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State-funded supportive housing for homeless veterans and people with disabilities opens in Peoria

Rehabilitation of former YWCA building brings housing and crucial services to 79 local residents

PEORIA – Blagojevich Administration officials from the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) today took part in the official opening of a supportive housing development in Peoria that will help build homes and futures for 79 local homeless veterans and people with mental illness, disabilities, and substance abuse. New Hope Apartments provides a safe place to live while the tenants learn to become self sufficient. The development, sponsored by two local not-for-profit organizations, rehabilitated the former YWCA building, helping the City of Peoria to preserve a historic building.

“Affordable housing is more than just bricks and mortar. This development is essentially helping a community to develop. Providing a stable environment for people in the area who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless means that they can concentrate on learning the necessary skills to rebuild their lives and become positive contributors to the community,” said Governor Rod R. Blagojevich.

It cost the Peoria Opportunities Foundation and the South Side Office of Concern \$11.9 million to complete the project. IHDA provided a \$1.25 million interest free loan from the State Affordable Housing Trust Fund and \$893,472 in Low Income Housing Tax Credits, which generated \$7.8 million in private equity for the project. The development costs included a gut rehabilitation of the former YWCA building including the installation of updated plumbing and electrical systems throughout the building and constructing apartments above the historically preserved swimming pool basin.

The newly renovated five-story building is located at 301 North East Jefferson Street and consists of 79 studio apartments that include a bathroom and kitchen. Ten units are fully accessible for persons with physical disabilities and a further two units are suitable for people with hearing or visual impairments. The facility also offers lounges and activity areas, three laundry rooms, a computer lab and library, as well as a fitness center.

The South Side Office of Concern will provide tenants with valuable supportive services such as case management, life skills training, job development, medical screenings and health management to

help them rebuild their lives. The supportive services are funded, in part, by the Illinois Department of Human Services.

New funding from IDHS will be allocated specifically to this project for the first Integrated Dual Diagnosis Treatment (IDDT) program in central Illinois. This additional funding from the IDHS Division of Mental Health and the Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse will bring new capacity to serve the needs of homeless persons with mental illness and/or substance abuse problems. The goal is to integrate supportive employment for persons with mental illness or substance abuse addiction with the permanent supportive housing program.

“New Hope Apartments represents the coordination of policy and resources that Gov. Blagojevich has been advocating in his annual comprehensive housing plans since 2005. New Hope Apartments brings together the strength of City, State, and federal resources combined with the neighborhood knowledge to benefit local residents and the community,” said DeShana L. Forney, IHDA Executive Director.

Relocated tenants from Phoenix House, another South Side Office of Concern supportive housing property, occupy 30 of the New Hope apartments. Preserving the affordability of units is one of the top priorities for IHDA funding as it helps stem the decline of affordable housing.

“New Hope will change the face of mental health in Central Illinois. It's a superb way of realizing both SSOC's and the division's mission of assisting those on the road to self-reliance that, in large part, comes from having a place to call your own,” said Brenda Hampton, the Acting Associate Director for System Rebalancing Services, IDHS Division of Mental Health. “New Hope not only coincides with our expectation of recovery, it also serves as a terrific model of collaboration that is driving us to better integrate our programs to empower consumers and improve communities.”

Monthly rent at New Hope ranges from \$380 to \$444, but employed residents are asked to contribute no more than 30 percent of their income to rent. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will subsidize the remainder. The Peoria Housing Authority also contributed 30 Section 8 project-based vouchers.

“The financial support from the Governor and the State has allowed us to take some of Peoria’s homeless people off the streets and into an environment where they have the stability to focus on overcoming their issues and acquiring the skills to become self-sufficient and community minded. We applaud Gov. Blagojevich for his commitment to Peoria’s homeless population and believe New Hope Apartments will become a good model for supportive housing in the area. The more people we can help become independent, the less we need to depend on costly institutions and burden the community,” said Jane Genzel, executive director of the Peoria Opportunities Foundation.

“This building, the bricks and mortar, acts as a promise and commitment to provide permanent supportive housing to 79 people who are homeless and have disabilities,” says Christine Kahl, executive director of the South Side Office of Concern. “We are honoring that promise by insuring that mental health, substance abuse and employment services are available on-site. We are so proud to offer these critical services and be the agency that enables the building to fulfill its promise.”