HUD SECRETARY VISITS

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Alphonso Jackson (right) joined New York City Housing Authority Chairman Tino Hernandez and executive staff for a visit to the Grant Houses Senior Center on the morning of December 6th. The Secretary spent some time getting to know residents after touring the Harlem facility. The Grant Houses Senior Center is one of 95 sponsored senior centers on NYCHA property. It provides meals and services to approximately 70-80 seniors daily, including arts and crafts, recreation and field trips. NYCHA also operates an additional 42 senior centers. Shown from left to right are: Grant Houses Resident Manager Tedric Gamble. Signed by Mayor Bloomberg, the document proclaims October 21, 2006 in the City of New York, “First Houses Day.” See page 5 for the complete story.

THE NEW USER-FRIENDLY RENT BILL

Keeping Residents Safe With CCTV

By Eileen Elliott

There is no question: The use of closed circuit television cameras, or CCTVs, has had a dramatic impact on crime in the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments where they are located. In a December 14th New York Times article, the paper quoted a statement made by NYPD chief spokesperson, Paul J. Browne, in which he refers to the cameras as “a highly effective crime fighting tool.” Residents report feeling greater security, and residents who live in developments that do not have the CCTVs have petitioned NYCHA, the NYPD and various elected officials for the systems.

Responding to improvements in CCTV technology which made the systems more affordable, NYCHA and the City Council formed a partnership in 2004 to bring Small-Scale CCTVs to public housing developments. Over the past two years Council Members have allocated approximately $7 million for the purchase and installation of the systems in NYCHA developments, and for Fiscal Year 2007 Council Members have already allocated an additional $5.8 million. Today Small-Scale CCTV systems exist in 21 NYCHA developments. In addition, Large-Scale, or VIPER (video interactive patrol enhanced) systems, which are significantly more expensive to operate, now exist in 15 NYCHA developments.

The cameras are effective not only because they facilitate arrests but also because they act as deterrents. Because the Small-Scale systems were installed relatively recently, NYCHA does not yet have statistics on their effectiveness. However, with regard to the VIPER systems, on average, index crimes (i.e., murder, rape, assault, robbery, burglary and car theft) go down by 25% the first year after cameras are installed, and crime continues to go down in subsequent years.

The Small-Scale CCTV Program

In November 2006, elevator cameras at Hylan Houses in Bushwick, Brooklyn captured footage of an armed robbery. The footage was used to create a wanted poster, and because of that poster, officers from PSA #3 were able to recognize and arrest the suspect three days after the crime was committed. This is just one example of how the Small-Scale CCTVs can help facilitate arrests.

Under the Small-Scale CCTV Program, NYCHA installs state-of-the-art high resolution video cameras.
Increased Access to Healthy Food

In mid-November I joined City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn at Melrose Houses in the Bronx to announce a concerted effort to increase access to healthy foods in low-income communities by creating a new Food Policy Task Force and the new position of Food Policy Coordinator. This collaboration between my office and the City Council will expand the availability of nutritious, affordable food in underserved communities, enhance the nutritional standards followed by City agencies in feeding clients and staff, and improve access to food support programs.

The City's nutritious foods agenda also includes increasing enrollment in food support programs, such as Food Stamps. Over 1.08 million New York City residents received Food Stamps in July 2006—a 36% increase since January 2002. Yet despite these gains, there are still many New Yorkers who are eligible for Food Stamps but have not enrolled.

It is now easier than ever for New Yorkers to determine if they are eligible for Food Stamps and a host of other programs. In October, the City launched ACCESS NYC, an online tool that brings 21 different City, State, and federal human service benefit programs—including food stamps—into a single Web site. By entering basic household information into the site (available at www.nyc.gov/ACCESSNYC), residents can receive a list of the programs for which they are potentially eligible, print partially-complete application forms and find office locations. If you don’t have Internet access, call 311.

At the same press conference, I also announced the expansion of the Healthy Bodegas initiative from 200 bodegas to more than 1,000 in the South Bronx, East and Central Harlem, and Central Brooklyn over the next two years. Expansion of the initiative will also include the launching of the “Green Light” section in bodegas to highlight healthier food items available for purchase, such as 1% milk, diet beverages, fruits and vegetables. Melrose Houses was chosen as the location for the healthy foods initiative because it is one of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments visited twice a month by City Harvest’s Mobile Market trailer. The Mobile Market provides free, fresh produce to some 3,200 residents of Melrose Houses and to approximately 1,180 residents of Stapleton Houses in Staten Island.

