Homeless women and a West Philadelphia community had reason to celebrate when dignitaries and neighbors cut the ribbon to open Bigham Leatherberry Wise Place on March 11. People’s Emergency Center (PEC), the organization that built Bigham Leatherberry Wise, took a vacant lot and building and turned it into eleven new affordable homes for formerly homeless women with special needs and their children.

Bigham Leatherberry Wise accommodates families with diverse needs. It has six two-bedroom units and five three-bedroom units. Two of the units are fully accessible to people with disabilities. One is accessible to individuals with sensory impairments. The project is part of the community objectives described in the 2004 West Powelton/Saunders Park Neighborhood Plan and the Lower Lancaster Revitalization Plan.

“Bigham Leatherberry Wise is important to this neighborhood. It provides affordable rentals in a changing neighborhood, and coincides with the homeownership projects in our pipeline,” said Kathy Desmond, Interim President and CEO of PEC.

Bigham Leatherberry Wise Place doesn’t just provide these families a place to live; PEC also provides critical supportive services as well. Residents have access to case management, children’s programs, affordable childcare, counseling and therapy, drug and alcohol out-patient treatment, and employment and training programs. A case management office is located on site for residents to access services and referrals.

Bigham Place has a courtyard with a beautiful rain garden with seating area and a large rear yard for children to run and play. PEC wanted residents to be comfortable and enjoy their new homes.

“Quality, safe, and affordable housing gives families the opportunity to focus on building a home,” said Deborah McColloch, Director, Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD). “Providing housing for women and their children gives the parents and the children the chance to thrive in our communities and schools.”

Even the name reflects commitment to the community. Bigham Leatherberry Wise Place is named in honor of three local community organizers who have been advocates for the community for many years. Helen Bigham was a PEC Board Member and dedicated volunteer throughout PEC’s history. John Leatherberry and Elsie Wise both held leadership positions with the West Powelton Concerned Citizens Council, and are long-standing community organizers.

Bigham Leatherberry Wise Place

Housing, as well as FHLBank Pittsburgh, TD Charitable Foundation, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, and The Reinvestment Fund, for a total investment of $2,695,000. The Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (PRA) provided financing assistance.

City officials, community leaders, and supporters cut the ribbon at the Bigham Leatherberry Wise Place Ribbon-Cutting

Formerly Homeless Women and Children Have New Homes To Call Their Own
March 2015

Calling all Community Developers! We need you!

The Housing and Disability Technical Assistance Program (TAP) is a resource sponsored by the Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD). The purpose of TAP is to provide information on accessible housing, fair housing laws and regulations, financial and technical resources, model projects and other issues related to housing for people with disabilities in the City of Philadelphia.

All developers that receive City funding and construct accessible housing must post those accessible units on the News on Tap Home Finder site for a minimum of 30 days prior to promoting them to the general public.

If you are a developer that meets those criteria, please visit News on TAP today to list your accessible units! And if you are a community member, please check the News On TAP site regularly for new accessible units.

Visit www.newsontap.org today!

New Era for the City’s Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Program

The City’s Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Program has had to say goodbye to its longtime leader, Judge Annette M. Rizzo. Judge Rizzo led the creation of the program, and left her position in the Court of Common Pleas in January. This program has been nationally recognized and saved more than 8,000 Philadelphia homes from foreclosure.

“Foreclosure doesn’t just affect the homeowner; it affects the whole city,” said Judge Rizzo. “In Philadelphia, we stand by our neighbors to preserve communities!”

“Judge Rizzo has been passionate about this program from the beginning, and truly led the way,” said Deborah McColloch, Director, Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD). “Thousands of Philadelphians are in their homes today thanks to the work of Judge Rizzo, housing counselors, volunteer lawyers, outreach teams and OHCD staff.”

When the economic and real estate crisis hit the country, the Philadelphia Courts saw the increase in foreclosures and wanted to make a difference. The Courts issued a court order to reassess how foreclosures were handled, and OHCD supplied the tools needed to help homeowners in crisis. OHCD funded and supported the SaveYourHomePhilly hotline (215-334-HOME), outreach to homeowners, pro-bono legal assistance, and utilized its team of experienced housing counseling agencies to advocate for homeowners. OHCD has invested more than $15 million in foreclosure prevention since the program’s inception.

“When a family facing foreclosure comes to my office, they are in distress, and often very emotional and upset,” said Mary Harper, Housing Counselor, Urban League of Philadelphia. “This program gives us the opportunity to help them during a major crisis in their lives and offers them solutions to save the place where they live and find comfort, their home. The work that takes place in this program changes people’s lives.”

