A Home for HOME
WORK UNDERWAY AT MAIN & FERRY
By Scott W. Gehl

Heavy equipment from Lamparelli Construction Co. moved through deep snow onto the vacant parcel just west of Main & Ferry to begin work on the new Home for HOME. When complete, the three-story building will provide more than 3,000 square feet of fully accessible office space for HOME as well as ten barrier-free energy-efficient affordable housing units for low-income households. The development will also provide off-street parking for tenants and clients.

Those living in the Cold Springs and Linwood-Oxford neighborhoods have waited decades for the fire-damaged structures to come back to life. It was a long time coming.

THE SEARCH
The deteriorated but elegant 19th Century building at 1542 Main had caught the eye of preservationist Scot Fisher, whose Triangle Development purchased the structures in 2003. It also caught the eye of Janet Meiselman, principal of Oxford Consulting, Inc., who passed the building each day. Both wondered if it could be saved.

Ms. Meiselman also served as a member of HOME’s Program Operations & Planning Committee, which was then exploring the concept of acquiring a mixed-use property to serve as HOME’s offices as well as provide some affordable housing units. There are few in Western New York who understand affordable housing as well as Janet Meiselman.

The committee set out a number of criteria for selecting a site: within the City of Buffalo, on a major public transit route, and at a location which would be both highly visible and accessible to HOME’s very diverse client population.

In the latter part of 2006, committee members literally drove the streets to identify vacant buildings and parcels. Accompanied by then volunteer Charles Gordon (whose architectural firm once occupied offices adjacent to HOME’s), members walked through nearly a dozen buildings in a variety of physical conditions—finally choosing Main-Ferry.

THE FUNDING
Following conceptual work by architect Gordon, HOME negotiated and signed a purchase contract in February 2007. Working as a volunteer, Ms. Meiselman then set about the difficult task of gathering public funds for the new housing component. Meanwhile, HOME began a capital campaign to raise a half million dollars to finance the lion’s share of the cost of new offices. The lead gift came from the Margaret L. Wendt Foundation, which committed $95,000 to the project.

In May 2009, New York State made three separate awards totaling $95,000 to the project.

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From the Director:

DEMOLITION DAY

by Scott W. Gehl

Standing atop a snow mound soon after 8 a.m. on a frigid February morning, Shannon M. Koehn and I photographed the start of demolition of a badly deteriorated two-story building on Ferry Street just west of Main. Before the year is out, the footprint of this disjointed structure will be replaced by a new addition to 1542 Main—site of the new Home for HOME and, not coincidentally, home for 10 families.

In a scene reminiscent of Jurassic Park, a behemoth yellow excavator took big bites out of the brick and concrete walls. For all the world to see, this—finally—was progress.

This project—birthed in 2007 by Janet Meiselman and HOME’s Program Operation & Planning Committee—has been an incredible collaborative effort. Members of the development team (such as Paul Lamparelli, Charlie Gordon, Bob Conway, and Mike Lesakowski) have gone far beyond their professional responsibilities to do whatever was necessary to bring us to this point.

Roger Ross, a partner of Dan Kohane’s at Hurwitz & Fine, provided extraordinary expertise, advice and incredible hours of service in bringing to closing a construction loan which some have called the most problematic encountered in careers of three decades. For Roger, HOME went from client to cause. We would not be here without him.

Nor would construction be underway without the patience of Scot Fisher, who followed hard-nosed negotiations with unflagging support. On the night of October 29, 2009—hours before dignitaries and supporters would gather to ceremonially break ground—Scot put his daughter to bed and then, in the illumination of his headlights, painted over graffiti on the western wall of the building being demolished that day—because he feared that graffiti would detract from the celebratory event.

PRAISE FOR THE PROJECT

(Continued from Page 1)

$1,682,134. The Federal HOME Loan Bank of New York (through M&T Bank and First Niagara Bank) committed another $197,000 and the City of Buffalo $495,000. Buoyed by grants from the Mulroy Family Foundation, the M&T Foundation, the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, the Western New York Foundation and more than 60 individual contributions, HOME’s capital campaign crossed the $400,000 threshold—with about $100,000 to go!

