



AVALON HOUSING inc.

Supportive Housing: The key to ending homelessness

The Making of a Merger : It's all about you!

When Avalon was initially approached by the board of Washtenaw Affordable Housing Corporation (WAHC) and local funders about a merger — in order to preserve 114 units of affordable housing in Washtenaw County — we were more than a little nervous. **As housing advocates, we knew we did not want to lose that many affordable housing units, displace families, and undermine the community's work to end homelessness by losing the benefit of all the funds and effort already invested.** On the other hand, merging with WAHC was sure to bring huge challenges and changes for Avalon — including managing a sudden 50% increase in our housing stock, and overseeing the more than \$6 million of badly needed housing renovation work. In addition, we would need to continue providing high quality services and enhanced property management activities to the now more than 500 people living in 324 apartments scattered at more than 25 sites.

Already facing some challenges related to the weakening economy, it was clear that if Avalon was to move forward with a merger, we couldn't do it alone. We needed broad support from the community: local leaders, funders and partner agencies, as well as Avalon and WAHC supporters, would have to step in and help make the merger a success.

Initiatives Support Corporation have each committed funds to Avalon for costs related to merging operations and housing rehabilitation. Our board merger committee - comprised of Avalon board and staff members, and key volunteers - has spent countless hours pouring over work plans, budgets, legal documents, and staffing changes. We've tapped into the experience of outside consultants and received support from WAHC investors, their board and partner agencies. Volunteers and donors have responded in record numbers as well. Despite the economic downturn, Avalon experienced an increase in giving last year and our volunteer list is growing by the day. Inquiries for volunteer positions have increased by more than 100%.



On February 1, 2009, Avalon Housing assumed management responsibilities for 114 WAHC units, including Parkhurst Apartments, (above) at 1500 Pauline Blvd. in Ann Arbor. The last step of the merger process, transferring ownership of WAHC properties to Avalon, should be completed by the end of 2009.

Well, we are moving forward and you stepped in.

The City of Ann Arbor and the Office of Community Development, the Downtown Development Authority, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, and Local

Of course, we're just getting started. During the coming months, we'll be launching several programs and activities aimed at making sure our tenants remain housed for the long term, that our properties are attractive and that we continue to be good neighbors. We will be creating community centers and gardens at all the new property locations, and working hard to make physical changes to the buildings. We'll also be working hard at creating a sense of community at our sites - one of Avalon's core values - in order to improve the properties and increase tenants' sense of pride and ownership. **Look for ongoing updates about this exciting period of growth for Avalon.**



Avalon Office Moves

1327 Jones Drive (off Broadway) is the site of Avalon Housing's new central offices. Our growth in recent years has meant more work, more staff and a need for more space. We'll be hosting an open house later this spring, but in the meantime, feel free to stop by and say "hello."

Teamwork

Carole McCabe and Michael Appel have worked together as a team since Avalon's inception in 1992. For the first 13 years Carole worked as Executive Director with Michael in charge of Housing Development and Finance, after spending his first year with Avalon as a Secretary of the Board of Trustees. Then Carole took on a new role as Director of Tenant Programs and Michael became Executive Director. All along the way they have shared the responsibility of leading Avalon through a steady growth process and refined the best way to complement each other's skills. Last November, they made their team approach to leadership official, by becoming Co-Executive Directors, with Carole of *Operations* and Michael of *Housing Development and Finance*. As always Avalon likes to put their own creative spin on traditional roles!

Pasta and People



Fortunately for Avalon, **Monique Deschaine's** self-described "stubborn determination" isn't limited to her pursuit of making the perfect pasta. She's just as determined when it comes to spreading the word about the importance of affordable, permanent housing, inclusive communities, and Avalon's good works. In fact, last fall when she was working on our fall fundraiser, (See Edu-thon Success!) she was unstoppable. Her creativity, infectious enthusiasm, and reassuring confidence drew in scores of volunteers - as well as event attendees - and helped us surpass our fundraising goals.

So what's behind her commitment to Avalon? Here's Monique's own account:

"There used to be a homeless shelter on Henry Street geared towards families and run by the Salvation Army. The kids from this shelter would go to Burns Park School where my kids also went to school. I had the privilege and opportunity to get to know many of them..

There were two things going on in my mind during this time. One is that I wanted these families to know that I understood what they were going through, that my childhood was similar to theirs in many ways. You can only imagine how shocked they were to learn that someone who had my kind of life would have ever been through the kinds of difficulties that they were experiencing. Number two is that I wanted so badly for them to have access to the same kinds of opportunities, education, and positive role models that my own kids have.