The lack of affordable and healthy food options in low-income communities can have significant consequences, such as obesity and diabetes, which are epidemic in New York City as well as nationally. Societal changes, such as increasing the availability of healthy food and decreasing the cost, can be an important part of the solution.

Here’s to a happy and healthy 2007!

Michael R. Bloomberg

NYCHA: Making a Difference in People’s Lives

A little over 70 years ago, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) was created to do away with tenements and slums and the overall deplorable living conditions facing the poor in the 1930s. Although no running water, rooms without windows, outhouses and communal bathrooms are pretty much a thing of the past, there are other factors that today affect the quality of life of many working class families.

Davia and Ricardo Mendoza, new residents of NYCHA’s Dyckman Houses can attest to the realities facing many working families in New York: realities such as lack of space, noise pollution, deteriorating buildings and perhaps most devastating for the working poor, higher and higher rents.

Before moving into this northeastern Manhattan development, the Mendozas lived just three blocks away in a one-bedroom apartment where they said they endured poor living conditions. Mr. Mendoza said the building in which they lived and paid a market-rate rent of close to $1,000 a month started to look rundown and dirty and added that he couldn’t deal with the noisy neighbors who played loud music into the wee hours of the morning.

“I work six days a week. I would get up for work after not sleeping all night. I was uncomfortable, I was tense.”

The Mendozas and their two daughters—18-year-old Bessy and 14-year-old Lizeth—lived cramped up in that one-bedroom apartment for more than a decade, using the living room as the master bedroom and the bed as a dining room table.

But all that has changed. In fact, the Mendozas said moving to NYCHA has been a godsend. “I thought to myself, ‘If God is giving us this opportunity we have to take it’ and we have come to find a gold mine here. Here [at Dyckman Houses] I sleep well, the neighbors are great, we communicate. That’s something we never had before. It’s a great environment,” Mr. Mendoza said.

This past summer the Mendozas were notified about their eligibility for a NYCHA apartment but they had no other choice but to turn it down because they were strapped for cash—they had been saving money to send their eldest daughter to Mt. Saint Mary College in upstate New York in September.

In this situation an applicant who turns down an apartment is placed back on NYCHA’s Tenant Selection and Assignment Plan (TSAP) roster, which was established to ensure that all applicants for public housing are processed and treated under equal terms. It can be months, sometimes years before they are notified about the availability of another apartment. But the Mendozas had luck on their side. “They told us that we would probably have to wait another year but two months after they called us back and here we are,” Mr. Mendoza said with a sigh of relief.

Looking Toward the Future

This humble Honduran family said now the future looks a little more comfortable and relaxed and that’s why people should realize how important public housing is and protect it.

“This is heaven. So, what are we supposed to do? Support the system and try to make it better,” Mr. Mendoza said. “It’s up to us to continue this [public housing]. This system has to continue not just for us but for the ones that come after us,” he added.

“This is a great benefit for us. We are getting back on our feet. This is just the beginning but we are headed in the right direction. We have one daughter in college already and we know that the next several years will be a little easier for us,” Mrs. Mendoza added.

By Heidi Morales

NEW HOME

Ricardo and Diana Mendoza are very happy with their new home in Manhattan’s Dyckman Houses.
The Future Of Public Housing

It’s 2007! Just as the new year brings new opportunities, it also brings new challenges. The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) faced some serious challenges in 2006, and staff and residents worked together to take significant actions. Many of our efforts, so far, have been successful.

Our initiatives were outlined in the “Plan to Preserve Public Housing,” which I announced last April. The seven-point plan was designed to ensure the viability of public housing not only for the families who currently live in NYCHA’s 344 developments, but for future generations. Key points of the plan included a one-time allocation from Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council of $120 million, and increased fees for heavy-duty appliances and parking. The plan also included increased rents for the 27% of residents who were already at the ceiling rent limits.

