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First-time owners given some help

The homes are the first in decades to be built in the struggling city.

Maple Heights asked the network to tackle its problem of vacant lots and houses, said Mayor Michael Carravino.

The program will renovate 10 of 175 vacant houses and build five new ones, all to be sold to people making no more than 80 percent of Northeast Ohio's median income. To be eligible for a home, a family of four must have an income of no more than \$48,000.

Cuyahoga County blessed the project with a \$300,000 grant, leveraging \$1.5 million in city improvements, Carravino said.

"The Cleveland Housing Network is a progressive community development corporation that arrived just in time in our community to address the very pressing issue," he said.

The network took a risk by becoming a partner in the construction of 10 large family homes in Glenville's South Boulevard area off St. Clair Avenue, without having buyers lined up.

The houses, conceived by the Glenville group and built in partnership with Rysar Properties Inc., are selling.

Homeward is marketing the Euclid-St. Clair Development Corp.'s Lakeshore Townhomes and Hurston Court, a development named for Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale Hurston on Cliffview Road in Euclid Park.

The Euclid-St. Clair group is one of Cleveland's youngest community development corporations, founded in 2000 by Ward 10 residents in the area stretching from Euclid Park to part of Collinwood and Lake Shore Boulevard. It has three projects and big plans.

It is building houses on vacant lots in Collinwood's East Clark section. On Lake Shore, at East 142nd Street, the townhouses offer views of Lake Erie.

But the group relies on the network for financing for home buyers.

"Cleveland Housing Network's role is to strengthen partnership possibilities to make projects successful," Kenney said.



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Rhonda Peoples and her daughter, Chelse, enjoy the home Peoples acquired with the help of the Cleveland Housing Network.

Network builds, sells modest houses, gives help to first-time homeowners

ANGELA D. CHATMAN
Plain Dealer Reporter

For 15 years, the Cleveland Housing Network's Homeward program has brought homeownership to city dwellers by demystifying the buying process and holding down mortgage costs.

Now network officials hope to expand the program by building and selling more moderately priced homes in the city and in selected suburbs.

That means more homes for first-time homeowners such as Cheryl Price and Rhonda Peoples, who needed help in buying their homes and wanted to keep their mortgage payments manageable.

"Before I went to the housing network, I went to other banks and they were giving us a high rate and not much [slack on] down payment," Price said. Her family settled into a new, \$169,000 house in

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Cleveland's Lee-Miles neighborhood in early November.

Peoples met a network representative during a tour of last year's Citirama home show. She and her daughter, Chelse, 12, moved into a new, \$149,000 home in the Stockyard neighborhood in May.

The network remains best known for the lease-purchase program on which it was founded 23 years ago. That program allows low-income renters to pay toward owning an affordable home.

But the Homeward program

offers a more-expensive product to people who can afford to buy a home outright, with just a little help with the process.

Through Homeward, the network builds and renovates houses for sale, working with 23 neighborhood community development corporations in Cleveland and by invitation in East Cleveland and Maple Heights. It is talking with officials in Euclid about expanding there.

What sells these homes are the network's home-buyer classes and its below-market interest rates, down-payment assistance, reduced closing costs, tax abatements and access to Cleveland mortgage programs.

The program has built or renovated about 1,300 houses since its first refurbished house in Glenville in 1989, said Chief Operating Officer Pat Kenney.

Tanya Allmond, executive director of the Northeast Neighborhood Development Corp.,

headed the Glenville Development Corp. in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As a charter member of the network, the Glenville group wanted to promote direct home sales rather than the rent-to-own plan.

"We wanted to push the homeownership agenda. That's what Homeward was all about," she said.

Kenney said the renovated homes sell for \$100,000 to \$105,000 and new ones start at about \$140,000. The financing assistance can hold a buyer's mortgage payment to the mid-to upper-\$500s for a renovated house and the upper \$600s for a new one.

Homeward is building the East Cleveland Renaissance Homes at East 125th Street and Phillips Avenue and other sites throughout the city. Its partners in the project are the city and the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority.

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