

HOUSING HEADLINES

A NEWSLETTER FOR RESIDENTS AND FRIENDS OF THE BETHLEHEM HOUSING AUTHORITY

IN THE
SUMMER 2015
ISSUE

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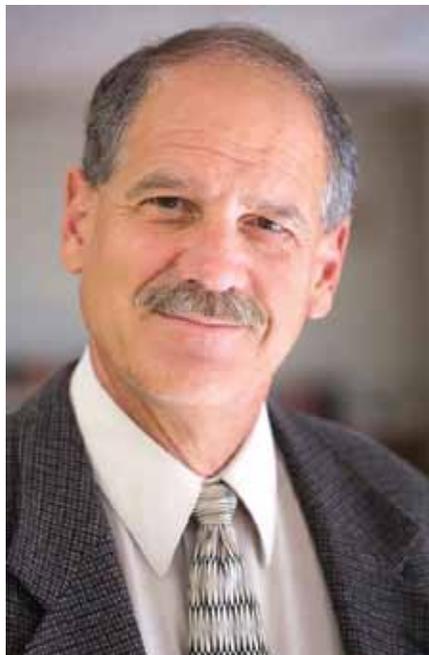


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Changes at Bethlehem Housing Authority Result in New Leadership

ON APRIL 13, 2015, the board of commissioners unanimously chose Eugene J. Gonzalez Jr. as the new executive director of the 75-year-old agency. Gonzalez takes the place of the recently retired Clara A. Kendy. He is a Bethlehem native, a graduate of Liberty High School and of Moravian College.

His BHA career began in 1976 as an assistant manager at Parkridge. He was soon transferred to the maintenance department where he served as assistant superintendent and then eventually as manager of the department from 1983–2003. Since 2003, he served in the capacity as deputy director for maintenance, planning & construction. Gene lives in Bethlehem.

Mayor Names Rogelio Ortiz to BHA Board

WHEN DOT SABY PASSED AWAY this past spring, a void was created on BHA's board of commissioners. Because Mrs. Saby was a resident commissioner, it became necessary to fill the position with a current resident. On May 11, Mayor Robert Donchez named Rogelio Ortiz to fill the unexpired term. Roy, as he is also known, his wife Martha and their five children reside in the Lynfield development and have been very active members of the BHA community for some time now. Roy and his wife and the Lynfield tenant council have developed programs designed to serve the low-income community. Programs include after school clubs, sports-related programs and community outreach.



Recently, Roy was elected to a seat (Region I) on the Bethlehem Area School District board. As proud parents, Roy and his wife are very strong supporters of public education and as residents of public housing, Roy is grateful for this opportunity to give back to BHA. "I look forward to learning all I can so that I can help guide the organization forward", he said. A biography will be posted on the BHA website and on our Facebook page.



REMEMBER – Anyone may participate in the Most Beautiful Yard contest. You do not need to sign up; simply take great care of that front yard and perhaps the judges will take notice. The award ceremony takes place in September.

The Value of Public Housing

What Good Does Bethlehem Housing Authority Do?

It's a question that may be on the minds of some in the community. It is probably a fair question since not everyone has access to information. Those of us who labor in the public housing field may even occasionally wonder whether what we do makes a difference. Then, an article appears in the media and the picture becomes crystal clear.

An analysis of current census data by Enterprise Community Partners reveals that nearly 30% of U.S. renters have to spend one-half or more of their family income toward rent and utilities. This number has jumped 26% just since 2007. Furthermore, the Labor Department and Zillow are reporting that rents have surged at twice the pace of wages since 2010.

What does it all mean? From our perspective, it shows why public housing and its programs, including the Section 8 voucher program, provide a real alternative to low-income families. Public housing like that found in Bethlehem consists mainly of low-income families, seniors and disabled. A very large percentage of our residents are children. With an average rent for a two bedroom dwelling in Bethlehem at about \$1,000 per month, the average lower income citizen finds themselves shut out of the market. As the above data shows, low-income people find that they need to make drastic decisions; pay a rent that you can barely afford, then have little income left over for necessities like food, clothing, etc. or pay for necessities and have nothing left to pay rent and utilities.

BHA (and the other 3,000 housing authorities) provides decent housing at an affordable rate that is tied to a person's ability to pay. Qualified persons will pay no more than 30% of gross income toward shelter and utilities.

Say or think what you wish about housing authorities but understand that in the battle to provide affordable housing against all odds, BHA and others continue to fight the good fight on behalf of the most vulnerable members of your community.

Easter Celebration at Lynfield

LYNFIELD RESIDENTS had a chance to enjoy the Easter weekend courtesy of the tenant council. Despite blustery conditions on April 4, scores of residents gathered at the community building and Clemente Park for festivities that included visits from the city's paramedics, police and fire department. Children had the unique opportunity to sit inside the various vehicles and to ask questions about emergency services.