BREAKING GROUND

On October 30, 2009, nearly a hundred HOME supporters gathered under a tent at Ferry & Oxford to hear Ernie Warlick (a member of the Buffalo Bills 1964-65 championship teams) tell how football stardom had not been enough to shield his family from discrimination. HOME volunteers had played that role—and four and one-half decades later, HOME is still fighting battles for victims of discrimination.

Visibly moved by Mr. Warlick’s remarks, a number of dignitaries joined Board Members Gilbert Hernandez and Janet Barnes in breaking ground for the project. Construction was scheduled to begin in April, but that was not to be.

As so often occurs in adaptive reuse projects of this scope, an unanticipated series of issues arose surrounding environmental testing and remediation and legal and financial approvals, delaying the closing until January 7, 2011.

Despite frigid temperatures, within a week of closing remediation of lead and asbestos had begun inside the two adjoining structures. By late February, the Ferry Street building had been demolished to make way for the foundation of the new addition to the historic 1542 Main.

PRIZES FOR THE PROJECT

Before the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency voted unanimously approved the City’s share of funding for Main-Ferry, Buffalo Mayor Byron W. Brown had praise both for HOME and the community development this project will spawn around one of Main Street’s most visible intersections.

HOME’S Main-Ferry project has been a very long time coming—but will surely prove well worth the wait.
HOME’S RAPID RE-HOUSING PROGRAM:
WORKING WELL, BUT FOR HOW LONG?
By Kenneth Gholston and Nicole Derrico

Since September 2009 HOME, along with eight other local agencies, has been part of a Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program for residents of the City of Buffalo. The program, established from funds in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, is designed to provide homelessness prevention assistance to households who would otherwise become homeless, and to provide assistance to rapidly re-house persons who are already homeless.

In its first 18 months of operation, the Buffalo Homeless/Housing Outreach Program (BHOP) has assisted hundreds of Buffalo residents with numerous housing-related needs, especially with rent and utility arrears.

HOME’s portion of the program revolves around helping those who are homeless find housing quickly. Since HOME began working with BHOP clients in December of 2009, nearly 100 previously homeless clients have found housing with HOME’s assistance.

One such client was Kevin, who was referred to HOME in January 2011. Kevin had been hospitalized, which caused him to lose his income. He was then evicted from his apartment because he could not pay his rent and ended up in the City Mission shelter. After meeting with Catholic Charities, he was referred to Nicole Derrico, HOME’s social worker. She worked with Kevin to find housing that was not only available immediately, but affordable and in a neighborhood where he’d feel comfortable. Working together, Kevin found an apartment complex in Kenmore that he was interested in. Before agreeing to rent to Kevin, however, the manager had questions about the BHOP process. Nicole stepped in to explain the entire process, from apartment inspection to payment of security deposit and rental assistance for Kevin going forward. Kevin was able to secure the apartment and moved in in February.

Kevin’s story is similar to many of HOME’s BHOP clients. Although he was able to find housing relatively quickly, for others the process has not been as timely. It has taken, on average, about a month for clients to find housing once they have been referred for assistance—not exactly rapid, considering that some of our clients are living in shelters.

Although the reasons for the timeframe are numerous, one of the most prominent is the increase in rents in the Greater Buffalo area. Although rent subsidies are available for eligible clients from the Department of Social Services, those subsidies are often not enough to pay for the rent for an apartment, regardless of the area of Buffalo where it is located. BHOP can provide money for rent subsidies going forward, but that money is temporary. The funds are temporary because the program, by design, is temporary.

Currently there are no plans in place for the program to be continued once the federal stimulus funding has expired. With the need for assistance so great in this area, there is fear that funds will run out sooner than the three years originally allotted by the federal government. Hopefully this program, or one similar to it, will continue to serve people like Kevin, and provide help to those who need it most.

Leave a Legacy . . .
Housing Opportunities Made Equal exists because of the continuing support of our members who desire to live in a community free of discrimination. For all those who share this belief, there is another way to support HOME’s mission—by Leaving A Legacy to HOME. For information on making a planned gift to HOME’s John Howland Koekkoek Endowment for Fair Housing Education, contact Shannon M. Koehn at 854-1400 extension 17.

HOME MEMBERS HONORED

Over 1,100 people gathered in the Grand Ballroom of the Adam’s Mark Hotel on November 20, 2010 to celebrate the centennial of the Buffalo Urban League. The goal of the Urban League is to build strong and stable families throughout Western New York.

