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City of Orange Celebrates Rebirth of Street Ravaged by Fire in 2010

ORANGE – June 24, 2015 – It's a new day for an East Ward neighborhood in the City of Orange.

Community leaders converged today on Oakwood Avenue to celebrate the opening of a contemporary seven-unit development. The site became a sad landmark in February 2010, when a devastating fire tore through seven attached row houses, displacing 38 Orange residents.

The damaged homes remained vacant until the Orange Housing Development Corporation (OHDC) acquired the property and demolished them in March 2012. After three years of work, the site is now home to a contemporary seven-unit affordable housing LEED certified apartment building that is like nothing else in Orange.

The raging fire may have left a gaping hole on Oakwood Avenue for years, but it was OHDC's vision that created hope and opportunity for the city.

“As an affordable housing agency, we knew we could not stand idle and do nothing to help the people that remained in the neighborhood,” said Dr. Walter McNeil, Jr., executive director of the Orange Housing Authority, who also serves as OHDC president. “We quickly developed a plan to work with the community to build a modern, multi-family apartment building, an amenity to the neighborhood and a great place for people to live.”

Built by Fast Construction in Newark, the development is part of OHDC's promise to be a cornerstone resource for the ongoing revitalization in the East Ward.

The Oakwood Avenue Development was made possible through a \$1.35 million Community Development Block Grant and the Department of Community Affairs' Neighborhood Enhancement Program. Other funding sources include \$560,000 from the Essex County Neighborhood Stabilization Program and equity from the Orange Housing Development Corporation. In total, the development cost \$2.4 million to build.



“As we stand and bask in this project, we realize none of this would have been possible without teamwork,” said orange Mayor Dwayne Warren. “Families could have abandoned this area but instead they stayed. I thank the residents and Dr. Walter McNeil for their commitment to our city.”

Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver, who represents Orange in the state Legislature, echoed the mayor’s sentiments. Delighted with the work of OHDC and the Orange Housing Authority, she affirmed her commitment to support urban municipalities that have a proven track record in developing affordable housing.

“The housing seen here will continue to expand our neighborhoods and stabilize our economy, she said. “It is my hope that our cities can learn from one another so we can see this in neighboring communities. The fact is, people are turning to older suburban towns, and they are starting to gravitate back to communities like Orange.”

The Oakwood Avenue Development features three-story, low-rise multi-family apartment buildings totaling more than 11,000 square feet. The modern buildings comprise one, two and three bedroom units. The architect designed the building to be energy efficient, featuring a solar panel roof and energy saving devices throughout the building.

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