

Bright Lights Shine During the COVID-19 Pandemic



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*Be Safe!
Be Kind!
Practice Social Distancing!
Wear a Mask!*

Executive Director Commentary

By Michael R. Fraley, Executive Director

As I reflect on the past three months and how challenging the times have been and continue to be, we as residents, staff, a housing authority, a city, a county, a state, a nation and a world must battle the Coronavirus and confront the tragic murder of George Floyd. It is important for the Housing Authority of the City of Erie (HACE), me as its Director, our Board of Commissioners and our staff to evaluate what we are currently doing and what we must do going forward to address the systematic issues of racism and poverty that overwhelmingly impact the African-American communities we serve. While it is vitally important to provide safe, quality and affordable housing, we as an agency must continue and expand our efforts to assist and partner with residents as they move towards economic and family self-sufficiency. This newsletter highlights some of the efforts HACE currently is making as part of our ongoing motto of "It's About People." The time is now for our community to make lasting change!

I have marveled at people's kindness during this period and their desire to do what it takes to keep themselves and their neighbors healthy. From the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to senior residents living in a HACE apartment building, everyone is trying to do their part to give all of us a fighting chance to come through this moment of history healthy and back on the path to normalcy.

Officials at HUD have provided HACE with additional funding to do the things needed to keep our staff and residents safe and provide additional support services to our residents. HACE staff have come to work every day knowing how important it is to continue to provide housing to City of Erie residents, respond to emergency work orders and make our vacant units into homes for future residents. Our social service partners continue to provide support to our senior and disabled residents, assist residents with completing their taxes, provide ongoing support as residents complete the process of purchasing their first home, check on residents who have lost their jobs and partner with HACE and several other funding partners to provide food and meals for individuals and families. Special thanks to our COPPS program members who continue to make our neighborhoods safe places for families to live.

Now as we begin to move into another phase of the new normal, HACE staff and program partners will increase the services available to our residents and applicants and continue to assist individuals and families on their path to self-sufficiency. We will need your help! **IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU INDIVIDUALLY CONTINUE TO FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES ESTABLISHED BY THE CDC AND WEAR A MASK IN PUBLIC, PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING AND WASH YOUR HANDS!** If we do these simple things, the impact of the virus will be mitigated, and we will get on with our normal lives much sooner.

For the past 20 years, HACE has provided a wide range of summer activities for our residents to enjoy. As an organization we do not know what form that will take this summer, but the creative planning has already begun. Utilizing some of the HUD Care funds, the YMCA, John F. Kennedy Center and the Quality of Life Learning Center are partnering together to put together family recreational and educational game boxes that will be given to over 500 families to assist them in enjoying fun and productive family time together. HACE staff is working with the Erie School District to provide ongoing incentives for public housing students who participate in online learning activities. Our Resident Initiative Coordinator is busy planning social-distancing activities for seniors and families. We will do things differently, but we will still work to provide our residents with activities that make our neighborhoods into great places to live, raise a family and spend their senior years.

I would like to thank the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners, the HACE staff, our program partners, the City of Erie and the County of Erie for the daily support they have provided to HACE residents. They have shown in their response to my requests that they live by the HACE motto of "It's About People."

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“Using a power washer for the first time was amazing!”

Painting the front porch was one of the first projects Housing Authority of the City of Erie Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) graduate Chatiqua Keyes-Carr took on when she and her two children moved into their first home in May, thanks to her hard work in the John E. Horan Garden Apartments (JEHGA) Home Ownership Course.

“I love being able to do projects around the house without anyone telling you what you can and can’t do.”

Last year, Chatiqua and her family needed a change and had outgrown their apartment. “I always wanted a home. But I never saw myself buying a house this soon in life. I knew I had debt, and my credit score wasn’t the best.”

Her kids were feeling it. “For years my daughter would ask me, ‘Mom, can we get a house?’ I’d tell her, ‘It’s coming, just not right now.’ I realized that if this little girl kept talking about getting a house, then I need to work hard to get that house.”

