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VISTAS

Quarterly Newsletter for the Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation

"We will continue to go to meetings to support affordable housing because it is very important." — Jose Alvarado

Greetings from Bertha M. Garcia

CEDC's HomeOwnership Director

This winter marks an exciting time at CEDC, and particularly the CEDC NeighborWorks® HomeOwnership Center (HOC). In December and January, 33 families received keys to their new homes at CEDC's Monte Vista development in Moorpark. HOC staff provided pre-purchase education to all of the buyers, and closed loans for eight affordable homes. See *VISTA's* cover story about one family who purchased an affordable home in this development.

At the HOC, our mission is "to enable and empower individuals and families to successfully purchase and retain homes by providing education, counseling, and lending services; and to advocate for all individuals and families throughout the experience of owning a home, regardless of age, race, economic status, or other defining characteristics." In our five years as a division of CEDC, HOC has helped more than 215 families into home ownership in one of the highest-cost markets in the country.

During the past couple of years, we have established new partnerships and expanded services to address rapidly rising home prices, decreased affordable housing supply, and a widened affordability gap facing low- and moderate-income families. As part of this effort, we established a lending affiliate, the Ventura County Community Development Corporation (VCCDC). In October 2004, VCCDC was designated as a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). This means we will have more resources to meet the needs of homebuyers in today's tough market. *For more information on CDFI certification, see page 2.*

As HOC Director, I am proud of our accomplishments. I would like to thank CEDC's staff for their hard work, with special thanks to the HOC staff. We couldn't have done it without you.

Bertha M. Garcia
HOC Director

A Christmas to Remember

Monte Vista Homes Welcomes the Alvarados

This year, Christmas came early for the Alvarado family. Right before the holiday, they moved into their new house in CEDC's 33-home, Monte Vista development in Moorpark.

Three days before Christmas, Jose and Silvia Alvarado, along with their four children and Jose's parents, were living in a two-bedroom apartment. Jose, Silvia and their 11-month-old son, Brian, shared one bedroom, the grandparents shared the other bedroom, and the three older children slept in the living room.

After six years on CEDC's inquiry list for affordable housing, and then applying for the Monte Vista project in April 2000, the Alvarados now own a four-bedroom/three-bath home with a yard, a dishwasher and a washer/dryer. "Our children are very happy. *Muy contentos.* Everything is better because we are comfortable, and the children have rooms of their own," says Jose.

When asked if the wait was worth it, a unanimous and smiling *"si"* is the response from both Jose and Silvia. *"La mejor cosa es saber que este es mi hogar y los pagos que hago son una forma de ahorros, una inversión, y no alquiler.* The best thing is knowing that this is my home," says Jose."The payments I make are a form of savings, an investment, and not rent."

Jose works in the fields preparing them for irrigation, and Silvia cleans offices in Moorpark. When asked what they did to make their dream happen, Jose advises others to be persistent. "It's not easy to become persistent," he says. "It comes after time. We went to City Council meetings, took all the education courses and saved money."

"The Alvarados really prepared themselves for homeownership," says HOC Director Bertha Garcia. "During their wait, they did everything they could to make their dream come true."

"I think my new home is great," says Omar, the Alvarado's 12-year-old son. "I thank God and my hard-working parents. And my grandparents are very happy for us." Omar's 14-year-old brother, Jose Manuel agrees, while eight-year-old Maria del Carmen adds, "It's a very great house. I have flowers in my room. [There are] daisies on my lamp and my bed."

The Alvarados are originally from Guanajuato, and usually return to visit family every Christmas. But this year, they celebrated the holidays in a home of their own.

Property Management Division

"Housing Is My Calling"

Spotlight on Dr. Dora P. Crouch

Affordable housing makes people's dreams come true. In the case of Dr. Dora P. Crouch, affordable housing has also made it possible for her to pursue her life's work.

A 12-year resident of Yale Street Apartments in Santa Paula, Dora has written four books on city planning and housing, exhibited her photography, and earned her bachelor of arts, masters and doctor of philosophy (ph.d.) degrees. Today, she continues to write about housing, both ancient and modern.

