

## Affordable housing tour shows how well homes fit in

By MICHAEL DAIGLE • STAFF WRITER • June 8, 2010

The homes blend into neighborhoods, their residents blend in with neighbors.

But that is the point, said Morris Township Councilman Daniel Caffrey, as the officials and guests on the United Way of Morris County's fourth annual affordable housing tour on Friday examined the energy efficient windows at the Jean Street apartments operated by Homeless Solutions, Inc.

When the complex was proposed, Caffrey said, opponents complained that it would be a problem for the area because it would house low-income residents. Instead, he said, the complex is an important and stabilizing element in the area near the Frelinghuysen Middle School.

That theme was repeated at all the stops on the tour from Morris Township to Mount Olive —that families and individuals who live in the numerous affordable housing units across the county add value to the community as they achieve self-sufficiency.

Freeholder director Gene Feyl said affordable housing allows families "to achieve financial stability so they can get on with the rest of their lives." The homes on display represent a "paradigm shift in innovation and creativity. They represent a collaborative effort for successful lives," Feyl said.

Among the homes visited by the 30 tour attendees were those developed by The Interfaith Council for Homeless Families for Morris County; The Rose House, which develops homes for those with development disabilities; The Morris County Affordable Housing Corp., which built Randolph's India Brook Village, a 100-unit senior housing complex; Community Hope, Inc. which has built housing for mentally ill residents and veterans; and Morris Habitat for Humanities, which, with partners, has built 41 homes, will finish seven more this year and has started 13 others.

Barbara Herman, office administrator for the Interfaith homeless council, said they occupy a renovated building owned by Morris County on the grounds of the Central Park of Morris County.

"This is ground zero for families," Herman said. "They arrive here when they are at their lowest."

With help of the staff and social workers, the families take the steps necessary to get themselves out of the emergency shelter and back into permanent housing, she said.

"Their goal is to be independent again," Herman said.

Michelle Roers, tour host and United Way director of community impact, said that her agency studied the population that needs affordable housing and found that 23 percent of Morris County's residents earn between \$20,000 and \$60,000 and are in danger of becoming homeless because of a job loss, medical expenses or another emergency. Theses families, Roers said, are working, but have little savings and few assets to help them get past the bad times.

Liz DeCoursey, program and property acquisition manager for Morris Habitat, said the family that lives in the Randolph home featured on the tour applied to the agency after a family illness for which they had no health insurance wiped out their savings and wealth that included a vacation home.

Richard Brown of Monarch Housing Associates, a non-profit affordable housing developer, said "affordable housing is best described as housing that fits in." Most people know someone who lives

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in affordable housing, he said.

Building affordable housing also puts people to work and can be an economic engine, Brown said.

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