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CDC touts new affordable housing

By Rich Eldred

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CHATHAM - It was open house at the newest housing complex Monday – affordable housing. The building at 15 Balfour Lane was once the home of the Visiting Nurse Association, but work by E.A. Barsness & Co. of Centerville converted it into four two-bedroom condominium units.

The units are not only priced at friendly levels but also built with an energy efficient outlook, from the refrigerator to the flooring to the walls and windows. The floors are bamboo, which re-grows annually, and is quite long lasting, not to say spiffy.

“This project started three years ago,” explained Elizabeth Bridgewater, executive director of Lower Cape Cod Community Development Corporation. “One public citizen in Chatham came up with the idea.”

That was developer Ron Rudnick, who was doing some renovations next door. He called Florence Seldin, chairman of the CDC Housing Committee.

“This was really one person’s idea, who called me up one day and said come and see me, I have an idea,” Seldin recalled. “We sat down with (then director) Gwen Pelletier and decided then that this would be a good project for the CDC.”

Money came from large private donations (Rudnick and David Oppenheim) made through Friends of Chatham Affordable Housing, from the town after a town meeting vote and a loan from TD Banknorth. The bank also gave a grant for energy efficient appliances and green construction. Local lawyer Lisa Still worked on a pro bono basis to dot all the i’s. The building was bought for \$450,000 and the final cost was \$1.3 million.

“There is not a penny of federal or state money in this,” Seldin pointed out. “It’s only because everything worked out well, the stars were in heaven and they were aligned.”

State Rep. Sarah Peake noted she is working on making state funds available for small-scale projects like this.

“I’m just here to offer my thanks and congratulations,” Peake said. “I congratulate the family of Chatham that has helped build these units.”

“This really is a wonderful project,” agreed Peter Rice of TD Banknorth. “And TD Banknorth places a very high priority on affordable housing in the community.”

Emily Loomis of the CDC was the project manager and she selected E.A. Barsness & Co. from a field of 15 candidates to do the renovation.

“Eric is incredibly honest and has the highest integrity,” Loomis said. “It was a pleasure to work with Eric and his crew.”

“It took about a year,” Loomis added. “Before that it was all open commercial space. We gutted the entire space and put in new insulation and a sprinkler system. Each apartment is 1,000 square feet.”

The CDC will close the sale Friday. The Chatham Housing Authority devised a screening process for potential buyers and the winners were selected by lottery. One couple and three individuals comprise the purchasers.

“They had to be under 85 percent of the median income in Chatham to qualify and we had a preference for Chatham residents and all of them are Chatham residents,” Loomis said.

One lucky Chatham resident was Rory Nickerson, former hockey, baseball and soccer star at Chatham High School.

“I’m very excited. I’ve been looking forward to it ever since the process started last summer,” he said. “It’s a golden opportunity to put money toward something to own. These guys did an amazing job. This is one of the better apartments, centrally located near everything you need.”

Nickerson, who played hockey at Plymouth State University, works as a carpenter for Steven Nickerson and he’s glad to have the chance to stay in town.

The units sold for \$154,156 each. They are deed restricted in perpetuity.

“These will continue to be part of the town of Chatham’s affordable housing stock,” Loomis declared. “We focused a lot on energy efficiency and cost effectiveness.”

“This is a success story,” Bridgewater told the assembled crowd, as they munched on cheese and cookies. “And the primary success is that four families will move into these gorgeous homes sometime in the near future. This was an incredible partnership between the CDC, the town of Chatham, private investment and TD Banknorth.”

“We couldn’t have done it without Emily Loomis, who has done an amazing job,” Seldin said.

The CDC has provided more than 65 housing units on the Lower Cape, as well as helping more than 1,000 entrepreneurs. They are a membership organization entirely supported by members.

“We have made affordable housing one of our top priorities year after year,” noted David Whitcomb, chairman of the board of selectmen. “This is indeed a success story.”

The units are all hooked up to the town sewer, which helped keep the price down. The whole project is part of the Cornfield Village Center area on Route 28.

“This is really a smart growth project,” Loomis said. “The project brings new energy to Cornfield Village in Chatham.”

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