



# Over-the-Rhine Community Housing

WHERE COMMUNITY COMES FIRST

Winter 2015 Newsletter

## JIMMY HEATH HOUSE CELEBRATES 5 YEARS!

“Everyone needs a home. It’s part of our humanity.” This simple statement from Dave Elkins, Jimmy Heath House’s Program Coordinator, best captures what the Jimmy Heath House (JHH) represents to the community.

On December 3, 2010, Over-the-Rhine Community Housing held its ribbon-cutting ceremony for the JHH. Jimmy Heath House was created to house the most vulnerable and longest-term homeless men on our city’s streets. The project provides fully equipped and furnished apartments to 25 residents at a time, providing the safety and security to struggle with recovery from addiction and to regain physical, mental and spiritual health.

Jimmy Heath House uses the “Housing First” philosophy, a nationally recognized model that asserts that housing is the first priority of all homeless individuals, and their primary goal when seeking assistance. In the first 5 years, we have provided housing to 50 long-term homeless individuals. Half came from a shelter and half directly from the streets, 40% have chronic health conditions, and 14% are veterans. Seven of our original residents still live at JHH, 15 have moved into permanent housing, 6 moved to a nursing home, and, sadly, 5 have passed away.

residents has returned to life on the streets.

There are also very important benefits to the community. Use of costly emergency rooms is reduced, as is contact with the police, the jail, and the criminal justice system.



Many churches, colleges, and civic groups have opened their arms to the residents of Jimmy Heath House. Over 20 church and civic groups have invested time and resources to help with meals and engage with residents over the years.

Jimmy Heath House has meant different things to different residents. For Brad, who was diagnosed with Stage 4 bone cancer before entering JHH, it was a safe, warm home where he could receive hospice care. Brad died after only two months at JHH, and did so with dignity.

Don had lived in a homeless camp on the river bank for four years until, after having been severely beaten, he was brought to JHH by the police. He stayed for over four years and attended and completed substance abuse treatment for the first time in his life. Recently he moved into his own apartment.

Most of our residents tell us this is their first apartment. They have to learn the basics of maintaining a home; e.g. how to use a microwave, take the trash out, and do laundry. They don’t learn this by themselves. There is an array of supportive and compassionate staff from several organizations helping them along the way.

How does the Jimmy Heath House benefit its residents? First, it provides the opportunity to have a safe place to call home. With this first step in place, alcohol use is reduced, an array of services is available, and housing stability is achieved. In the first five years, only 1 of our 50



*continued on page 2*

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Last month Over-the-Rhine saw what, until very recently, no one could imagine: the sale of a condominium (on Race Street) for \$1 million. I remember when, in 2006, one of our staff members lived in that building. It was sold and everyone had to leave. It was a tough time.

This million-dollar condo sale is the latest sign of the changes in OTR, making me worried how we fit in this changing neighborhood. When I am tired and despairing, I seriously wonder if we at OTRCH and the low-income families for whom we work will survive or be pressured to move out.

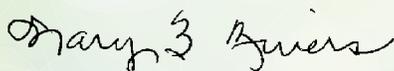
What gives me hope and encouragement is that 37 years ago a small group of residents began the process of buying buildings in Over-the-Rhine. They wanted community control of housing so that their homes would not be subject to the whims of “the market.” Because of their action and foresight, we now own over 90 buildings and manage over 400 apartments in Over-the-Rhine. We are deeply rooted in this community. We have a right to be here. It’s home.

We operate from a different economy here, striving to operate in what is being called “the economics of compassion.” Recently I attended a neighborhood economics summit at Xavier University, where we were encouraged to pursue community development through the lens of justice and compassion, and to value all people. We have been doing that for many years at OTRCH, and I was reminded that there is yet more that we can do.

Part of the “more” for us includes investing over \$300,000 in small, minority-owned businesses this year, providing commercial space for small entrepreneurs with a dream, and making affordable housing available so that people have the stability of home. We give people the opportunity to hope.

This issue includes a challenge from our Over-the-Rhine Community Council president, Ryan Messer, to make sure that the buildings in OTR remaining to be developed include affordable housing. We have also included a section on celebration, highlighting three awards that we have won, and our 2015 edition of our annual event *Celebrating Our Beloved Community*. Additionally, this issue contains a variety of messages of hope from residents. I also want to call out Carrie Johnson’s name. She was a long time resident and activist who advocated for affordable housing. We will miss her. She died on November 14th. Her spirit will live on in our work.

Thank you for your friendship and your support. You have allowed us to provide a space for people to live, dream, and hope.



