After nearly eight years in development, CHT celebrated the grand opening of our new building at 88 King Street in downtown Burlington. The building is home to 20 new apartments and CHT’s new headquarters. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) headlined the grand opening, along with representatives of Housing Vermont, officials from the City of Burlington, private investors, CHT residents and donors, and state and federal funding agencies.

“Thanks to the work of the people joining us here today, twenty families call this beautiful building home,” said Leahy, who secured a $434,000 Housing and Urban Development grant for the development. “Thousands of other families across Northwestern Vermont have some tie to the anchor tenant of the building – the Champlain Housing Trust. And hundreds more looking to either buy a home or save their home from foreclosure will seek assistance from the Housing Trust’s NeighborWorks® HomeOwnership Center housed here.”
The last few months have made real the promises that President Obama made to increase transparency in government, focus public dollars where citizens need it, and elevate the discussion to what we hope to become a country, not just what has failed. The last few months have also, unfortunately,solidified what a difficult, challenging time we live in.

To be sure, the various initiatives, legislation and spending bills emanating from Congress are not perfect. I suspect that we all might prioritize differently where we should focus attention: Health care or weatherization? Telecommunications or housing? The President and Congress are engaged in a balancing act, but it is clear that the target for resources is unquestionably primarily our neighbors who need it most: low and moderate income households who are struggling to get by each month and most vulnerable as unemployment rates rise.

I wish to publicly thank Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders and Congressman Welch for their steadfast commitment to listening to Vermonters needs and acting on Vermont’s stimulus package. The President of the United States, Senator Obama, is no doubt aware of the critical need in our state for federal funding. As he outlines the new Making Homes Affordable Program and works to address the future of the housing market, Senator Sanders and Congressman Welch look forward to engaging in lively debate and working with the President on the best solutions.

The best news from the stimulus bill is that there is assistance for many of the people we serve. Included in the package is money for Medicaid, food stamps, extension of unemployment benefits, support for health centers, and a one-time $250 payment for those living on Social Security and government disability support. For the people that living in CHT housing, the bill offers long overdue investment into their monthly budgets.

On the heels of the Recovery Act, President Obama unveiled the Making Homes Affordable initiative to stem the tide of foreclosures. The plan encourages homeowners in trouble to work with their lenders – providing both a carrot and a stick to larvae – to refinance or modify the terms of the mortgages to make their monthly payments more affordable.

CHT’s HomeOwnership Counselors are available to work with homeowners to determine whether the program will work for their specific circumstances and provide assistance as they can. One limitation of this new Making Homes Affordable program is the lack of funding for the counseling services we now provide. We are working on that, please if you are in trouble, call us.

We are an uncharted waters and in amazing times. I get relief, though, knowing that CHT’s executive staff and leadership are here. This is why we create institutions to serve the community’s need. And this is a time of great need.

L. Randolph Amis, President

Tell us what you think...

It has been a little while since we last provided our members with a newsletter and we would love to hear what you think. Is this informative for you? Would you like to see us return to producing two or three newsletters per year? And about the content – what did you like, or not like?

In the next few months we will conduct a resident survey, asking you directly a few questions that in their sum attempt to answer the question, “How are we doing?” Please keep an eye out for it – but remember, you don’t even need to wait for us to ask before telling us what you think. Feel free to contact me at chris@champlainhousingtrust.org if you wish to offer advice or provide feedback.

Chris Donnelly, Editor

Uncharted Waters

The Champlain Housing Trust is a community land trust that supports strong, vital communities in northwest Vermont through the development and stewardship of permanently affordable homes and associated community assets.

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McClure continues generosity

Fresh off completing the last payment of her $1 million pledge to CHT’s endowment, Lois H. McClure committed another act of generosity: she became an annual supporter of the Housing Trust with a $25,000 gift in January.

“I know this is a successful organization that needs all the help they can get,” Ms. McClure explained. “I am so happy to be able to support their work.”

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The donation is the largest annual fund gift in the organizations history, and came just as CHT is entering its 25th anniversary year. “We could not ask for a better advocate, a more thoughtful philanthropist or a more willing partner than we have in Lois,” said Brenda Torpy, CEO. “She’s done so much for us, and so much for Vermont. We are truly fortunate.”

The Champlain Housing Trust elected Board members and presented awards to three affordable housing champions at its Annual Meeting held Saturday, January 31. The event was attended by nearly all the members of the Housing Trust. Included in the awards were a United States Senator, a philanthropist and a resident community activist.

United States Senator Bernie Sanders (VT) was presented with CHT’s Tim McKenzie Award, named for the organization’s first Executive Director, for his steadfast commitment to creating a permanently affordable housing trust model for nearly 30 years in public office. The Champlain Housing Trust’s predecessors, the Burlington Community Land Trust and Lake Champlain Housing, were both created under the Sanders Administration while mayor of Burlington in 1984. Since then, Senator Sanders has effectively advocated for investment in permanently affordable housing programs and organizations.

Lois H. McClure, of Shelburne, was recognized with the Hilton A. Wick Award for her fundraising and advocacy leadership. Ms. McClure recently completed payment of a $1 million pledge to CHT’s endowment, and secured an additional $500,000 to the fund. She rarely misses an opportunity to speak out on the importance and effectiveness of CHT’s home ownership programs, and has now begun to contribute to our annual fund (see sidebar). The Hilton A. Wick Award memorializes the efforts of Hilton Wick, a tireless campaigner for several community causes.

Flynn Avenue Co-op (in Burlington) resident Richard T. Kemp was recognized with the Carole Pack Volunteer of the Year Award. Mr. Kemp represents cooperative housing residents on CHT’s Board of Directors and has been a community activist agitating for more affordable housing over many years. He also represented CHT residents and the Board at this year’s United Nations World Habitat Day celebration in Angela where CHT was presented with a World Habitat Award.

At the Annual Meeting, members also elected six Board members: L. Randolph Amis as a General Member; Jane Kiss, a Public Member, representing the City of St. Albans; Joe Reinsrt, a Public Member, representing the City of Burlington; Adam Pipar, a CHT homeowner; David McFadden, a CHT homeowner; Pamela James, a CHT renter.

The Champlain Housing Trust has fifteen Board Members elected by the membership. One-third are resident representatives, one-third represent municipal interests in Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, and one-third are general or at-large members. If any resident or general member would like to serve on the Board or a committee of the Board, please call Chris Donnelly, Director of Community Relations, at 862-6244.
When CHT offered free compact fluorescent lightbulbs last fall, we thought residents would notice some savings on their electric bills. For Valerie Poulos of Winooski the savings have been too dramatic to miss: the energy-saving bulbs reduced her bills by over $35 a month!

That might be because her Victorian-era apartment contains some twenty lamps. They are features of the eye-catching decorative groupings whose country antiques and paintings reflect Ms. Poulos’ childhood on a horse farm in Williston. The arrangements also show the creative eye she brought to her former work as a display stylist at [Megram’s?] department store.

In her retirement Ms. Poulos also enjoys spending time with her three children and two grandchildren. During the warm months she can often be found on the front porch enjoying a chat with passing neighbors, or tending her beautiful flowerbeds along the walkway of the house. She appreciates a lot about Winooski: the neighborliness, the many nearby services, the convenience of getting to her former work as a display stylist at [Megram’s?] department store.

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