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OHA working hard for senior residents during winter storm

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Staff Writer

The Orange Housing Authority has been hard at work confirming residents in their various facilities throughout the city have been faring well after Winter Storm Jonas dropped close to 3 feet of snow on Orange and the rest of New Jersey on Saturday, Jan. 23.

The OHA owns and operates Washington Manor at 340 Thomas Blvd; the Oakwood Avenue Development at 219 Oakwood Ave.; Walter G. Alexander Village at 105 Wilson Place; and 209 Park Ave. According to OHA Executive Director Walter McNeil, making sure all of those sites were accessible to residents, many of whom are senior citizens, and various support services were available was a real challenge.

McNeil is responsible for 250 residences, 642 "Section 8" vouchers, 114 tax credit units and various "Scattered Sites" throughout Orange.

"This was the worst snowstorm that we experienced in a very long time," McNeil said on Tuesday, Jan. 26. "We appreciate all of the cooperation from our residents and staff in trying to remove the large amount of snow. The OHA's maintenance staff started working from early Sunday morning until late Monday afternoon."

However, McNeil said he's also aware some OHA residents believe the agency's response to the heavy snowfall should have been better and he said he wants them to know he understands their concerns and is addressing them as best he can.

"We understand there were a number of people who were unhappy because they were not able to get their cars out during the state of emergency," McNeil said. "As a small housing authority, we don't normally have heavy equipment, so we received assistance from the city of Orange and a private contractor. Our staff is still working to ensure that all of our properties are



In addition to clearing away 3 feet of snow Winter Storm Jonas left on its many properties, including Washington Manor, pictured, the Orange Housing Authority has added to its sphere of influence by having OHA Executive Director Walter McNeil and OHA Board of Trustees Chairman Coram Rimes be selected by Rutgers University Center for Government Services to teach training courses to commissioners and executive directors of housing authorities and redevelopment agencies in January, through the New Jersey Local Housing Authority and Redevelopment Agency Training Program.

properly shoveled and salted for resident."

The OHA's first winter preparedness test comes on the heels of McNeil and Orange Housing Authority Board of Trustees Chairman Coram Rimes being selected by Rutgers University Center for Government Services to teach training courses to commissioners and executive directors of housing authorities and redevelopment agencies in January, through the New Jersey Local Housing Authority and Redevelopment Agency Training Program. The course came into existence in 1991.

"We are pleased Dr. Walter McNeil has agreed to teach the ethics course for public housing authority directors and redevelopment directors," said Allen Zalkind, direc-

tor of Center for Government Services.

"This is a required course for housing authorities and redevelopment directors and Walter is a very appropriate candidate to be teaching the course. We are grateful that he consented to serve as an instructor."

The complete course of study provides commissioners and executive directors with the opportunity to enhance the knowledge and skills necessary to oversee and administer the operations of housing authorities and redevelopment agencies. Rimes said he was flattered to be chosen to teach the course.

"The Orange Housing Authority has made an extraordinary commitment to provide outstanding services for our com-

munity," Rimes said. "We are pleased to share our knowledge and enthusiasm with our peers in the housing industry."

McNeil said he's always ready to share his knowledge with others, and views it as an opportunity to tell the world about how the OHA is steadily rehabilitating the East Ward by revamping old, abandoned properties that surround public housing.

"We are delighted to take on this new opportunity at such an important time. OHA's Board of Commissioners and I have been very proactive with exposing the city of Orange to new opportunities and we are happy to bring what we have accomplished in our community to a respected program," said McNeil. "Ensuring we have the very best professionals in our trainings is vital."