There was a DJ on hand throughout the afternoon, providing the backbeat for an enjoyable community event. Special thanks to Roy, Martha and the entire tenant council for organizing this. Basilio Bonilla and Inez Aguilar played a big role in organizing the Easter Party. The highlight was probably the egg hunt which entertained kids of all ages. An appearance by Peter Cottontail was a special treat as well.



HIGHRISE HIGHLITES

■ *Millie Matos*

For quite a few years now, BHA has scheduled fire safety drills at the high rise buildings. We do this because we recognize the responsibility we have as property owners to help keep our residents safe. Residential fires can be very dangerous, especially in taller structures. Because "seconds count", we emphasize the importance of practicing responses to emergencies. By doing this, the residents and the fire fighters are ready in the event of an actual emergency. Although a great number of you participated in May, there are still a few who do not take this as serious as we would want. Remember- the life you save may be your own.

Recycling is the law here in Pennsylvania. We make it easy here at BHA. Within the high rises, your trash room on your floor is the place to recycle. If you have questions about recycling, contact CHOO at **610-865-8352**.



Remembering...Dolores White Caskey

CIVIC ACTIVIST, community leader, long time Bethlehem resident and former BHA commissioner Dolores White Caskey died March 24 at Moravian Village of Bethlehem. Mrs. Caskey was born in Las Vegas, New Mexico in 1920. She attended Highlands University in Las Vegas, and taught school in Pecos, N.M. before moving to Texas to work as a civil servant for the Army Air Corps during World War II. She married then Capt. James W. Caskey in 1947.



In 1973 she was elected to Bethlehem's City Council, where she served for 12 years, four as Council President. Mrs. Caskey was a tireless advocate and worker for the community, especially its disadvantaged. She was appointed to the Board of the Bethlehem Housing Authority where she served more than 10 years, and was the recipient of various leadership, service, and civil rights awards. Her fluent Spanish language skills and commitment to civil rights enabled her to help build bridges among disparate interests for the betterment of all.

In addition to her own political campaigns, Mrs. Caskey was an active volunteer for many others, and for the Democratic Party. She served as Secretary for the Pennsylvania delegation to the Democratic National Convention in 1980. The Northeast Ministry and BHA honored Mrs. Caskey in 2007 by dedicating a brand new computer learning center within the Fink Building in her name. In so doing, BHA and the ministry acknowledged her many years of service on behalf of the city's disadvantaged.

Remembering...Dot Saby

LONGTIME RESIDENT and BHA commissioner Dot Saby lost her battle with cancer.



She was named to complete the unexpired term of Paul Reitmeir, who stepped down in October 2008. His departure required the appointment of a current resident. Mrs. Saby's experience as both a BHA council president and as an active RAB member made her an ideal choice. Dot was a committed commissioner, serving on several important committees, including the Safety Committee and the Resident Advisory Board committee. Despite not having a car, Dot rarely missed a meeting during her tenure. "I saw my position as a privilege and always strove to take it very seriously", she told us recently.

As a retired health care provider, Dot always had the best interests of her neighbors at the Bartholomew House at heart. She will also be remembered as the driving force behind the building's very successful tenant council. She served as president for more than ten years and she was always available to counsel other residents who needed tips on how to establish councils.

Our condolences go out to Dot's many friends and family.

Beautiful Yard Contest

ONCE AGAIN, BHA sponsors its Beautiful Yard Contest. This annual initiative has really spurred residents in the family developments to take extra special care of their yards. Over the years, thousands of dollars in prize money have been awarded to lucky winners. Along with the cash, residents earn certificates as well as nice color photos of their properties at the award ceremony. It is never too late for you to be a part of this. All you need to do is take great care of that yard. Plant flowers, apply mulch and who knows, maybe the judges will notice your front yard. The ceremony takes place in September.

RESIDENTS' REMINDERS

■ *Zulma Rodriguez*

Our trash collection firm has adjusted the pick-up schedule in the Northeast. Starting in April, all trash gets collected once per week, on Wednesday. All garbage must be placed out for collection in plastic bags inside the hinged container which has been provided by the contractor. The garbage hauler will dump the container and return it to your apartment.

DO NOT PLACE ANY GARBAGE OUTSIDE OF THIS CONTAINER!

Remember – Anyone may participate in the Most Beautiful Yard contest. You do not need to sign up; simply take great care of that front yard and perhaps the judges will take notice. The award ceremony takes place in September.

