



DOORWAY

Volume 4
Issue 2

BCHT: Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc.
(Formerly Martin House)

December 2016

A doorway to hope and opportunity, BCHT's mission is to create safe, quality housing in Trenton that local people can afford to buy or rent and to support community action and development in at-risk urban neighborhoods.

A Home for the Holidays ... Lending a Helping Hand

Shelter is a basic need for everyone, but a *home* is something much more than that – something that many of us take for granted.

This is the story of a family that wants so much to get back into their beloved home, but needs your help to do so.

Susan and Jeff Skylar (not their real names) had worked hard to realize their dream of owning a home where they could stably raise their four children, one of whom is handicapped. The home they loved in Trenton was taken from them four years ago because of a freak accident. In a high-speed chase by police, a car crashed into their house, damaging the foundation and breaking the gas and water lines. Water flooded their cellar, and gas began to fill the home. The Skylars praise the Trenton Fire Department for its response and an assessment that told them they had to vacate their home immediately. They grabbed a few belongings, and thus began a four-year odyssey of living in motels and being homeless. Now living in a one-room efficiency apartment in Trenton, Susan and Jeff work hard at their jobs while trying to keep up with their children's needs and give a sense of normalcy to their family life.



The home waiting for its family

The Skylars have spent so much time during the past four years dealing with the insurance company, contractors, the bank, lawyers, and various advocacy groups to try to get back into their home – all to no avail. The car that hit their house was stolen. The Skylars are suing their homeowners insurance because it paid only a portion of what was needed. The mortgager is willing to work with them, but they need to get back into the home for that to happen.

BCHT and its new affiliate, **Neighborhood Redevelopment Cooperative Solutions (NRCS)** would like to lend a helping hand in the Martin House tradition – *one house at a time, one family at a time*. NRCS is a nonprofit corporation headed by Born Understanding Allah of Born Builders. He brings together sub-contractors in a partnership to support the production of affordable homes, while hiring and training unemployed members of the community in the trades. BCHT is working with NRCS on another project that will begin in the spring, and the Skylar project will be a good way to start our relationship with Born. **If you wish to help the Skylars** raise the money to get the work done which will allow them to move back into their home, please use the form on page 4 and fill in “Skylars” in the *Designated For* space. The Skylars need about \$30,000 to get back into their home: \$10,000 for asbestos and mold removal and \$20,000 to fix the structure and roof. Your gift of any amount will be greatly appreciated! BCHT is also applying for a grant to help the family.

Parishes and School Give Help at Thanksgiving – Helping Us Be a True Doorway to Hope

Thanks to **Our Lady Queen of Peace in Hainesport**, 46 families received food baskets for Thanksgiving, which were distributed by **Doorway to Hope Family Shelter (DTH)**. DTH was also the grateful recipient of new coats from the **Knights of Columbus at St. David the King Church** Council 14716 in West Windsor and new and gently used coats from the **Millstone River School** in Plainsboro. DTH distributed the coats to Doorway to Hope participants and other needy people in Trenton. Many thanks to those who contributed.

As the **BCHT Thrift Store** prepares for its great work of Christmas sharing, it is strongly feeling the loss of Annie Hodges (Page 2), who ran the warehouse and opened it to the public every Saturday. We need someone to help keep the warehouse organized and open on Saturday mornings.



Coat drive at Millstone River School

Food for Thought

Sixty-six (66) gunshots were fired in Trenton on November 28, 2016. What responsibility do we have in this? Should we be “seeking out the poorer quarters where the ragged people go...the places only they would know?” (Simon and Garfunkel)?

Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. (BCHT) www.BCHTrenton.org 609-989-0271 BCHTinfo@gmail.com
Executive Director: Pearleen Waters; **Board of Trustees:** Dorothy Holmes, President; Jacqueline Meyers, Secretary; Kellie Malloy Foerter; Chris Mazauskas; Tamika Young, LSW; Bruce M. Sattin, Esq.; **Founder:** Fr. Brian McCormick; **Editor:** Linda Smythe Oliaro

A Message from Fr. Brian McCormick – A Reaction to Indifference

By Father Brian McCormick, Retired Founder of Martin House/Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. (BCHT)

Pearleen Waters asked me for a special note for this newsletter. As a Roman Catholic priest, I am especially called to be attentive to our Pope, that is, Pope Francis. He has said *the great moral failing today is indifference*.