"I am a good example of why affordable housing is necessary," says Dora. "I have a small pension because I retired early from being a university professor to research and publish books. Affordable housing has meant that I have been able to be a writer, and an advocate."

An affordable housing advocate since the early 1970s, Dora is also a founding member of Ventura County's Farm Worker Housing task force. Dora was there during CEDC's "charrette" community input process for the development of Santa Paula's Plaza Amistad *(see the Fall 2004 issue of VISTAS)*. And if housing is on the city council agenda, she will be there as well.

A global traveler whose journeys have taken her to Greece, Italy and Turkey, it was Ventura County's scenic beauty that first brought her here. "[Ventura County] is one of the most beautiful places in the world," says Dora. "The drive from Moorpark to Ojai convinced me. Only Kauai can rival this area."

CEDC purchased Yale Street Apartments in 2003, after the previous owner was unable to keep it maintained. Dora is pleased with work CEDC has done to improve the 26 unit affordable-rental complex, and pays a special compliment to Resident Manager Angel Escobedo for helping to create a safe and desirable place to live.

"I'm not worried about housing because Yale Street has been so satisfactory to me," Dora says.

CEDC NeighborWorks® HomeOwnership Center

VCCDC Earns National CDFI Certification

The Ventura County Community Development Corporation (VCCDC), a non-profit, private lending affiliate of CEDC, is proud to announce its recent designation as a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) by the U.S. Department of Treasury. With this designation, VCCDC becomes the first CDFI to be headquartered in Ventura County, and the only CDFI on the Central Coast that provides lending capital to assist very-low, low, and moderate income families into homeownership.

CDFIs are dedicated to providing financial services and products to traditionally underserved markets. As a CDFI, VCCDC is able to access U.S. Department of Treasury monies for use as second mortgage 'gap financing' to help families finance homes. Banks can now also receive tax credits for investing in VCCDC.

"CDFIs offer a great investment opportunity for mainstream banking institutions wishing to extend the reach of their community lending activities," says Mike McGuire, President of Affinity Bank. "Capital invested in CDFIs by the private sector gets leveraged with federal funds, making more credit available at lower rates than can typically be achieved by a bank's direct community lending programs." As a result, he explains, VCCDC's CDFI designation will provide an opportunity for banks like Affinity to help more underserved individuals and families into home ownership.

VCCDC provides loans through capital funds by State Farm Bank, Rural Community Assistance Corporation, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, and the Federal Home Loan Bank. VCCDC currently receives operating and technical assistance support from the CDFI Fund, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation and World Savings Bank.

For more information on VCCDC, contact Bertha Garcia at 805/659-3791 ext. 131.

Housing Development Division

Housing Conference "Builds Common Ground"

On September 15, more than 240 housing advocates, civic leaders and active citizens gathered for the Third Annual Ventura County Housing Conference. Titled "Building Common Ground," the event was hosted by CEDC, the Ventura County Economic Development Association (VCEDA) and Housing Opportunities Made Easier (HOME).

"Building Common Ground" provided a unique opportunity for participants to learn about what others are doing throughout the region,

- Create a brochure outlining the permitting process
- Establish a web-based "project tracking system"
- Conduct workshops on city policies, codes and expectations for development
- Form a "one-stop" permit-processing center
- Assign one City staff person to each project

county and state to reduce development costs and increase the supply of housing. A special highlight of this year's conference was the need to streamline the state and local permit process. Today, the length and complexity of the process significantly adds to building costs.

To address this issue, the City of San Buenaventura's Chamber of Commerce Focus Group developed solutions for streamlining the permit process which include:

- Provide the option for a project applicant to comment on conditions of approval proposed by the City
- Provide an education program for Planning Commissioners

No strategy is a 'silver bullet' that alone can solve the region's housing needs. However, by solving one problem at a time, and working together as a regional team, we hope to move closer toward our goal.

A policy brief highlighting the scope of solutions discussed during the conference is available by contacting Jill Bangser at 805/659-3791 ext. 135.

CEDC Employee of the Quarter: *Eileen Barretto*

Eileen Barretto, CEDC's Employee of the Quarter, knows how to make things happen. Since joining CEDC as an office assistant in May 2003, Eileen has helped in nearly every department within CEDC with quality work and a great attitude.