I would spend a lot of time trying to connect them with the various resources in our community, but discovered how difficult it was, even in our very privileged town. And of course it all starts with housing. That is when I learned about Avalon Housing. I was very, very impressed with everything about Avalon, the way that they look at the whole person, the big picture, realizing that putting a roof over someones head is just the beginning. Unfortunately, during that time, they had very limited housing for families with children and I had to suffer through watching most of the families I met during those years moving to absolutely horrible apartments, usually outside of Ann Arbor.

Finally, when Carrot Way came about, my dream came true, at least for these families, and now there is a place where these previously homeless kids can have so much of what my own kids have. Here they have beautiful, safe, clean, attractive apartments next to a park where they can play and feel proud to invite kids over as opposed to feeling ashamed of where they live. They have a community of caring adults with Charles as a leader who is worth his weight in gold. They now have access to homework help and all kinds of enrichment activities,- everything that all kids should have, but many don't.

Here at Avalon, we all have the assurance that the tenants are being treated with respect and understanding. That is why I will do everything I can possibly do to help Avalon do what they do best."

Al Dente is a local business supporting local causes. PLEASE visit www.aldentepasta.com for ideas, recipes and (of course) delicious pasta!

Edu-Thon Success!

We named our five days of events in November 2008 as "With a little help from our Friends"... and as it turns out perhaps we should have named it with a LOT of help from our friends!

The response was overwhelmingly supportive. Against a goal of \$75,000, we actually raised a little over \$88,000. The five days of events were indeed a whirlwind - ranging from cocktail parties to lectures and sit-down dinners to book signings with special guests Fritz Haeg and Judy Wicks. **By the end of the weekend, more than 300 individuals were able to share in at least one event with us!**

The list of people and organizations we would like to thank would probably fill more than this whole newsletter could fit. **But we would be remiss in not thanking some extraordinary people who made it all happen: Cynthia Burgoyne, Lisa Dengiz, Monique Deschaine, Francis Glorie, Karen Godfrey, Margaret Krebsbach, and Lori Saginaw.** Special thanks also goes to our generous event hosts Wendy Chapman and Francis Clark, Zingerman's Roadhouse, The Earle, Leslie Science Center, University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment and the Ann Arbor District Library (downtown).

Most of all, though, we want to thank you - our supporters that gave donations, came to events and shared your commitment to supportive housing in Ann Arbor in a myriad of ways.

In Other Words

The following email was received by Avalon a few months ago and it made us proud:

I am a preschool teacher at the Ann Arbor YMCA. As I speak, two men in an Avalon Housing van are parked under my window helping a girl change her tire. Many people walked by, but your two men stopped to help. It is freezing outside...my preschoolers and I had a great conversation while watching this about helping and caring. Thank you.

- Brandy

Avalon, Safehouse, Northside and St. Aidan's team up to make a difference

In late spring, four families – all survivors of domestic violence - will be moving into Broadway Apartments, one of Avalon's latest supportive housing projects developed in partnership with Safehouse and the neighboring congregations of St. Aidan's Episcopal and Northside Presbyterian. With its sunny rooms, original woodwork, hardwood floors and stained glass windows – the apartments are perfect for families looking to make a fresh start.

The best painting parties in town

One of reasons the Broadway apartments are in such great shape is the outstanding work of two groups of volunteer painters.

The first group of 16 arrived on a very cold and snowy day in late January. Led by Jeff Muoio, from HomeAid (Michigan), the group was comprised of a team of University of Michigan students, Michigan Homebuilder's Association members and the terrific team of D&G Painting. Many thanks to all those who braved the weather and kindly spent their day prepping, painting and cleaning. Special thanks to Northside Ministries for all their support, not the least of which was calling out the snow plow so we could leave at the end of the day!

The second group came all the way from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida! As part of an alternate spring break arranged through the John Lennon Education Fund, 12 students donated one day of their working "vacation" to Avalon. We owe particular thanks to our contractor, Amana Construction, for providing an amazing home cooked lunch!

Broadway Open House

On February 12th, thanks again to the generosity of Zingerman's Delicatessen who provided the refreshments, more than 75 people helped us celebrate the collaboration between Avalon, Safehouse and the Northside Ministries, as well as the (near) completion of the Broadway Apartments.



With this permanent supportive housing project, survivors of domestic violence will have one of their basic needs met, while pursuing hope for a better future.

Barb Neiss, Executive Director of Safehouse



A Legacy at Work

This past January, Avalon Housing received an unexpected gift of \$100,000 from Bethlehem United Church of Christ and the estate of Howard and Florence McKay. The McKays left the bulk of their estate to the church, with instructions to distribute a significant portion of it to "help the homeless."