Each year, the League honors citizens for their contributions to the community. The Family Life Award was presented to Danis and Scott Gehl. Danis serves as associate executive director at the University at Buffalo’s Educational Opportunity Center. Scott has been HOME’s dedicated director for nearly 30 years.

The Gehls’ recognition continued into the new year when, on January 20th, the National Federation of Just Communities held its Community Leaders Luncheon at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center. The NFJC is a coalition of organizations working across America to promote the values of diversity, inclusion and social justice. The Federation’s Family Leadership Award was presented to Danis and Scott Gehl.

HOME member Collin Gehl beamed as his parents received these awards. In their bio, the Gehls reciprocated, noting that, of all their accomplishments, they are proudest of their son, Collin.
WHO KNEW FUND RAISING COULD BE SO SWEET?
CHOCO-LOGO EVENT - A DELICIOUS SUCCESS

By Mary Leahy

On February 9th, more than 50 HOME members, staff and guests enjoyed a tour, gourmet chocolate tasting and wine pairing at Choco-Logo, downtown’s only chocolate factory. They experienced various chocolate products being mixed, formed and packaged. They sampled and purchased fine chocolates for friends and loved ones for Valentine’s Day. They even learned, first hand, that many unexpected tastes and flavors compliment chocolate, including wasabi, hot peppers and sea salt! Certain wines go well with certain chocolates, and samples of each were served.

Proceeds from ticket sales plus a portion of the evening’s chocolate sales were donated to HOME, netting a sweet $1,350. Not only was it the “Yummiest Event of 2011” but also a fascinating and enjoyable way to raise needed funds for the important cause of fair housing.

Even in a recession, candy has been a luxury that many people can still afford. Dan Johnson, chocolatier and owner of Choco-Logo, told guests “Chocolate is a comfort food.” Choco-Logo’s premium products are sold in Bloomingdale’s, Macy’s and other stores nationwide, as well as in specialty gift shops, hotels and casinos.

The historic building at 141 Broadway, the unique and progressive tastes, along with the stimulating conversation with our expert tour guide made this a very special event. HOME member Kenji Kimura says “It was one of my favorite HOME events, ever!”

A special thanks to Choco-Logo and everyone who turned their sweet tooth into a great reason to support HOME! By popular demand, our HOME signature candy bars (now in milk, milk with almonds and dark chocolate varieties) and nut corn will be available for purchase at our office and at upcoming events! Check out pictures of this event on our website and on HOME’s Facebook page!

HOME Members Faith and Deb give the event 2 (or 4) thumbs up!

Newlywed HOME Members Kenji and Jenna Kimura with Chocolatier Dan Johnson

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For more information on membership contact HOME (716) 854-1400 or www.homeny.org

For more information contact: Shannon M. Koehn at (716) 854-1400 ext 17 or skoehn@homeny.org

Housing Opportunities Made Equal’s latest annual report may be obtained upon request from the office of the Attorney General Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, New York 10271
DUAL VICTIMIZATION
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE + HOUSING DISCRIMINATION
By M. DeAnna Eason

Nearly 1.3 million women are victims of a physical assault by their intimate partner each year, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. As catastrophic as domestic violence is alone, imagine the enormity of the injury when a victim has to deal with housing discrimination as a result of the abuse she has experienced. This is dual victimization.

A survey by the National Law Center of Homelessness and Poverty reports that domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness in the United States. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that 19% of the homeless population are victims of domestic violence (www.nationalhomeless.org) or that 38% of domestic violence victims will become homeless at some point in their lives.

The domestic violence scenario jeopardizes housing for victims in several ways. Criminal activity (the abuse) in the unit may result in housing providers evicting the tenant, regardless of whether she is the victim or the perpetrator. In other situations, the victim may flee the abuse, be locked out of the unit by the abuser or denied a transfer to a safer unit by the housing provider and thereby be rendered homeless. Housing providers often evict because the noise from violence, or the constant police presence at the unit disturbs the “peaceful enjoyment” of neighbors, or because of damage to the unit. Women fleeing violent situations may also be denied housing if they are coming from transitional housing, a shelter or if the prospective housing provider suspects that the victim will “take back” the abuser.

