Some young people dread “the big 3-0,” but as an organization we are excited to round our third decade with strength and continued relevance. Our history has taught us that the most important years are the ones ahead of us.

In the fall newsletter I described our latest strategic plan; it takes CHT in a bold new direction to help people who are homeless or risk losing their homes. Moments like that, when we step up to try something different, are at the core of our culture. So I think the best way to convey our rich history and evolution is to tell about the moments when CHT, and our founding organizations of Lake Champlain Housing Development Corporation and Burlington Community Land Trust, chose the risk of innovating in order to serve the mission.

We started in a small city with a big idea – Burlington, Vermont, where residents, with support from Mayor Bernie Sanders, acted on their belief that a great city is one where everyone can afford to live, and that the way to assure this was to create housing that is permanently affordable.

LCHDC started with a rehab program for the suburbs around Burlington, but soon expanded to address a big gap by building affordable apartments. Their attractive properties changed people’s minds about affordable housing. As the organization’s reach grew, they also became known for their ‘firsts’: the first new construction co-op, the first housing with services, the first historic school conversion to senior housing.

Likewise, BCLT started by preserving affordable rentals in the Old North End and creating the community land trust, a new model of homeownership, around Burlington. But faced with a wave of abandoned properties in the ONE, BCLT chose to broaden into community development, converting sites into a park, an artists’ co-op, and buildings for community services. I remember many board discussions about shifting from the tried and true, but it all came back to mission: what did residents need?

Both groups took our biggest leap when we merged in 2006. This was a huge, scary move for all involved, but again it came to core mission and the ability to serve, so the board and staff went forward.

That choice is reaffirmed daily, as we invent new ways to counter the alarming growth in homelessness; without the strength we gained by merging, we would not be able to meet this need. One hundred and seventy-seven at-risk or homeless families have found homes with us through the Ready, Set, Rent! program. Many others found services and a safe place to stay this winter at Harbor Place.

Older renters from Alburgh to the ONE now enjoy health services at home because we adopted the SASH program. Our homeownership keeps growing, with homes at South Meadow converted from market apartments and a new partnership with Habitat for Humanity. As a founder and CHT worker for 20 years, I can tell you that the one constant of our history is change—change that is always a renewal of mission.

One project now underway in the ONE speaks to our roots and adaptability. In the 1990s the Champlain Valley Mutual Housing Federation asked BCLT to absorb their program. It took time to perfect our services to the co-ops, so we focused on serving the existing ones instead of forming new co-ops. But co-op members also urged us to get back into game. Thanks to their advocacy, the Bright Street Co-op – on a street in need of revitalization – is now in the permitting process.

Wherever our mission takes us, these elements—members in leadership; the will to take on new challenges, and a commitment to answering neighborhood desires—will never change.

Happy Birthday CHT!

Brenda Torpy, CEO

‘A LEGACY IS SOMETHING TO LEARN AND BUILD FROM, NOT TO REST ON.’
Driving south on Shelburne Road, you may have noticed a change at the former EconoLodge Motel. The old sign and big red awning are gone, and now a simple sign by the roadside reads “Harbor Place.” Last summer CHT bought the old motel and converted it into temporary housing for Vermonters who are homeless. Harbor Place is more than simply a place to stay, though; it offers a new approach to helping people in crisis.

Several agencies – Howard Center; the Safe Harbor Clinic of the Community Health Center of Burlington; Women Helping Battered Women, and the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity – worked with us to draft a plan that was approved from the state Department for Children and Families (DCF). It provides for their social workers to hold office hours on site at the motel.

This seemingly small change can make a big difference. Becoming homeless is not only hard emotionally. It can consume all of a household’s time as they scramble to hold things together, getting children to school and adults to work from a new location, often with no car. Having caseworkers right at the motel surmounts that barrier to seeking help.

To date, the site is working, guests are more than five times as likely to find a permanent home as people in the regular motel voucher program, and state bills are actually lower, while helping people to become self-sufficient.

