

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

LOCAL FIRMS SUPPORT \$3 MILLION HOUSING PLAN

Norm Parish

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Nonprofit groups could get a total of \$3 million to help them provide housing for residents with low and moderate incomes in the St. Louis area.

The **Regional Housing and Community Development Alliance** in St. Louis announced Wednesday that two banks, a department store company and a housing organization have already committed to contributing \$1.15 million for a new program, called the Regional Neighborhood Support Collaborative.

The Enterprise Foundation, a Columbia, Md., nonprofit group that helps housing organizations, will provide \$500,000 to the program. NationsBank and Mercantile Bank each will contribute \$300,000, and The May Department Stores company will give \$50,000.

The group hopes to raise an additional \$1.85 million for the three-year program, which will be extended if it is successful.

The first grants should be given out as soon as June.

"Having the two biggest banks in St. Louis setting the foundation for this initiative sends an important message to our colleagues in the corpo rate, philanthropic and public sectors about the importance of community based development," said W. Thomas Reeves, a senior vice president of Mercantile Bank of St. Louis at a news conference at the Etzel Place Apartments, in the 5800 block of Plymouth Avenue.

Nonprofit groups in St. Louis and in St. Louis, Madison and St. Clair counties will be eligible. The grants will allow nonprofit groups to concentrate on developing housing rather than spend time raising money, housing advocates said.

"This would really help us attract and keep skilled and experienced staff so we can put together more housing deals," said Gina Ryan, executive director of the St. Louis Association of Community Organizations, a nonprofit community organization in St. Louis. "We will definitely apply."

Housing officials are uncertain how many new "affordable housing" units will be developed as a result of the contributions.

Currently, area nonprofit groups provide new housing for 300 families each year in the St. Louis area, Altman said.

The collaborative hopes to help finance five to seven large housing groups and give smaller grants to other groups. Large organizations will be eligible to receive \$50,000-\$100,000 annually for three years, while smaller groups will be eligible to get as much as \$25,000. The program is aimed at people who earn between \$15,000 and \$40,000, Altman said.