MARY BURKE RIVERS  
Executive Director



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## JIMMY HEATH HOUSE CELEBRATES 5 YEARS! (continued)

Jimmy Heath House has been central to a community-wide effort to help those individuals whose addiction, mental health, medical and legal issues has kept them cycling among shelters, jails, emergency rooms, treatment centers and the street. Jimmy Heath House has reduced chronic homelessness in Cincinnati.

One of our first residents, Paul, who had been homeless 30 years, summed up his experience at Jimmy Heath House by saying, “I’m learning how to live again.” In the past five years, we have all been learning and growing from our experience at the Jimmy Heath House.

# HOPE AND WELL WISHES FROM OTRCH BOARD



Roger Auer, OTRCH Board President

Do you remember what Over-the-Rhine looked like 15 years ago? At that time, did you have a vision of how you would like it to look? Is today's reality close to what you had imagined?

During this season of thanksgiving and celebration, let us be thankful for the good that has taken place in Over-the-Rhine. Many volunteers have worked thousands of hours and shared their skills and expertise to renovate and establish clean, affordable housing for low-income persons. Many donors have been generous and shared from their abundant resources so that those of limited resources can simply live. OTRCH staff have worked tirelessly and with abundant creativity to make every dollar stretch so that low-income people can thrive.

At the same time, people of higher income levels have moved into OTR; a community of opportunity, hopefully for all and not just for those with higher incomes. The neighborhood will surely be a festive place this holiday season. If hustle and bustle is what you're looking for, you've come to the right place. Regardless of one's income, it feels good to be surrounded by positive energy. The streets will be kept clean, there will be an abundance of police protection, and well-lighted establishments will provide an atmosphere of safety and prosperity. Everyone will share in these amenities – and that is surely a good thing.

John F. Kennedy said, "a rising tide lifts all boats." As the tide rises in Over-the-Rhine I would like to think that everyone's

boat is lifted. OTRCH has helped to provide many low-income people with a "boat," or at least clean, affordable housing. We are providing affordable housing in the midst of some of the hottest real estate in the city.

I believe the interaction of people from varying economic groups can be healthy for everyone. In most Cincinnati neighborhoods, demographics are decided by income. This is not true in OTR. The socio-economic mix that we see seems to be one of Over-the-Rhine's most attractive features. Division resulting from economic inequality does not contribute to "peace on earth" anywhere in the world. Let's keep the experiment going in Over-the-Rhine. It could provide hope for more folks than we could imagine.

I want to close with a personal note of hope and well wishes from my friend and colleague on the OTRCH Board of Directors, Bridgette Burbanks:

"I live in buddy's Place, 1300 Vine Street. I've been there for four wonderful years. I am in recovery, 6 years sober by the grace of God. I am an OTR resident board member of Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, now that's a great honor. I want to wish everyone a Happy Holiday and a Happy New Year and remember GOD loves you, just trust in him even through the bad times."



Bridgette Burbanks, OTR Resident, member of OTRCH Board

—Roger Auer

We asked three JHH residents to share with our readers a message of hope and new beginnings, something they have come to know: "My HOPE is to learn how to sleep at night without the fear of getting beat up, told to move down the street, to another doorway, to animals sniffing me and trying to bite me to get to my food stash." —T.

"My HOPE is that whenever I go to my mom's to work around her house

that this is the way I can show her that I really do love her so she can see me as the son she always wanted, not the son who turned out to be." —N.

"My HOPE is that my family will remember me and the love that I have for them." —O.

—Andy Hutzel

# HOPE FOR THE WAY FORWARD IN OVER-THE-RHINE



The opening of Beasley Place last May was a step forward for Over-the-Rhine and the neighborhood we all love so much. State officials, city representatives, and community leaders all came together to celebrate with Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (OTRCH) on the opening of additional quality, and affordable

homes for Over-the-Rhine residents. It is not surprising that this project recently received Ohio Community Development Corporation Association's *Project of the Year* award.

One of the most important threads running throughout our neighborhood is a desire to maintain our diversity of all kinds. This goal isn't achieved by words, but through hard work and strong community partnerships.

Across the country, many urban neighborhoods like Over-the-Rhine have found it difficult to balance the need for new residents while ensuring long-term residents a home. Often, as the neighborhood becomes more popular, property becomes more valuable and lower income residents are forced out. We have to make a direct effort towards balancing market forces with the need to maintain the diversity that is part of the very fabric of OTR.

This is one of the many examples of how OTRCH is playing a critical role in the neighborhood we are trying to create. We are fortunate to have a community development partner whose mission focuses on housing and supporting low-income residents, thereby helping us maintain our economic diversity.