As domestic abuse survivors are nearly always women, the practice of evicting victims based on violence committed against them has a greater effect on women than on men. This disparate impact violates both the federal Fair Housing Act and the New York State Human Rights Law which prohibit housing procedures that disproportionately affect one sex over the other. By denying housing to survivors or evicting them from units, private housing providers can find themselves named in a discrimination complaint on the basis of sex.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued the “One Strike” rule in 2001 that allowed public housing authorities and Section 8 assisted housing to terminate a tenant’s lease because of any criminal activity committed by that tenant, household member or guest that “threatens the health [or] safety” of other residents or neighbors.

As a result of this rule, victims of domestic violence were being punished for the violence they experienced. In response to this, in 2005, the federal government enacted the Violence Against Women Act of 2005 (VAWA) which provided resources to victims to prevent homelessness and an assurance that victims could access the criminal justice system without risking current or future housing. This legislation protects victims of domestic violence by prohibiting denials for housing and evictions in public housing and Section 8 assisted housing solely because of a victim’s history of abuse.

Housing providers may be unaware that such denials for housing and evictions may constitute discrimination under the Fair Housing Act, New York State Human Rights law, or VAWA. Although these laws do offer some comfort to domestic violence survivors, it is imperative that safe and affordable housing be made available to help victims maintain self-sufficiency and stability.

Housing providers can show initiative by incorporating domestic violence policies into their rental agreements that aim to ensure sensitivity, confidentiality and services that would allow the survivor to live in safety and security. Landlords and leasing agents are invited to contact HOME for free assistance in revising their policies and agreements.

FROM THE HOME CASE FILES:

Ana, a 50-year-old single woman, lived alone on the West Side of Buffalo. Upon receipt of her Section 8 voucher she contacted HOME’s Community Housing Center (CHC) for help with finding a home that met her needs and fit her voucher criteria.

During her one-on-one session with HOME Mobility Counselor Melissa Sommerville, Ana shared her experience of viewing an apartment in South Buffalo. Ana was discriminated against because she was Hispanic. The landlord—ironically also Hispanic—told her that he knew what “Hispanic’s on the West Side did and he didn’t want any drugs or violence to be going on in his apartment!”

As Ana shared her story with Melissa she was crying and very upset. She stated that she was more hurt because someone from her own background was discriminating against her. Ana did not want to file a discrimination case out of fear of retaliation.

As Melissa worked with Ana during her personalized housing search, Ana would tell her about the crime and violence going on in her neighborhood and how badly she needed to get out of there. Ana was yearning for peace.

After about six weeks of housing searches, Melissa and Ana were able to find an apartment in South Buffalo, near her daughter and grandchildren. Ana stated that the CHC program was “a true blessing” to her and she could not express how much HOME’s help meant to her. Ana was finally able to gain that sense of peace.

To report discrimination, call 716-854-1400.
A VISION FOR HOME

HOME’s Associate Director Shannon M. Koehn will be a 2011 “Vision VIP” for the CEPA Gallery. “Visions of Greater Buffalo” is a photographic event that supports the gallery’s educational and public art programs. “Visions” highlights the people and places of WNY. 100 photographic images created by 100 community leaders will be part of an exhibit in the Market Arcade building. A panel of artists and curators select one photograph from each participant to display. A gala reception and silent auction will be held on Thursday, May 19 and will feature the framed artwork. The Visions VIP whose photograph brings the highest amount at auction will win a cash prize of $3,000 for their favorite non-profit organization. Second prizes of $1,500 and $500 will also be awarded. The subject of Shannon’s photos will be HOME’s new home at 1542 Main Street, the surrounding neighborhood and images which promote diversity. Please join us for this special evening to support HOME and Shannon.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO TRACK DOWN HISTORIC PHOTOS

HOME is looking for two or three volunteers who would enjoy working together as a committee to do a little historical research on the classic 19th Century building that will become HOME’s new headquarters. Little is known about the past use of the building. A few vintage signs and artifacts recently discovered in the buildings offer some clues. Volunteers will begin by checking old city directories in the Local History Department of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, looking for names of commercial tenants of 1542 Main Street over the years. With the names and dates of those businesses in hand, a trip to the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society may provide vintage, period photographs of the building. It may prove to be a fun and exciting project to track the usage of this structure through the years.

If you would like to join this committee, please call Mark Evans at 585.226.2236 for more information on how to get started. No experience necessary!