers served, has exceeded his expectations and that he would like to have the second LIFE Center completed within the next two years.

Among the congressmen in attendance for the hearing were Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.) whose district includes parts of northeast Allegheny County, Rep. Dave Weldon, M.D. (R-Fla.) from Orlando and Rep. Ralph Regula (D-Ohio), the subcommittee chairman from Navarre whose home district also includes Canton which, like Tarentum, also includes many elderly with steel industry pensions. Aggazio said each representative related well to his testimony.

"I got the sense they knew what I was trying to convey," said Aggazio. "Dr. Weldon, in particular, being in the medical field, related to the needs of the elderly and commented that we're doing great work."

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**Frank Aggazio**  
Executive Director, ACHA

### Creativity + Hard Work = Success

Here we are approaching the end of summer 2003, and the ACHA is still moving forward, in spite of imminent budget cuts from Washington. In our previous issue of Community Connections, I stated that our success would depend on our creativity in finding ways to do more with less. I believe that we are being successful in meeting that challenge.

We have accomplished much since our last issue. We cannot cover them all in this issue, but I can mention a few:

In June, we were a part of the HUD initiated "Homeownership Express" Bus Tour. It was an honor to have Pittsburgh selected as one of the cities to be visited during this month long tour. One of my greatest satisfactions came in seeing two of our residents accept ceremonial keys to their new homes at this event. The excitement on the faces of the educational scholarship recipients at this year's Home Ownership Golf Classic was another high point. After all, this is what the ACHA is all about — meeting the needs of its residents and helping them improve their quality of life.

The ACHA received eight awards at the NAHRO summer conference. It is both encouraging and humbling to reflect on how much success we have had this year in establishing and executing programs to benefit our communities.

Last, but not least, on May 14 we were honored to be able to make a presentation to the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee concerning the ACHA's LIFE Center program in Homestead.

The articles in this issue describe these events in greater detail. I have a host of other ACHA accomplishments that I want to share with you, but we'll save them for the next issue! In the meantime, ACHA staff, board members and residents: keep up the good work!