Howard and Florence McKay "were pretty frugal folks, lived a modest life, had what they wanted or needed, and put away the rest," said Mary Jean Raab, past president of Bethlehem UCC. Howard died in 1990, and when Florence followed in 2006, the estate was worth \$2.4 million.

Half of Avalon's gift will be used to upgrade three properties on N. Division that house primarily single adults, most of whom have struggled with homelessness in the past. The other \$50,000 will go to support tenant services. Along with the funds, church congregants will join in the work at Division and volunteer at community center programs.



Last spring when Avalon staff were researching Fritz Haeg (our Edu-thon guest) and his quest to use front lawns for growing food instead of grass, which is costly to maintain, we thought we needed to give it a try.

Edible Avalon



Our Arbdale Apartments on Pauline just happened to have some perfectly usable -and empty - front lawn that would make an ideal first garden. So with help from a dedicated group of volunteers, including Russ Monahan who built the raised beds, and Kris Kaul, who supervised the gardens – and most importantly the tenants who really made it work - Edible Avalon was born!

This year, thanks to Food Gatherer's Big Community Harvest program (funded through the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation's Big Idea funding round) we're adding garden sites to more Avalon properties. The program will provide raised-bed garden plots, seeds, plants, and tools for tenants. We'll also provide several afternoon sessions with a garden coordinator who will help with hands-on education about organic gardening, cooking, storage, and nutrition.

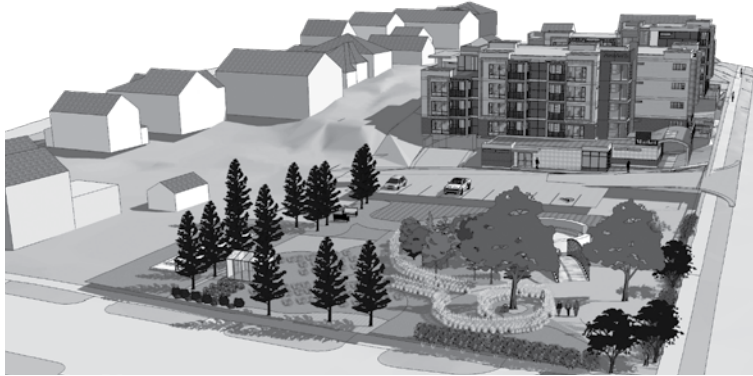
Edible Avalon is an important part of ensuring that our tenants have access to fresh, healthy food. But equally important is the effect these gardens have on our tenants' quality of life. Gardening helps build strong connections with friends, neighbors, volunteers, and the entire community!

If you'd like to participate in Edible Avalon, we'd love to hear from you. We're looking for volunteers willing to offer a few hours or a few days. Check out our website for more information! www.avalonhousing.org

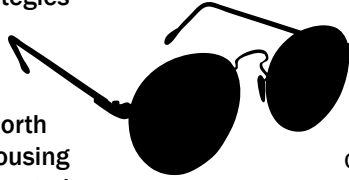


Avalon Goes Green

Avalon has long valued development and maintenance strategies that reduce energy usage, utilize green materials and safeguard staff and tenant health. Our current partnership with Three Oaks Group takes this to a new level. Near North, a 38-unit affordable housing development proposed for North Main St. will be the most innovative and green affordable housing in Ann Arbor. Twenty-four of the 38 apartments will be allocated for households with annual income equal to \$33,000 or less (50% of the area median income). Fourteen will be set aside for persons with special needs and extremely low annual incomes of 30% of the area median income or less. The 5,000-10,000 square feet of commercial space included in the plan will include light retail and office space. Both partner organizations will jointly own the project upon completion and Avalon will manage the residential units. For more information and updates on the progress of the development, please see www.nearnorthannarbor.org



WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?



We're updating our website and want to know what you want to see included!

Are you looking for more stories from our tenants? Would you like to have more advice and links to sites that can help you as a homeowner or tenant? Do writing and photography competitions pique your interest?

Please let us know. Contact Jude (jwalton@avalonhousing.org) and share your thoughts!

For Your Calendar

Beginning in April, and continuing through the summer

Grounds keeping and maintenance volunteering opportunities available! We'd love to host individuals or groups – please contact Jude at jwalton@avalonhousing.org, 734.663.5858 ext 213.

Friday May 15th – Avalon Housing's Third Annual Hometown Hootenanny

Mark Hodesh and Downtown Home and Garden once again host this annual celebration, this year featuring Michigan's own Saucecats. SEE INSIDE for more information!

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We've Moved!
New Address:
1327 Jones Drive, Suite 102
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