The Over-the-Rhine Comprehensive Plan, created in 2002, calls for a balance, and housing in three categories: market rate, workforce housing, and affordable housing. I think the goal of the plan, a diversity of housing options resulting in an economically diverse neighborhood, remains right for OTR. Today, 13 years later after the creation of the plan, we don't have a common understanding of how we're progressing against these goals. The Over-the-Rhine Community Council, OTRCH, and neighborhood partners, have begun an assessment of our current housing inventory to get a better understanding of where we are today. This data will help us understand how to further protect our diversity.

We've seen countless buildings brought back online with residents living in them again. Even with the amount of development that has already happened, we still have somewhere between 200 and 300 vacant buildings yet to be completed. This represents a significant amount of work ahead and an opportunity for us to further ensure we maintain the diversity in our neighborhood.

If we look to the Plan, these vacated buildings could account for up to 100 buildings for affordable housing. This is why OTRCH and other community partners committed to the development of affordable housing are so critical to our future success.



But it doesn't end there. OTRCH also helps us to create housing opportunities for the middle

category of the Plan, as well. Perhaps this is an area where OTRCH may be able to play an even bigger role in solving the complex issue of creating moderate income housing. While very complex and often difficult, there are fairly straightforward approaches to creating units in this housing segment.

However, we cannot do this alone. We need our city, state, and federal leaders to invest in this bucket. Simple market demands make it very difficult for a developer to want to create housing that would rent below market rate. We will have to be creative in developing strategies and tactics with our community development partners to make this possible.

No question, our task in creating the Over-the-Rhine of the future will not be easy. But the job becomes much easier with Over-the-Rhine Community Housing and others helping us to ensure that anyone who wants to work, live or play in Over-the-Rhine can do so, and have a safe neighborhood where they can thrive and prosper.

—Ryan Messer

# RECOGNITION OF OTRCH'S PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT WORK

This past fall, Over-the-Rhine Community Housing was recognized for our property development work on two projects: Elm Street Senior Housing and Beasley Place.



Elm Street Senior Housing  
(1500 Elm Street)

- The Heritage Ohio award was for honorable mention for best public/private partnership. This award is presented to an organization that has partnered and leveraged resources

to complete a project with positive, lasting impact in the community. Elm Street Senior Housing was selected for honorable mention for its unique partnering of senior housing development funds through the HUD 202 program, state and federal historic tax credits, and low-income housing tax credits.

Beasley Place (1405-07 Republic Street) - The Cincinnati Preservation Association awarded its Rehabilitation Award for the exemplary quality of the historic preservation of the building.

The Ohio Community Development Corporation Association awarded its "CDC Project of the Year Award" to Beasley Place.

OTRCH, developer and owner, rehabilitated 1405-07 Republic Street into Beasley Place, which provides 13 units of affordable family housing in the heart of Over-the-Rhine right next door to a high-end condominium and just a block away from Washington Park. The rehabilitation of the two separate buildings included combining the buildings through



From left, John Blake, Monica Hardman, Dawn Grace, Yvette Reed, Matt Murtha, Ashleigh Finke, Greg Warner, Mary Piper, and Paul Muller



From left, Steve Torsell (President), Ashleigh Finke (OTRCH), Kathleen Clyde, Judy Jackson.

new interior openings, constructing a new five story elevator addition in the courtyard, and refinishing over 75% of the historic wood flooring throughout the building. Many of the original features were preserved including the storefront, two historic stairs, a majority of the historic wood floors, the unique and different hearths in each of the units, and the historic wood windows on the façade. The project also included many energy saving upgrades and will be an Enterprise Green Communities certified building.

# OTRCH CELEBRATES ITS 8TH ANNUAL CELEBRATING OUR BELOVED COMMUNITY EVENT



The 8th annual *Celebrating Our Beloved Community* was held October 1 in the ballroom of Music Hall. Over 250 persons joined us for an evening of good food (catering by

Picnic and Pantry), pies (over 35, compliments of volunteers), a story telling tour of Over-the-Rhine (Michael Burnham presenting *A Good Neighbor Tour*), giving the Individual Beloved Community Award to Carrie and Annabelle Johnson, and the Partner in Building Our Beloved Community Award to the City of Cincinnati, Department of Community and Economic Development.

