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Celebration marks end to 8-year Hope VI project to revitalize public housing

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Paige Rentz

By Page Rentz
Staff writer

Ten years ago, Sharon Baker moved into the former Delona Gardens, a World War II-era public housing complex that had its share of crime and blight.

Today, she considers herself lucky to be a resident of Dogwood Manor, which opened three years ago as part of an ambitious, \$110 million project to replace aging public housing and revitalize one of the city's poorest neighborhoods along Old Wilmington Road.

"I literally came down here with nothing," says Baker, who is 71. "And here I am today. I was one of the first to move in here."

Baker and several of her neighbors at Dogwood Manor joined local officials and community leaders Wednesday in the lobby to celebrate the completion of Cypress Terrace, the last piece of the eight-year Hope VI project, and to look to a brighter future for Grove View Terrace, which is scheduled to be razed and rebuilt.

Murray Duggins, the chief executive officer of United Companies, which is the developer and manager of the new Hope VI apartment complexes, said cooperation and collaboration among local government and private partners were keys to the project's completion. Delona Gardens and Campbell Terrace apartments were demolished.

Dawn Driggers, director of the Fayetteville Metropolitan Housing Authority, called the Hope VI project a mammoth effort to reduce crime, creating an entirely different neighborhood.

"The largest majority of our residents were kind of caught in the crossfire between the police and us," she said. "And then with the drug dealers and all the bad things going on, and they're just in the middle trying to survive."

"Things have changed," Driggers said. "This is a new day."

The Housing Authority and Duggins' company hope to keep the transformations going with a plan to raze and rebuild affordable housing at Grove View Terrace, a development of the 1940s on Grove Street near B Street.

The Housing Authority has chosen Duggins' company to redevelop Grove View Terrace apartments, which have been approved as a Rental Assistance Demonstration project through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The program, he said, is similar to the Hope VI program but without the \$20 million grant that came with it.

Duggins said his company is putting together a team to work on the project.

"We don't have the plans laid out," Duggins said.

Still to be worked out is where all of the money for what will be a \$30 million project will come from. Some of the funding sources have been identified, but others have not yet.

Duggins would like to see the concrete-block units of Grove View Terrace torn down and replaced with about 300 new units similar to those of the Hope VI redevelopment of 642 apartments.

"I consider this to be my legacy," Duggins said after the celebration.

The apartments at Dogwood Manor have an open feel with natural light and many amenities, such as common areas, a fitness center, game room and hair salon.

Residents have even turned the empty landing in the stairwells into a garden of sorts, lining them with potted plants that benefit from the sunlight that streams in from a window.

Aaren Sampson, 34, has lived at Grove View Terrace for about four years and said she doesn't really like living in the complex.

Chief among her complaints is that it takes a long time to get problems fixed.

"Sometimes, they take so long to do it, I just do it myself," she said.

She'd like to see a better playground than what the complex offers her 4-year-old daughter, Ava. Britanni Ferguson, 23, said he wholeheartedly supports the project.

"I think they should just go ahead and take a bulldozer and knock it all down," she said. The 56 units in Grove View Terrace I were built in 1942, and the remaining 156 units were built in 1952.

"The maintenance is out here every other week because they need to fix what's wrong in this person's apartment or that person's apartment," she said.

"The apartments are livable," she said. "They're just old, and I think it's time to just tear them down now."