

The Home Front Apartments- Housing for Homeless Veterans



by Lisa Hoffmeyer

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that 1 in 150 US veterans are homeless—about 150,000 men and women or 13% of all homeless adults. The Big Bend Homeless Coalition, the City of Tallahassee, the Tallahassee Housing Authority and the local VA office are determined to make a dent in those numbers with the Home Front Apartments, 53 one-bedroom apartments targeted to house area veterans who are homeless.

The City of Tallahassee had its eye on the complex, formerly known as the Chelsea Apartments in the Providence Neighborhood, for some time. Finding a way to bring this vacant and abandoned property back on line was just one piece of the overall plan for improving and revitalizing this Community Redevelopment Target Area. The City's plan was to purchase and renovate the property and donate it to a nonprofit organization once finished.

When the City learned it would be receiving

Neighborhood Stabilization (NSP) funds, they immediately got to work and acquired the property out of foreclosure from Wells Fargo for \$570,000. The City's multifamily rehab experts inspected the property with an architect and together they estimated the renovation costs at \$1.5 million. The scope of the rehabilitation included new flooring, energy efficient appliances, doors and windows, façade improvements, landscaping, new walkways, laundry facilities, a community room and a new air conditioning (HVAC) system. The work was competitively bid and Pinnacle Construction, a minority-owned business enterprise, was just about ready to sign the construction contract when the entire complex was vandalized. Thieves had ripped out the only thing of value in the building—the copper wiring—damaging all the interior drywall in the process and increasing the renovation cost.

The resourceful City staff contacted the Capital Area Community Action Agency to inquire about using multifamily Weatherization money to fill this unforeseen budget gap. The staff applied for and received more than \$250,000 toward the renovation. Some of the things the weatherization funds paid for included HVAC, low flow showerheads and smoke detectors, allowing the NSP money to fund the balance of the project. The scope of work was adjusted accordingly and the contractor began construction in May 2010 and it was completed in August 2011.

In the summer of 2010, the Big Bend Homeless Coalition responded to the City's Request for Qualifications seeking a qualified nonprofit to own and manage the complex. Twenty-five percent of the City's NSP allocation was required to serve households at or below 50% of Area Median Income, Big Bend's focus on homeless individuals and families was a great fit. Big Bend Homeless Coalition was awarded the project, renamed it the Home Front Apartments and took title from the City in November.

The Big Bend Homeless Coalition's previous



The City of Tallahassee used NSP fund to acquire and rehab the Home Front Apartments. The rehab included new flooring, energy efficient appliances, doors and windows, façade improvements, landscaping, new walkways, laundry facilities, a community room and a new air conditioning (HVAC) system.



Home Front Apartments is a community targeted to house area veterans who are homeless.

Veterans make up a disproportionate share of the U.S. Homeless population.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers programs to help homeless vets or those at risk of homelessness. Trained counselors are available 24 hours a day at 877-424-3838. Other resources, including housing support services, treatment and job training information can be found at: www.va.gov/homeless

experience includes managing scattered site permanent rental housings for homeless families and owning and managing 152 units of transitional housing.

In partnership with the Housing Authority, the Big Bend Homeless Coalition applied for and received an allocation of extremely competitive project-based Veteran's Administration Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers for the new development. The VASH Vouchers subsidize the difference between the apartment rent and the 30% of adjusted gross income the residents are required to pay. The VA case managers will handle the tenant qualification process and 15 homeless vets from their waiting list are now poised to become the first tenants at the Home Front. The Providence Neighborhood Association is delighted

with the development, and rather than crying "NIMBY," they said "YIMBY!" and are happy that the former eyesore has been beautifully renovated and proud that it will be used to house some of our nation's homeless veterans.

This collaboration came together flawlessly—I couldn't have asked for a better set of partners working together," said Susan Pourciau of the Big Bend Homeless Coalition. "And the best news is that 50 Veterans will move out of homelessness and into their own affordable, safe apartments."

Patient capital, capable City staff, qualified and experienced nonprofit partners, and a skilled general contractor—these are the ingredients of a successful development project, and they all came together perfectly at the Home Front Apartments. **HNN**

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Meet George Smith



Mr. Smith is one of the first tenants who will move into the Home Front Apartments. He is an Air Force Veteran with almost 10 years of service to our country. Like so many, Mr. Smith is a victim of the current economic downturn. Until a couple of years ago, he was employed full time

at a chicken processing plant in Florida, only to be laid off when the plant shut down. He applied for job after job with no luck, eventually moving to Valdosta, Georgia. When his unemployment ran out, he became homeless. "I was as low as I could go," he said. While volunteering at a Community Resource Fair, "Veterans

Stand Down," he met Denna Green-Corbett from the Tallahassee Veterans Administration. She encouraged him to move to Tallahassee and take advantage of the services there.

With some skepticism, in January 2011, Mr. Smith moved into transitional housing at Tallahassee Veterans Village, began taking computer classes offered by Goodwill Industries, and is now enrolled in Lively Technical Center in the Culinary Arts program specializing in vegetarian cuisine. Mr. Smith is also a poet and enjoys encouraging others who are experiencing hard times. He is very grateful for the people he has met at the VA and the assistance he has received and is looking forward to moving into his brand new apartment, where he can continue his path toward success and be a role model for others. We wish him all the best. **HNN**