No longer involved in the immediate nuts and bolts of housing under BCHT, I look at housing of and for the poor in general. Indifference here would seem to be: “It has nothing to do with me; it is no more than an annoyance, that is, it is getting too close to me; we spend too much tax money on them; why don’t they get a job; and don’t drive through their area.”

We are called to have an active awareness, concern, and involvement for and with all our fellow human beings who are suffering sub-human pressures... This is a universal call of our humanity.

Specifically to housing in our area, our involvement has taught us that low-income people are always hurting and desperate. Their lives become unorganized and are always near points of immediate desperation and usually drifting (being pushed) to new areas of survival.

Refusing to be indifferent, we started Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. to be effective with this tragedy in human living and survival. Could we create a living situation in which families were secure and could be stable to grow as a family – one man to one woman and their children, living in community? Blessed by the Good Lord, we were able to do this.

We started two organizations to do this: 1) homeownership that poor people could pay for and maintain – under Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. in 1972, and 2) a second effort, Doorway to Hope (1990) for homeless families. In 1990 Pearleen Waters and Barbara Thompson accepted what was, in our culture, the unfair request to become fully involved.

I said to Pearleen and Barbara as young women, “I can find a way to pay you the same salary as you are making now, but there will be little, if any, salary increases and no retirement funds. Someone has to make the commitment to overcome the sad way of living the poor are going through, to build family life and community.” These two brave and sacrificing women said they would.

To Barbara I said, “You must know that society and the government are insincere in their approach to the homeless, so they will start a program that publically addresses the issue, but it will fade out. Then a new program will start. This will happen often, and you must deal with it.”

For Pearleen, now Executive Director of BCHT and the only paid employee, it was, and is, a long haul. With me being retired, she does not have the pastoral audience or diocesan support to generate the money or people it takes “to get it done.” Please remember, we have said, and continue to say, we are the only group that has developed and delivered home ownership for families of three and more, for those below 38% median income.

These two women, Pearleen and Barbara, “have heart.” They are seriously NOT indifferent! But they need like-minded co-workers. Working with them, we can continue to overcome the great indifference that pervades our society as we do something important but small and growing. We realize *small* is actually overcoming indifference and, little by little, moving us to address the much truer and bigger issues of this homeless, transient, and invisible community.

In Remembrance: Annie Pearl Hodges



Annie Pearl Hodges, a member of the Board of Trustees of Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. (BCHT), died suddenly on August 16. She will be greatly missed in her church and our community. Annie was a hard worker and willing servant of the Lord. She was employed at UPI as a case worker and as a social worker for the City of Trenton, which began her devotion to community service. Annie was a tireless volunteer, running BCHT’s furniture warehouse and the Trenton Food Bank at the Cadwalader Asbury Methodist Church. She was known for her wry sense of humor and her wonderful smile.

← *Annie Pearl Hodges 1950-2016*

We Pay Homage to Others Who Worked in the Martin House Spirit/Legacy

In the past few months we have lost two other people, besides Annie Hodges, who were devoted supporters of Martin House/Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. (BCHT). We would like to send condolences and blessings to their families and friends and to thank those who made donations to BCHT in their names. **David Clark Maxwell** was one of the first members of the Board of Trustees of the Martin House Community for Justice Foundation, for which he served as treasurer. **Joseph Robert Ramus** was also an early and long-time supporter of Martin House/BCHT and one of the first trustees of the Board of Doorway to Hope Family Shelter. These men were NOT indifferent to the plight of the poor, and we hope their example is inspirational.

Beautify Wilbur Eagle Scout Project A Great Success

Amir Black, a Boy Scout in CYO Troop 257, has successfully finished the first part of his Eagle Scout project, *Beautify Wilbur*. Amir recruited homeowners in his Wilbur neighborhood to participate in *Beautify Wilbur*, a project to enhance the curb appeal (and thus, the value) of homes in the neighborhood. Each homeowner received up to \$100 worth of materials from Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. (BCHT) to paint their front door and/or landscape their front yard with the help of the Boy Scouts. Isles Urban Agriculture provided some of the plants.

BCHT obtained funding for the project through a grant from the *Princeton Area Community Foundation*. Discounts from *Home Depot* really increased our spending power. In total, 12 houses were beautified, including one vacant townhouse in one of the groups being worked on. The pictures below tell the story. Thank you PACF, Isles, Home Depot, and those who did the work – Boy Scouts and Neighbors!