Judge Rosalyn K. Robinson will be the program’s new leader. “This program is unique not only to Philadelphia, but to the country,” said Judge Robinson. “Judge Rizzo laid the foundation and her commitment garnered dynamic results. The court system, the City and our community partners will continue to ensure that in Philadelphia we will save neighborhoods one address at a time. I am looking forward to my participation in the program, and am committed to its continued success.”

“I am confident that Judge Robinson will lead this program with passion and innovation. The fight is not over, and I have left the program in capable hands,” said Judge Rizzo.
On February 19, seniors gained access to 48 brand new homes in West Philadelphia! Philadelphia Presbytery Homes and Services for the Aging (PPHSA) and the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (PRA), along with other civic groups and community members, cut the ribbon for Wynnefield Place Apartments, a newly constructed apartment building for low-income seniors.

New Homes for Seniors in West Philadelphia

Each unit in Wynnefield Place includes a kitchen, living/dining room, bathroom and a bedroom. PPHSA designed the units to meet the adaptability and accessibility needs of the residents. Every apartment has an accessible route throughout the unit, so residents can move with ease.

The ground level of Wynnefield Place includes a spacious vestibule and lobby, a multi-purpose room with a kitchen, community computer room and storage room for the tenants to use and enjoy. Wynnefield Place also has a Service Coordinator who fits services to the specific needs of the residents.

“We are proud of our role in this project and know the importance of quality affordable housing for our community,” said Brian Abernathy, Executive Director of PRA. “Providing 48 units of housing for seniors is part of our agenda to improve neighborhoods across the city.”

PRA provided the land and financing assistance for the development.

Vacant land causes blight in communities throughout Philadelphia, but OHCD found a way to attack this problem! OHCD partnered with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society to develop an innovative program, Philadelphia LandCare, to manage vacant land and reduce blight.

The LandCare program maintains more than 8,500 lots, covering 10 million square feet of land. It “cleans and greens” lots across the city by removing debris and weeds, adding compost-enriched topsoil, and planting grass and trees to create park-like settings. This program is a nationally recognized model of landscape treatment, and creates over 100 jobs each year.

A recent issue of Police Chief magazine featured the Philadelphia LandCare program. “Preventing Victimization: Public Health Approaches to Fight Crime” highlighted research that shows how lot beautification reduces crime, improves residents’ health, and increases property values.

“We know that vacant land is an issue in our city,” said Deborah McColloch, Director, Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD). “The Philadelphia LandCare program is an innovative program that is a major step in the right direction. This program improves community appearance, fosters neighborhood pride, and, as we see from this study, helps to reduce crime. All these elements are critical to making communities stronger.”

To read more of this interesting story, visit: http://www.courtinnovation.org/tags/crime-prevention

Philadelphia LandCare Program, Fighting Crime in Philadelphia
Families Facing Foreclosure Benefit from City Programs Funded by Wells Fargo

Foreclosure is a problem too many Philadelphia families face. That is why the City of Philadelphia and Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD) developed the Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Program. The program, which has helped families stay in their homes and out of foreclosure, includes:

- Door-to-door outreach
- SaveYourHomePhilly Hotline
- Housing counseling
- Legal assistance
- Financial capability workshops

In 2013, the program received a boost! Wells Fargo provided an $850,000 grant to the program through its CityLift Local Initiatives Grant Program. The funding supports all the program components, but particularly the door-to-door outreach and financial capability workshops.

Homeowners participating in the Foreclosure Prevention Program are required to attend the TFFG orientation class, and are encouraged to take the remaining available classes:

- Setting Priorities/Budgeting
- How to Use On-line Banking Tools and Other Technology
- Understanding and Recovering Your Credit

Once the three TFFG classes are completed, clients receive a certificate. This certificate is passed on to their mortgage lender to show the clients’ dedication to strengthening their financial management habits. In many cases, class completion was cited by a lender as a positive factor in the decision to offer a mortgage modification.

“Wells Fargo’s support is vital to the success of TFFG, Door-to-Door Outreach, and the other Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Program components,” said Deborah McColloch, Director, Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD). “We appreciate the continued support Wells Fargo gives our programs. These funds directly help Philadelphians become financially stable, and also can give them the tools to keep their home. That is invaluable.”

Door-to-Door Outreach

Outreach workers provide homeowners facing foreclosure information on the Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Program and how it can help them. Door-to-door outreach contacted more than 3,000 families in 2014.

Tools for Financial Growth (TFFG)

For the last three years, Tools for Financial Growth (TFFG) financial capability workshops have given homeowners facing foreclosure the skills to avoid future financial problems. So far more than 1,200 homeowners have graduated from the program after attending the orientation and all three workshops.