

## NeighborWorks: 'Time not to flee, but to focus'

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**MANCHESTER** – The organization credited with helping to turn around the center city a decade ago held its annual meeting yesterday, just days after the death of Officer Michael Briggs revealed a city core once again tipping toward decline.

If there is to be a turnaround this time, Manchester Neighborhood Housing Services, in name at least, won't do it. The organization yesterday unveiled a new name: NeighborWorks Greater Manchester, which organizers say emphasizes a goal to reach beyond the center city and highlights an affiliation with the similarly named nationwide community-redevelopment organization, officials said.

At its annual meeting yesterday, officials held a moment of silence to honor Briggs. The Manchester police officer was shot in the core area that the organization has focused on since it came to Manchester in 1992, noted Michelle Caraccio, spokesman for NeighborWorks.

"We've heard it a lot. People are getting frightened about the crime," Caraccio said. "This is the time not to flee, but to focus."

Manchester Neighborhood Housing Services has long held respect among Manchester leaders. Its board of trustees is a Who's Who of prominent Manchester names. And former Mayor Raymond Wieczorek has credited the organization and the Streetsweeper police crackdown with cleaning up the center city in the early 1990s.

Caraccio said the organization will continue to pursue home ownership and affordable rentals for low-income people.

Meanwhile, it will also work on community improvement efforts, said Executive Director Robert Tourigny. NeighborWorks has implemented a Community Services Committee, a committee of tenants, landlords, homeowners and activists, which is trying to address neighborhood issues, including crime, trash and absentee landlords.

The current focus is the neighborhood at Granite and Douglas streets, Tourigny said. Blighted buildings and yards are making it difficult for responsible landlords to find tenants, he said.

"A lot of these landlords don't care, particularly the ones from out of state," he said.

Meanwhile, Caraccio said a misconception exists that the NeighborWorks low-income apartments attract criminals. The organization owns 209 rental units and is developing another 57 at the Silver Mill.

NeighborWorks tenants sometimes hold two or three low-wage jobs while trying to raise a family, Caraccio said.

"It's hard-working families that are living in these units. They take a lot of pride in their community," she said. Apartments are geared toward people who make 60 percent of the family median income for the area, and NeighborWorks evicts tenants charged with a serious crime or drug possession.

Tourigny said NeighborWorks is also encouraging eligible people to purchase duplexes and triple deckers and become owner-occupied landlords.

In August, NeighborWorks sent letters to tenants in 60 West Side apartment buildings that were on the market, encouraging them to purchase the building. Many letters were returned undelivered, meaning the tenants have already moved out, he said.

A landlord workshop will be held next weekend for about 20 people who expressed interest.

With its new name, the organization plans to pursue low-income rental projects in towns surrounding Manchester, Caraccio said.

"Working families are having a hard time finding housing that's affordable," she said. In New Boston, for

example, the average sales price of a single-family home is \$386,000, she said.

Projects would likely be townhouses or similar rental property. Carracio said NeighborWorks would not likely develop mobile home parks.

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