"Eileen lights up a room with her smile," says Laura Cuellar, CEDC's Human Resources Director. "She has been a good fit for CEDC. She is dependable, and works quietly and efficiently. She makes sure she understands what she is meant to do on a job before she tackles it. And she is always willing to take on a new task."

Eileen first heard about this position at CEDC from her aunt, Yvonne Gutierrez, Executive Director of El Concilio. "My *tia* (aunt) told me there are good people here at CEDC," says Eileen. "I've been here ever since."

While Eileen does everything from updating databases to helping plan CEDC events, she also attends junior college at both Oxnard and Ventura community colleges. Her dream: to make a difference in children's lives by getting them out of crime and into sports. After learning about the Oxnard Police Activities League (PAL) program while participating in one of their basketball tournaments, Eileen has set her sights on becoming a police officer.

"Eileen has an easy-going personality that makes it enjoyable to work with her," says Executive Assistant Ellie Navarro. CEDC's staff thanks you, Eileen.

"My tia told me there are good people at CEDC. I've been here ever since." — Eileen Barretto

Community Building Division

Affordable Housing Key to Quality of Life

Spotlight on HOME

Imagine living in a neighborhood where you know your children's teachers, the community police officer, the post-office clerk and your doctor's assistant. They are your friends and neighbors. They care about you and your family because they know you. Here in Ventura County, we are in jeopardy of losing this idea of community.

Housing Opportunities Made Easier (HOME) is a group of concerned citizens, elected officials, non-profit representatives and others who educate and advocate for the creation of affordable, well-constructed, accessible housing in Ventura County.

HOME believes in planning for a balanced housing supply that meets a wide range of needs. This includes affordable homes and rents that don't exceed 30- to 40-percent of annual household incomes, as well as convenient locations near transit corridors and commercial venues. Teachers, nurses, police, firefighters and seniors, as well as retail, clerical, blue collar and farm workers, must have the option of residing within local housing rather than being squeezed out of the county or into substandard living arrangements.

"Our housing needs are changing," says HOME Chairperson Dawn Dyer. "Empty nesters are looking for smaller homes to free up equity and limit maintenance. Many young singles are marrying and starting families later in life or not at all. Nontraditional lifestyles require nontraditional homes. Single family homes meet the needs of many, but certainly not all of our community members."

Pursuing solutions that balance and promote these multiple objectives will help build the broad community support necessary to achieve Ventura County's housing goals.

"Change is the only constant," says Dawn. "The choices are decaying and dying, or evolving and regenerating. This goes for cities too. Living things do not stay the same. The good news is we can plan for the kind of change we want."

To learn more about HOME, visit www.vchome.org.

Dawn Dyer, HOME chairperson, speaking at the 3rd Annual Housing Conference.

Board Member Profile

David Rodriguez: *Committed to Community*

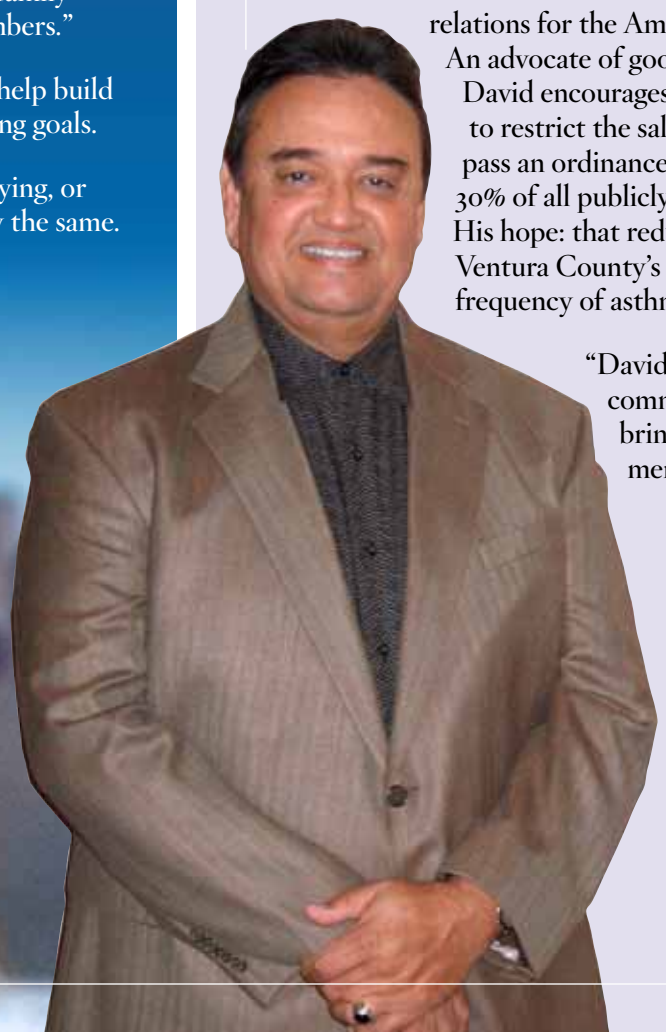
Dedicated to community service, David Rodriguez is a nonprofit board veteran. After meeting CEDC Executive Director Rodney Fernandez more than four years ago, David decided to join the CEDC Board of Directors. Though already serving on several boards and as Ventura County Chapter President of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), he rearranged his already hectic schedule so that he could donate his time and energy to CEDC.

