

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

## HOUSES BEING BUILT IN WELLSTON CAN PROVIDE A FOUNDATION FOR THE CITY'S FUTURE THE 40 NEW HOMES WILL BE PART OF \$6.5 MILLION PROJECT

Norm Parish

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Beulah Smothers has seen so much deterioration on her Wellston street during the past 33 years that she often has considered moving.

Not anymore.

Today, Smothers' Wellston neighborhood is the site of a dedication of the first of 40 single-family houses. It is the first major housing development in Wellston in about 30 years.

The houses, geared for low- and moderate-income families, will be rented under an unusual lease-purchase arrangement. It will create new housing in the city of about 3,800 residents.

"We are trying to do something to stabilize our neighborhoods," said Wellston Mayor Lawrence Brady. The community had more than 4,500 residents in the 1980s.

"We want people to stay in Wellston rather than move away," Brady said. "For years we have had a downward spiral, but now we will have something to help keep people in the community."

The more than \$6.5 million project is a partnership between the Bank of America, the Wellston Community Support Association and the **Regional Housing and Community Development Alliance**.

The entities providing financial assistance for the project include: the **regional housing** alliance, tax credits from the Missouri Housing Development Commission, and St. Louis County, which is providing money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Most of the money came from Bank of America.

"Our investment in Wellston is part of our pledge to invest \$150 million in (the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative)," William C. Wilson, St. Louis president of Bank of America, said in a prepared statement.

"We believe that every resident has the right to live in a safe community with access to good schools, jobs and decent, affordable housing."

The Sustainable Neighborhood Initiative is a program to help revitalize communities. The initiative was developed in 1998 under the auspices of the St. Louis 2004 organization.

In the Wellston project, residents will be eligible to buy houses if they live in them for 15 years.

Residents also can put a not-yet-determined amount of money into a special fund that can be used for purchase of a house.

The actual purchase prices in 15 years will be nominal, said Christina Cunningham, executive director of the Wellston Community Support Association. However, if a family moves, the money that was put into the special fund will be returned to that family.

The rents will range from \$475 per month for a five-bedroom house to \$390 for a three-bedroom house. A four-bedroom house will rent monthly for \$440.

The program targets families who earn 60 percent or less of the area's median income. A family of four can't earn more than \$28,860 a year.

The Meyer Co. of St. Louis is the general contractor of the houses, which range from 1,282 to 1,682 square feet. The houses, which contain garages and basements, are offered in single- and two-story designs.

The project should be completed by next year.

The houses are scattered across an eight-block area bounded by Page Avenue, Skinker Boulevard, Dr. Martin Luther King Drive and Ogden Avenue.

Today's ceremony is scheduled at a nearly completed house in the 6200 block of Lenox Avenue.

"This place had been going down for a while," said Smothers, 78, who lives across the street from the house that is being dedicated. "But these new houses look nice. I think I will stay here."

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