The Boy Scouts worked with homeowners to paint and landscape



BEFORE and AFTER a home was landscaped and the door was painted red



Amir w/ family and Beautify Wilbur friends

NEEDED!

Mentors and equipment for Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to help with badges, fishing, camping, etc.

Thrift Store Warehouse – The passing of Annie Hodges means there is no one to run the warehouse. Please help!

Coaching help for homeowners in financial literacy, gambling and borrowing addiction, life skills, etc.

Help for rehabbing homes: volunteers and contractors for painting, sheet rock, plumbing, carpentry, cleaning etc.

We are looking for board members to help us creatively continue the mission of BCHT.

Help Wanted to Hire: *Bookkeeper/office assistant. Construction Manager.* Go to BCHTrenton.org/News/ for details.

A Gateway Bridge to Trenton

The Lincoln Avenue Bridge over Amtrak between N Clinton Ave and East State St is slated to be replaced with something more stable and more fitting as a major gateway into Trenton. A public information meeting was held at the CYO East State Street Center on Nov 9. The CYO and BCHT will be directly affected by the closing and replacement of the bridge, as they flank the discharge road from the bridge into Trenton. **BCHT's Executive Director, Pearleen Waters**, took a leadership role, encouraging community members to attend the meeting and sharing her concerns regarding drug traffic under the bridge, lighting, and safety of pedestrians. She asked how the new sidewalks will be designed (6-foot wide with 6-inch curb, with the current trip hazard at the corner utility box being addressed) and how flooding at the corner of East State Street will be addressed (drainage will be directed to the underside of the bridge and into the stream). Residents were asked to pick the style of the bridge. They chose a rustic look with stone facing.



Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc.

In This Issue: A home for the holidays, "Beautify Wilbur" Eagle Scout project, In Memory of Annie Hodges.

Summer Fun in the Inner City

Summer is a time when many inner-city children lack positive activities to occupy their minds and hands. The CYO East State Street Center and Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. (BCHT) did much to remedy that in our area.

The CYO East State Street Summer Camp provided 125 children with a safe, inter-active place of learning and fun for nine weeks this past summer. Activities included swimming two days a week, 4-H Club cooking, sports, arts and crafts, academic enrichment, mindfulness, field trips, a self-esteem and anti-bullying program, a camp cook-out, and Family & Friends Day with presentations by the campers.



Volunteers from St. David the King provided enrichment fun on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons

Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. (BCHT) sponsored *three movie nights* where children gathered at Greg Grant Park to watch the show while parents caught up on what was happening with each other.



Fun at the movies

The block party for our third annual National Night Out was once again a time for neighbors to gather for fun as a community. Games were set up by Amir Black of CYO Boy Scout Troop 257, and some special food was provided by the homeowners of the Fr. Brian McCormick Court Homeowners Association at 893-935 East State Street. Fun was had by all.



National Night Out

Next BCHT Community Meeting: Wednesday, January 18 at 6:30 pm at 802 East State Street. Please come!

YOU CAN HELP! WE NEED YOUR MONETARY, MORAL, AND VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

I UNDERSTAND THE NEED AND WANT TO JOIN THE EFFORT:

A **CO-CREATOR'S Pledge** of \$10,000 to support housing for the poor and community action in the inner-city

I/We pledge \$ _____ over 1 year 3 years... in monthly payments of \$ _____ Starting on: _____ (DATE)

I/We want to support **BCH of Trenton/Doorway to Hope/the Thrift Store**. Enclosed is a gift of:

\$1,000 \$500 \$250 \$100 Other: \$ _____ (OPTIONAL:) Designated for: _____

PLEASE PRINT :

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Address: _____ Email: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Company: _____ (Enclose matching gift form)

Donate online or mail to: BCH of Trenton, PO Box 298, Trenton, NJ 08602 (Make all checks payable to BCH of Trenton, Inc. *)

*BCH of Trenton, Inc. is qualified by the IRS to receive contributions that are deductible for federal income tax purposes. This charitable organization is registered with the Attorney General of the State of New Jersey. Information may be obtained by calling: (973) 504-6215. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Trenton, NJ
Permit No. 114

Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. (BCHT)

802 East State Street, PO Box 298
Trenton, NJ 08602
Phone 609-989-0271 Fax 609-989-4991
www.BCHTrenton.org email: bchtinfo@gmail.com