"There are many people in Ventura County who need and deserve a home," says David. "I am proud of CEDC's efforts to increase our housing inventory to help meet Ventura County's housing needs."

David specifically noted CEDC's success with farm worker housing, including CEDC's roots in Cabrillo Village, a farm worker-owned property in Saticoy. "The farm worker works very hard and still cannot afford a home," he says. "CEDC does a great job of meeting the need for farm worker housing. And in the process, we form dozens of new partnerships."

Raised in Oxnard, David is the proud father of 16-year-old Christina, who attends Buena High School in Ventura. Professionally he manages government relations for the American Lung Association. An advocate of good health and the environment, David encourages local communities to enact laws to restrict the sale of tobacco. He recently helped pass an ordinance in Thousand Oaks that made 30% of all publicly financed housing smoke-free. His hope: that reducing smoke will minimize Ventura County's rising asthma rates and lower the frequency of asthma attacks in sufferers.

"David's passion and commitment to his community are the best resources he brings to CEDC," says fellow Board member Celina Zacarias.



CEDC Highlight: LIIF's Lynn Hansen

People like Lynn Hansen, Southern California Director for the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF), are making the world a better place—one family at a time. Through her work at LIIF, Lynn has helped needy families obtain safe, secure and affordable housing alternatives.

"In a world where you often find people saying 'We can't do that,' Lynn always goes the extra mile to find a way to make it happen," says CEDC's Senior Project Manager Jesse Ornelas.

Since 1984, LIIF has provided nearly $500 million in capital and leveraged $3 billion for low-income families and communities. LIIF's programs have served 200,000 people by supporting affordable housing, quality childcare, and high-performing community schools in hundreds of neighborhoods.

"All too often, families are forced to make painful choices: pay for housing or food, housing or childcare, housing or health care," says Lynn. "Those of us who can help must do something. I do my best to help prevent families from having to make such choices."

With housing costs consuming a disproportionate amount of a low-income family's budget, LIIF was founded with an emphasis on affordable housing. LIIF's capital has helped create affordable housing for the working poor; special needs housing and services for the homeless; housing for victims of domestic violence and people with disabilities; unique homeownership developments; and community facilities such as child care centers and charter schools. By investing capital and providing technical assistance to community development organizations, LIIF spurs economic advancement for the very poor. Which is why CEDC seeks out lenders like LIIF when searching for funding to develop affordable housing.

Congratulations to Lynn in her new position as an assistant general manager for the Los Angeles Housing Department! We will miss you.

Quick Fact:

According to the LIIF website, the poor entered the 1970s spending 30 percent of their income on housing; today, this figure has more than doubled to 66 percent, leaving little money to cover other basic necessities. Across the nation, over 14.3 million households are extremely cost burdened, spending more than 50 percent of their incomes on housing. After paying their rent or mortgage, most of these families barely have $500 left each month for food, transportation, clothing, child care and medical expenses.

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