

# Acorn Acres Takes Root

Maggie Cook-Pleasant and Gina Miserendino

Interfaith Mission of Sussex County (IFMSC) whose motto is “Creating Community Through Better Housing” had a dream of building affordable decent housing since its founding in 1990. Acorn Acres, a 24 unit apartment complex for low income families is the realization of their dream, their mission and the fruit of extraordinary planning and collaboration by their board and staff.

Despite the cold, rain and an unplanned government holiday, approximately fifty well wishers convened to celebrate the official open house of Acorn Acres in Georgetown on Friday, June 11.

Those who call Acorn Acres home include African-American, Hispanic and white families. The complex offering two, three and four bedroom units is owned by Interfaith Mission of Sussex County and is managed by East Coast Property Management in compliance with USDA Rural Development and Delaware State Housing Authority guidelines. According to Rubi Campos Acorn Acres’ property manager,

requirements to live there include meeting financial income limits, passing a home visit, landlord references and credit and criminal background checks.

Deborah Wilkins Schiffer, IFMSC’s Executive Director shared that the project had an inauspicious beginning having faced “plenty of concern and opposition from the community at large.” But, through “sharing of information,” attitudes changed. On the other hand, the reaction from the target community could not have been much more enthusiastic. Families waited in line in the snow for hours on a freezing January morning. Interfaith received two hundred and fifty applications for the twenty four units that first day.

When the tenants first saw the units they were “shocked.. so pleased that they could have such a nice apartment for the money they could afford. One lady cried she was so happy.” reports Rubi Campos. Ms. Campos commented that all the tenants have settled in, it is a quiet community where residents go to

work and kids go to school. Except for one unit where the tenant passed away, all the original tenants remain after one year.

Although residents have not expressed a need for any particular service, in honoring the second part of their mission, there will be a summer youth program held on premises for kids 5-12.

Ms Schiffer says that Acorn Acres will also be helping to facilitate other kinds of educational programs and social services in the future. An expanded playground is also a goal.

In response to being asked what would they do differently when planning another such effort, Ms. Schiffer replied that she would build more units and/or more complexes to better address the crisis level need for affordable housing in Sussex. “Unfortunately limits to funding and what is allowed have prevented us to date from building more of what is needed.” notes Ms. Schiffer and adds “There is definitely a need for more affordable rental housing like Acorn Acres for very low income families,