Just as we could not have effectively implemented these changes without your cooperation, I ask for your cooperation again as we enter NYCHA’s 73rd year, especially with one critical aspect of the Plan to Preserve Public Housing: the transition of 8,400 units of conventional public housing from 21 developments once funded by the City and State, into the Section 8 program.

These developments no longer receive funding from any source and so NYCHA has had to use its already inadequate federal money to pay for their operation. In 2006 operating these buildings accounted for a full half of NYCHA’s budget deficit. Allowing the 8,400 units into the Section 8 program will provide a new funding stream and keep rents affordable for all 21,000 families in the 21 developments.

NYCHA held over 200 meetings with residents last spring to explain why the transition is important and what it means. I myself met with City, State and federal elected officials about the transition. I’m happy to say that based on these meetings, resident interest appears strong. As of the writing of this column, NYCHA is still waiting to hear whether or not the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will approve the plan. As part of our strategy we are also seeking resources from the State to support State developments.

To further complicate NYCHA’s financial situation, in 2007 housing authorities across the country are slated to receive a 22% budget reduction. That means that despite all of the actions we are taking, the Housing Authority is now looking at a more serious deficit than for Fiscal Year 2006. This is money that is needed to take significant action.

I look forward to working with you to preserve the authorities and residents alike must continue our efforts in the coming year. It is only for the families who currently live in NYCHA’s housing that brings together professionals, grassroots organizations and communities to create high quality murals.

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(Continued on page 5)

New York City Police Department
Toll-Free Terrorist Hotline
Reports May Be Made To:
1-888-NYC-SAFE
1-888-692-7233
NYCHA Hosts Borough Domestic Violence Conferences in October

**By Eileen Elliott**

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) hosted a series of domestic violence conferences—one in each borough—on the fourth week of October during National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. An estimated 1,000 residents attended.

The conferences were entitled: “Domestic Violence: A Male Issue,” and focused on men as part of the solution.

“This year’s conferences bring us closer to realizing our vision of ending domestic violence in our communities,” said NYCHA’s Director of Social Services Nora Reissig-Lazzaro, who, along with her staff, organized the annual event. “By including men in this critical dialogue, we recognize that while they are a part of the problem, they can and must also be a part of the solution.”

To illustrate that point, the highlight of each of the conferences was a special 50 minute presentation by actor/comedian and activist Ben Atherton-Zeman, entitled, “Voices of Men.” Mr. Atherton-Zeman, a spokesperson for the National Organization for Men Against Sexism, used humor and celebrity male voice impressions to cover topics such as: sexual assault and consent, domestic violence and sexual harassment, in his self-described “educational comedy.”

The first conference took place at the Bronx River Community Center on October 23rd. Keynote speaker Borough President Adolfo Carrion, Jr., spoke passionately about the pervasiveness of domestic violence and the ways in which society makes the objectification of women and the violence against them appear to be acceptable.

“Domestic violence is destroying lives—making a lasting impact on families and communities,” said the Borough President. “Violence is glorified in every commercial or entertainment venue in American life. Violence sells... We create the problem, therefore, we try to fix the problem.”

The keynote speakers at the other conferences were: Center Against Domestic Violence Director Luis Matos, Hunter School of Social Work Professor Samuel Aymer, social worker Rommel Washington of the St. Luke’s Crime Victims’ Treatment Center, and Richmond County District Attorney Daniel M. Donovan, Jr.

Each conference also featured a panel with representatives from a variety of grassroots and community based organizations, as well as from the NYPD. Resource tables from over 20 entities provided a wealth of helpful material, and NYCHA staff were on hand to address any personal issues raised by residents in the audience. For more information on domestic violence related services, call the Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-621-HOPE. As always, call 911 in the case of emergency.

NYCHA residents at the Bronx Domestic Violence Workshop.

Keeping Residents Safe With CCTV

(Continued from page 1)

in building lobbies, entrances, exits, elevator cabs, playgrounds and parking lots, with guidance from the NYPD on the choice of locations. The cameras record images 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week. These images are routinely stored for a set period of time and can be retrieved by staff and the police in the event of an incident. The Small-Scale CCTV’s do not require around-the-clock monitoring, as do the original, Large-Scale CCTV’s, or VIPER systems.