Recreation News

■ *Robbie Robinson*

ONCE AGAIN, BHA SPONSORED A FATHER'S DAY EVENT. More than 30 participants were treated to an Iron Pigs game at beautiful Coca Cola Park on June 21st. Many thanks to our partners, Just Born Candies and the Iron Pigs. Just Born Candies Inc. provided snacks for lunch and the Iron Pigs provided food vouchers with each ticket.

The day began with a nice cookout at one of our BHA playgrounds prior to the ballgame. Roy and Martha Ortiz organized the event, along with Robbie Robinson of the BHA recreation department.



CONSTRUCTION CHECKLIST

We passed the half-way point on the final phase of Marvine renovations...and all high rise generators are updated.

We are working with the city regarding a new environmental review.

Litzenberger hot water system will be replaced in the Fall.

There is a need to repair floors, especially at Pembroke.



IDENTITY THEFT TIP # 2

FIGHT "PHISHING" – DON'T TAKE THE BAIT.

SCAM ARTISTS "phish" for victims by pretending to be banks, stores or government agencies. They do this over the phone, in e-mails and in the regular mail. Do not respond to any request to verify your account number or password. Legitimate companies do not request this kind of information in this way.

BOTTOM LINE: Never give out your personal information – unless you made the contact.

BHA Keeps Up with Technology

OVER THE PAST DECADES, technology has provided those of us in the workplace with tools designed to help us perform our duties more easily. Whether it was the automatic typewriter, the copy machine, the fax machine or today's powerful computers, each advancement allowed workers to perform more efficiently and cost-effectively.

One recent way that modern technology can help the Bethlehem Housing Authority is through the creation of social media. "Ten years ago, that term probably didn't even exist," said Mark Iampietro, BHA's deputy director and the person charged with expanding BHA's reach through use of technology. The new technology allows even non-profit agencies like BHA to take advantage of the potential that exists within this new world. "If I had to describe what social media means, think of regular media as a one-way street where you can read a newspaper or listen to a report on television, but you have very limited ability to give your thoughts on the matter. Social media, on the other hand, is a two-way street that gives you the ability to communicate too", he added.



To this end, BHA has established a presence on social media with its very active Facebook site. "We wanted to establish an active site, one where we can share information about the agency and open up avenues of communication between us and residents, applicants and others", he said.

In the time since BHA's site was established, it has been used to share all kinds of information about the agency with anyone who may be interested. "We feel that an agency like ours greatly benefits whenever we can get information to the general public about our programs, our staff and of course our mission", said Mr. Iampietro. Why the need to do this? "Unfortunately, the main stream, traditional media sources such as newspapers have pulled back coverage of local agencies over the past few years. We still have a need to report what is going on in our world, so social media allows us to reach out", he said. Based upon the numbers of shares and likes, it appears that BHA's mission to communicate and get the word out about public housing has been a successful one, thanks in large part to new technology.

BHA Makes Its Properties Available to AARP Tax Counselors

ONCE AGAIN, BHA residents and others benefitted from a partnership between the authority and AARP Tax Counselors. This past tax season, AARP volunteers were able to process 122 Pennsylvania returns and 135 Federal ones as part of the annual program hosted at the Bartholomew House. "We are very pleased with this mutually beneficial arrangement", said Bette Harlow of AARP. "Allowing this use of a BHA facility meets one of our immediate goals of making BHA properties available to the public", said BHA deputy director Mark Iampietro. "Many of our properties have community centers or multi-purpose rooms which are available to the general public. We invite people to visit our website to learn more", he said.



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ADMINISTRATION

Eugene Gonzalez,
Executive Director
Helen Jarinko,
Executive Secretary
Mark Iampietro,
Deputy Director

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Joseph Long
Chairman
David Sanders
Vice Chairman
Iris Linares
Valerie McLendon
Rogelio Ortiz
Resident Commissioner



UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark your calendar so you don't miss out on these meetings and activities!

- AUG. 10** Board Meeting, 4:30 p.m., Monocacy Tower
- AUG. 12** Resident Advisory Board, 2 p.m., Monocacy Tower
- SEPT. 7** Labor Day, BHA office closed
- SEPT. 14** Board Meeting, 4:30 p.m., Monocacy Tower
- OCT. 12** Board Meeting, 4:30 p.m., Monocacy Tower
- NOV. 9** Board Meeting, 4:30 p.m., Monocacy Tower
- NOV. 11** Veterans' Day, BHA office closed

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

- Central Office **610-865-8300**
- Central Highrise Operations Office (CHOO) Litzenberger, Bodder, Bartholomew and Monocacy Towers **610-865-8352** OR **610-865-8353**
- Central Family Development Office Pembroke, Marvine, Fairmount, Pfeifle, Lynfield, Parkridge and Bayard Homes **610-865-8342** OR **610-865-8343**
- Maintenance **610-865-8319**