



Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Below-Cost Housing in Bed-Stuy Makes Dreams Come True for Formerly Homeless

by Ben Silverbush



BEDFORD-STUYVESANT — Politicians and government officials joined developers and tenants Friday morning, to celebrate the opening of 910 DeKalb Avenue, a new apartment building for low-income families and formerly homeless adults with psychiatric disabilities.

The event, which culminated in a symbolic ribbon-cutting and tour of the building, drew about 75 people. It was held in the structure's backyard patio, surrounded by trees, shrubs, and a children's play area. Before the building's construction started in October 2002, seven vacant lots were in its place.

Standing at five stories and 54,878 square feet, the Dunn Development Corporation project includes 64 housing units, all below cost by about 60 percent of the area's average income. The breakdown is 37 studio apartments for the previously homeless and mentally ill (\$465/month), and 27 other low-income apartments (eight one-bedrooms at \$545/month, and 19 two-bedrooms at \$655/month).

Contracted by HLS Builders Corporation and built by SLCE Architects, the endeavor cost \$10.6 million. Its funding came from low income tax credits from the DHCR, a permanent loan from the New York State Housing Trust Fund, tax credit syndication by the Richman Group Affordable Housing Corporation, and a construction loan from the Community Preservation Corporation.

Yolanda Jackson told The Brooklyn Daily Eagle that she moved into one of the building's studio apartments on April 18. Before then, she spent 11 months in homeless shelters. Jackson had entered the shelter system after working for 18 years with Metropolitan Hospital and the Human Resources Administration. After resigning from her job, she had trouble finding work, and her fiancée had a stroke. As a result, he was unable to support her financially while he needed to live in a nursing home. Now, Jackson said, she appears to be on her way to work again, looking to be a receptionist in a hospital, or do time-keeping as she used to. In the meantime, though, her apartment is being paid for by public assistance and Community Access Inc., a member organization of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services. "It's wonderful," said Jackson. "It's a dream come true."

Nancy Rivera is another tenant of 910 DeKalb. Before moving in, Rivera said she spent over two years in homeless shelters. While there, she worked at three jobs, having no days off and getting very little sleep. But now, Rivera noted, she pays her own rent.

Judith Calogero, Commissioner of the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR), made a speech at the ceremony.

According to her, this project was DHCR's highest scoring application two years ago. She said that the government's role is to help finance, rather than build projects — as it mistakenly thought in the past. Referring to the building's appearance, including its window coverings, wood paneling, and playground, Caligaro added, "From an architectural standpoint, it's probably second to none. This is a model that can be replicated, not just in Brooklyn but through all of New York."

"Her leadership really makes projects like this possible," said Martin Dunn, president of Dunn Development.

State Senator Velmanette Montgomery spoke soon after. She acknowledged the New York City Housing Authority as the helpful neighbor of DeKalb Avenue residents, and said she felt good that housing was built for "real" people, decent living accommodations for the neediest.

Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz called market rate housing something "most of us cannot afford, ever" and praised 910 DeKalb as a "blessing" that would help the neediest. "Frankly, I look forward to the day when this kind of event will be common," he said.

Lisa Green of the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene said that housing is essential to wellness and recovery, and that she is proud to be involved with affordable housing projects while serving as the director of her agency's new housing services office.

Mark Hurwitz, deputy commissioner of the NYC Department of Homeless Services, said he is in charge of the city's shelters for single adults, and that his agency is engaged in a 10-year effort to end chronic homelessness. He added, "What better demonstration of what it takes to end chronic homelessness than this?"

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