Where the CCTV Systems Are Located

In 2004, the Small-Scale CCTV systems were installed at Isaacs-Holmes, Two Bridges, Rutgers and Lower East Side I in Manhattan; and Independence Towers and Williams Plaza in Brooklyn, with the help of City Council funding. Using its own funds, NYCHA also installed a Small-Scale CCTV system at Butler Houses in the Bronx.

As of August 2006, additional systems had also been installed at Atlantic Terminal, Bushwick, Hylan, Haber and Palmetto Gardens in Brooklyn, Fulton, Chelsea, Elliott, De Hostos, LaGuardia and Smith Houses in Manhattan; and Queensbridge Houses in Queens. In 2006, City Council Members also allocated additional funding for either new Small-Scale CCTV Systems or the addition of camcorders to the offices of the Council.

Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion, Jr.

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First Houses’ 70th Anniversary

By Eileen Elliott

PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE UNITED STATES WAS BORN ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE OF MANHATTAN 70 YEARS AGO WITH THE OPENING OF THE NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY’S (NYCHA’S) FIRST DEVELOPMENT, FIRST HOMES. TOGETHER, NYCHA RESIDENTS AND STAFF JOINED ELECTED OFFICIALS AND FRIENDS TO CELEBRATE THAT BIRTH IN A COBBLESTONE COURTYARD NESTLED BEHIND THE DEVELOPMENT’S EIGHT FOUR- AND FIVE-STORY BUILDINGS ON A BRSK October 21st afternoon.

“On December 3, 1935, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, New York State Governor Herbert Lehman and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt stood here in this courtyard and dedicated the opening of NYCHA’s First Houses,” said NYCHA Secretary Yolma Huertas in her capacity as Mistress of Ceremonies. “Soon after, in 1936, the first families moved into First Houses and that is the event we mark today.”

Located between East 2nd and 3rd Streets, and First Avenue and Avenue A, First Houses is among the smallest of NYCHA’s 344 public housing developments. Yet, its historical significance looms large. Before First Houses, squated tenements were often the only available housing to people without means. In fact, First Houses was created by renovating the original tenement buildings that lined the street, and removing every third building so that light and air could reach all of the 122 apartments.

The Speakers

NYCHA Chairman Tino Hernandez expressed the pride he felt as the Housing Authority’s 19th Chairman and emphasized the City’s commitment to maintaining public housing. “We went from 122 families in Manhattan in 1936, to 187,000 families across the City in 2006,” the Chairman said. “We now have a Mayor who is committed to providing housing to low- and moderate-income New Yorkers.”

Senator Martin Connor, who represents the neighborhood, commended NYCHA for the work it has done, despite the challenging financial climate. And City Council Member Rosie Mendez recalled a time when she was 11 years old and was forced from her home by a fire. The young Ms. Mendez and her family moved into NYCHA’s Williamsburg Houses. “All my friends wanted to come over to my house to play,” she said. “There was always heat and hot water, no rats.”

Charlotte Miles, a resident leader from the nearby Lilian Wald Houses, told her story of growing up there; a story of many achievements and happy memories. Vice-Chairman Earl Andrews, Jr. presented a proclamation to development Manager Tedd Gross and long-time First Houses resident, 91-year-old Andrew Hladek. Signed by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, the document proclaimed October 21, 2006, “First Houses Day.”

A Call For Support

NYCHA’s newest Board Member, Margarita Lopez, a former City Council Member and a long-time Lower East Side resident referred to the financial struggle that NYCHA and other housing authorities are facing. Commissioner Lopez told the crowd, “I’m here to remind everyone of that: the job is not yet done; the job is just beginning. Without NYCHA, the anchor that maintains this city will disappear.”

Entertainment was provided by NYCHA’s Senior and Youth Choruses, and a photo exhibit highlighted the growth of public housing in New York City.

Although public housing may be facing challenges, you would never know it in the festive courtyard at First Houses on October 21st. The speakers left the stage, the children played, and everyone ate hamburgers and hot dogs beneath the towering London Plane trees. The mood echoed Ms. Miles’ words, “Being a NYCHA resident has been a wonderful thing for me and my family and I wouldn’t have it any other way.”
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