

In 2010 / 2011 The Community Builders began a \$15MM rehabilitation project at Heritage Common Apartments, in Lawrence, MA. Lawrence was and is one of the states hardest hit communities for joblessness. It surpasses both state and national averages at well over 17%. Many of the hardest hit economically disadvantaged members of the city live at Heritage Common Apartments. They do so by choice. It is a great place to live. Heritage Common is a former co-op that today is a 140 unit rental community. It encompasses a very large section of the city as shown on the accompanying map.

The site was nearing 30 years old and was in need of upgrades and a facelift. We are happy to say that this has been accomplished as the pictures submitted will confirm but the **real “turnaround”** was not just physical which was the primary goal, but was done so internally by the residents themselves. Yes...we've updated building systems, new windows, doors, roofs, kitchens and bathrooms, new flooring, enhanced and up to date fires safety systems and enhanced curb appeal, but the real metamorphosis was in the residents themselves. The story below will highlight just a few areas that have changed the community on the whole.

The Residents and Resident Service Programs of Heritage Common

The residents at Heritage Common Apartments, many of which volunteer to help others less fortunate in their community have very little in terms of material wealth, but they are diligent, humanitarian and responsible citizens. These shared values sustain and reinforce social connections in spite of high unemployment and poverty in the area. Volunteers convene weekly in the Community Learning Center to produce warm blankets from Polartec® fabric donated by Malden Mills Corporation. The ladies of the Heritage Sewing League (***The Sew-Fisticated Ladies***) split their time between sewing blankets for local shelters and serving needy families free meals at the local Senior Center. While they're not training for the Boston Marathon, their perseverance is admirable. They're driven by the same extraordinary humility that distinguishes residents who attend Heritage's ESOL courses.

For some, English is becoming their first literate language. Residents attending Heritage's ESOL courses support each other by collaborating during learning activities and consistently coming to class. Like communities, they need people working together in order to function and to be successful. Residents embrace opportunities to contribute their knowledge, experience and labor in the spirit of helping neighbors and classmates. They appreciate the access to technology provided by Heritage's Writing Support / Computer Center and strive to increase their writing and reading skills. Residential community programs, which are practical and specific to residents' needs, facilitate community engagement and responsible citizenship.

Heritage's children are equally responsible for each other's learning and social development. Monday through Friday, children attending Heritage's After-School Program read out loud to each other, work together on homework and encourage each other to participate in exciting community service projects which include planting trees, delivering free blankets and recycling. Heritage's children appreciate community partnerships that Heritage shares with Northern Essex Community College and the Greater Lawrence Technical School by exemplifying appropriate behavior and an eagerness to learn during free summer camps provided by these schools through scholarships.

Residents' empathy, industry (backbone) and demand for literacy, technology and health services all direct and sustain Resident Services at Heritage Common. In September, residents took advantage of opportunities to better care for their families by attending on-site comprehensive health screenings, clinics and courses sponsored by Holy Family Hospital of Methuen, MA. We had well over two hundred people in attendance. When given access to preventative health technology, residents are learning to maintain their health so that they may continue to provide for their families and can support their community.

The Residents of Heritage Common are committed to community service initiatives and the betterment of their families and neighbors. They are motivated by their own desires to learn and do more not only for themselves but for others...their neighbors. They overcome barriers by personally connecting with others and lending a helping hand. Heritage's Resident Services Programs facilitate residents' access to

education, technology, health services, employment opportunities and community service, but Heritage Common's residents are the driving force who empower these programs.

The Heritage Common Community Learning Center (HCCLC) offers residents a variety of practical and life enhancing services. Teachers at HCCLC offer a holistic approach to teaching residents ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) by integrating listening/speaking, writing, reading, technology and collaborative components into each course offering. Teachers work with local social service agencies to coordinate life-skill workshops and health clinics with ESOL learning objectives.

The HCCLC Writing and Computer Center provides residents with tutors and access to technology. Flexible and compassionate, HCCLC teachers work in-house and in partnership with the community offering courses that take into account and accommodate for residents' diverse language abilities, learning needs, learning styles, cultural backgrounds and schedules.

The HCCLC After-School Program activities are also exemplary of holistic learning. Teachers engage children in a variety of academic, kinesthetic, musical, artistic and recreational activities to stimulate and maximize learning experiences. Heritage's teachers teach children to recognize, develop and appreciate the collective power of collaborative efforts. Community service initiatives are incorporated into many learning activities. Moreover, teachers teach all residents to think and operate at higher cognitive levels while expressing themselves in a variety of ways. Literacy is an inherent component of the majority HCCLC programs and the "Reading Buddies Program" allows parents/adults to strengthen children's reading skills while advancing their own English proficiency. Many senior residents enjoy reading and sharing their histories with children. All HCCLC teachers and staff members are bilingual and maintain strong communications with residents.

In the fall of 2010, a full-time Resident Services Coordinator (RSC) was hired to provide, develop, implement and evaluate programs that are relevant to residents' specific needs. Programs are added regularly. Addressing the social fabric issues of the community will insure long-term viability not only of the site, but of those living there. The RSC proactively connects with residents through individual and family appointments assessing a family's criteria. Audrey Latham is the site's RSC and is a certified teacher as well. Audrey fully understands the needs of the residents and their desire to learn. She focuses many of her efforts in this direction.

Regular phone calls, monthly newsletters, flyers and announcement boards are also used to maximize residents' awareness and access to helpful social service agencies and their programs. We also provide community meetings and functions to get residents out of their units to meet their neighbors. This is meant to be a catalyst to turn a housing development into a real "**neighborhood.**"

The Resident Services Coordinator also establishes partnerships with local hospitals and social service agencies that can provide residents with additional resources. These include but are not limited to on-site health screenings and clinics. Health is a top concern for the Heritage Common population.

As part of the companywide initiative that **The Community Builders, Inc.**, has had in place for the last three years, the RSC as well as other site staff worked with all qualifying residents to get their income taxes filed for "free." They also insured that those eligible for either the Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) or the Child Tax Credit (CTC) filed for them. Many residents were not aware of this IRS initiative and have benefited greatly since we rolled it out two years ago. Yet another program offered by the HCCLC, the **Tax Credits for You** Campaign resulted in tens of thousands of dollars back in the pockets of those families in need.

In addition to life-skills and children's programs, the RSC coordinates social and therapeutic programs. These include weekly bingo games, exercise classes and other multi-generational learning activities. One of the most popular with our senior residents is the sewing circle we previously noted. The site, in partnership with Malden Mills which many people will remember that when it had a terrible fire many years ago, its owner paid all of his employees their full salaries for nearly a year during reconstruction since they were the neediest in community and the backbone of his company. That dedication is what we still

see today. The company donates bolts of Polartec® fabric to make and donate hand made blankets to local shelters, nursing homes, veterans organizations and our needy neighbors.

The HCCLC empowers residents to productively assimilate into their surrounding community by providing effective ESOL teachers and a variety of life-skill programs that are relevant to residents' needs. Furthermore, HCCLC maintains an articulate system of programs which is characterized by responsible citizenship, holistic learning, humanity and collaborative effort.

The mission statement of The Community Builders, Inc., is ***“Building strong communities where people of all incomes can achieve their full potential.”*** Heritage Common is doing its part to positively impact and change the lives of its residents and the community! For this reason, we believe that Heritage Common Apartments in Lawrence, MA is a true Community of Quality and is deserving of the 2011 NEAHMA Best Turnaround of a Troubled Property.

Thank you!