In making the award to Carrie and Annabelle Johnson, Bonnie Neumeier said, “I can’t think of two Over-the-Rhine residents more deserving to receive this individual Beloved Community Award than these two women; two sisters, two wise elders, two gracious loving people, Ms Carrie and Ms. Annabelle Johnson. You two model for the rest of us how to live the beloved community. We honor and celebrate you both tonight for all that you are, all that you have done for our neighborhood, all that you still bring, and all that you inspire in us...to be a good neighbor. Ms Carrie, you served as Community Council President, on the Board of the Over-the-Rhine Housing Network, and were a long-time Board member of Peaslee Neighborhood Center. Ms. Annabelle worked as Peaslee’s receptionist, making everyone feel welcome. Both of you are active with Working in Neighborhoods, reaching beyond the borders of Over-the-Rhine.

Both of these women have a way of calling us into their hearts, when they say “darling” or “honey,” words of endearment sweet to our ears. To be so active in the community, you had to be supportive of each other at home. You are deeply spiritual and live out your faith with your chosen faith community, St. Francis Seraph. You both have volunteered at the St. Francis Soup Kitchen, regulars there in a variety of roles over the years. You both visit the sick. You are model caregivers. Ms Annabelle, we know what a caregiver you have been to your sister Ms. Carrie these last few years as her health has been challenged.



*Carrie (left) and Annabelle Johnson*



*Carrie Johnson*

Witnessing you, we are privileged to taste what it means to live the Beloved Community. May we all heed your exemplary lives. Thank you Ms. Carrie and Ms Annabelle.”

In making the Partner in Building the Beloved Community Award to the City of Cincinnati, Department of Economic and



*Oscar Bedolla Receiving Award for City of Cincinnati*

Community Development, Mary Burke Rivers said, “I am a little old school, including the use of a Rolodex. Each of the names on these cards brings up memories and a project.

Let me call out all the names; Susan Utt, Wayne Chapman, Gifford Tebbs, Connie Roesch, Gerard Hyland, Ken Bordwell, Russ Hairston, Beth Stiles, Patrick Ewing, Herb Washington, Velda, Cheryl Meadows, Peg Moertle, Mo

Adlon, Dawn Grace, Monica Hardman and Aisha Tzillah, Jen Walke, Michael Cervay, Oscar Bedolla.

Now the projects; 1929 Vine Street, Sharp Village (10 buildings, 36 units), Sharp Village Annex (10 buildings, 40 units), Recovery Hotel (20 units), buddy’s Place (20 units), Vine Street People’s Co-op (5 buildings, 25 units), Beasley Place (13 units), Jimmy Heath House (25 units), and lead remediation in 100s of OTRCH-owned units.

We are honoring the City of Cincinnati, and its dedicated staff over the last 20 years, for their help in developing affordable housing in Over-the-Rhine. There are many stories to tell but as you can see, the city Department of Community and Economic Development has contributed to our beloved community! You have contributed to the successes of residents and the stabilization of families. You have improved the facades of buildings and the lives of our neighbors. You have certainly been our Partner in Building Our Beloved Community!”



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# HOW TO SUPPORT OVER-THE-RHINE COMMUNITY HOUSING

There are many ways to support OTRCH and our work on behalf of low-income residents of Over-the-Rhine.

## Donate!

All of the following information and “hot” links are available on the OTRCH website, [www.otrch.org](http://www.otrch.org). Click the Support Us! tab on the homepage.

- Make a one-time, or monthly, gift online via the secure form.
- Make a gift by check: Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, 114 W. 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202
- Make a gift, online or by mail, to memorialize a person or to honor a person(s) at special times (holidays, birthdays, weddings).
- Have fun and be a fundraiser for us! Call us, we’ll give you some ideas and then use Crowdrise to create your own fundraising page and campaign. You can also use Crowdrise for alternative giving at special times.
- Remember OTRCH when you begin the Required Minimum Distribution from retirement accounts.
- Make a gift of stock, or wire funds from a cash account
- Remember OTRCH when naming beneficiaries in your life insurance, annuity, and estate documents.

## Use Community Resources to Help OTRCH!

- Make OTRCH the beneficiary of your Kroger Rewards card. You can either get a Kroger Rewards card or change the beneficiary to OTRCH on your existing card.
- Make your Amazon purchases by using AmazonSmile. 0.5% of your purchase price will be donated to OTRCH.
- Use Goodsearch as your search engine. For every internet search you do, Goodsearch gives a penny to OTRCH. Check out other ways that Goodsearch provides to support OTRCH.



## Be Informed!

- Receive email updates.
- Like us on Facebook

## Be Engaged!

Invite a church, school, business, or friends group to join you in a volunteer project in Over-the-Rhine. Contact Jake Merritt ([jmerritt@otrch.org](mailto:jmerritt@otrch.org)) for information. If you don’t have a group, Jake can help you find one.