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Hut is a self-help micro-loan with an open, friendly face. Hut Rent Vermont in 2009 due to skyrocketing prices, leaving her nine sisters and brothers behind. He spent four days at sea in a small, leaking boat with 40 people, with nothing to eat and only the condensation from killed ice to drink.

Hut was a natural leader and soon got us working together as a team, building the new apartments, and creating a sustainable community.

The program will also let us compare the performance of the various products and set-ups we’ve used in our quest for efficiency. CHT’s commitment to permanent affordability becomes worthwhile to sift through this kind of “big data.” At our current scale even small changes will add up over the years, translating into smaller rent increases and a greener future.

For from home and living in crowded conditions, they learned to speak English, though the family saw snow for the first time and didn’t know how to make snow balls. To adjust to American culture. His wife Ky, whom he met in a refugee camp, sewed the few dollars they received from their parents, Hon and Ky became a couple and had their first child there.

Now we are ready to study our energy-use tracking program called Wegowise, whose results will help us keep costs down for our tenants and keep our carbon footprint as small as we can.

Gordon Rowe, become a detective hunting for clues. Finally, comparing properties places that are less efficient so that we know to investigate them. Initially, comparing properties will let Gordon assess the value of the various products and set-ups we’ve used in our quest for efficiency.

Not wanting to rent, they learned to speak English, though they could not get the traditional permission from their parents, Hut and Hut became a family. Now we are ready to study our energy-use tracking program called Wegowise, whose results will help us keep costs down for our tenants and keep our carbon footprint as small as we can.

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Hut sits by her room in a refugee camp in Malaysia, calls him “lucky” because her own trip took ten days, she didn’t know how to eat, they had no water to drink, and by the time they reached shore she was too weak to walk. Mary in the boat died at sea. When they reached Malaysia they were given green tea with sugar until they regained their strength.

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The finance team works in a fast-paced context to provide accounting support for CHT’s more than 70 properties with 2,100 rental apartments and cooperatives, as well as 520 shared-equity homes. The staff processes more than 35,000 invoices and 26,000 rental receipts in a year. The department has two seasons: audit season (September to April), when they provide documentation about our multifamily properties to independent auditors, and budgeting season (May through August), when they help to draft budgets for each of those properties.

Coworkers nominated Caitlin for this award to thank her for her flexibility and work ethic, which have been invaluable to the finance department. Her hard work is greatly appreciated, especially when she helped to cover others’ responsibilities in their absence, all while doing her own job excellently.

SOME FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT YOUR WORK:

The people, the work environment, and knowing that what we do every day helps the community.

THINGS ABOUT YOUR WORK YOU WOULD BE HAPPY TO CHANGE:

I would like to see us do more things out in the community, because we don’t just care about our properties but also about the community as a whole.

WHAT DO YOU WISH MORE PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT CHT?

That we do a lot more than just rent apartments! Not only do we sell homes, but we act as a partner with buyers to make sure they are able to stay in their home, with either rehab loans or foreclosure assistance. We are in this with our buyers and will do everything we can to keep a roof over their heads.

WHAT DO YOU WISH MORE PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT YOU?

That I got this job two weeks before graduating from college – and these days it’s a big deal to have a job before you graduate.

IF YOU HAD A MAGIC WAND, WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO IMPROVE VERMONT’S HOUSING SITUATION?

Everyone would have a place to live that they could afford.

PEOPLE ARE SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT YOU:

As a renter who might like to join CHT’s board of directors? In your high-level volunteer role, you will support CHT’s mission of strengthening our communities by helping people secure and keep decent, affordable homes.

Residents play a vital role on CHT’s board: one-third of the seats are reserved for people living in our rental apartments, cooperatives, and shared-equity homes. The term of service is three years.

Board members attend monthly meetings, serve on committees, and help us with community outreach, fundraising, and advocacy for affordable housing. Members enhance learning and monitoring to learn their way around the role.

If being on the board interests you please contact Julia Curry at 802-861-7378 or jcurry@getahome.org. CHT staff and board leaders will meet with you to provide more information.

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