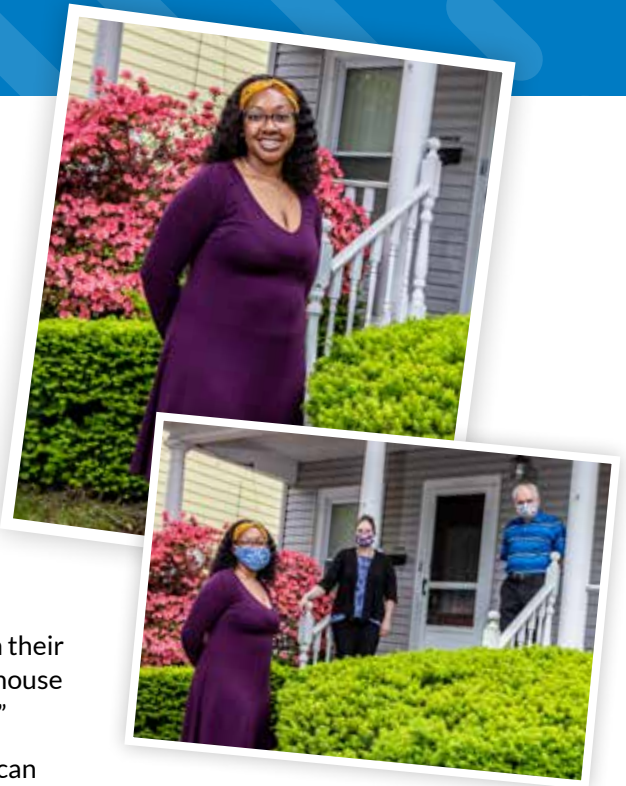
Having just upgraded their car, Chatiqua worked hard to save money and improve her credit score. But the reality of a house-sized purchase seemed far off.

While working with FSS caseworker Sabrina Tolbert, she was informed about the Movement Mortgage Home Ownership Course to be held at the John E. Horan Garden Apartments Multicultural Community Resource Center (MCRC) site. Amazed by the amount of resources available, she dove in head-first.

“It was eye-opening. I learned things I was never taught about being a homeowner, and all the steps you have to go through - there are so many! That was the biggest surprise for me. Most people think, ‘Oh, I’m just going to go buy a house.’ It’s not that easy.”

The course also warns about common house-buying pitfalls. “The program gives you knowledge so you won’t be taken advantage of. It prepares you and shows you the correct way to do things when buying a house.”

Chatiqua completed the course, and was able to buy a house just in time to plant a spring garden with her daughter - a year ahead of what she had thought possible. “I wish I would have known about [the course] sooner. But it came at just the right time for me.”



“It was a pleasure observing the excitement Ms. Keyes-Carr had when we visited with her at her new home. She represents one of the ongoing success stories of public housing and Section 8 participants, young and old who are buying houses, going to college, getting full-time jobs, and graduating from the Housing Authority Section 8 and Public Housing Family Self-Sufficiency Programs.”

Mike Fraley
Executive Director

“I am very proud and excited for Chatiqua Keyes-Carr because she has developed the discipline to go through the process of utilizing the resources the Housing Authority of the City of Erie has to offer to purchase her home.”

Bishop Dwane Brock
Founder and CEO, Eagle’s Nest Leadership Corporation
Chairman of the Board of Commissioners
Housing Authority of the City of Erie

Owning a home has changed their lives, both now and in the future. “Owning a home means stability. It’s a strong foundation for me and my family.”

Chatiqua lights up when she looks ahead. Her home is a place where she sees her children growing up, going away to school, and gathering as a family. “This is the house my one-year-old will grow into and always remember.”

“Now my daughter says, ‘Mom, we have a house!’ And I say, ‘I know! We have a house!’”

Housing Authority of the City of Erie Development Managers



Kim Preston

Kim Preston is Manager of Lake City Dwellings. Celebrating four decades with HACE, she came to Erie from Pittsburgh after getting married. Having served as Section 8 Coordinator and Tenant Selection Coordinator, she moved into the Development Manager role in 2009.

Working with the residents — the children in particular — is what she finds most rewarding. She loves it when they recognize her when she's out and about. "They shout, 'Miss Kim's here!' And they come up, and you get hugs." She gets to watch them grow up and move on to start their own lives. "It always makes me smile."

"If we show our children through our words and actions that you can accomplish your goals, then we've begun to put them on the right path. Take that extra few minutes with your kids. It makes a big difference."

Kim enjoys relaxing with her family by the fire pit or hiking through Erie's scenery.

Cynthia Grayson

A Mississippi native, Cynthia Grayson is Manager of Harbor Homes and Ostrow Apartments. After joining HACE in 1997 as a Clerk Typist, she was promoted from Assistant Manager to Development Manager in 2007.

Cynthia loves providing people with the housing they need. "When you run into people who really need a house, and you can put those keys in their hand, you did something worthwhile. That's why I do this."

She'll never forget the time she helped a person get housing on Christmas Eve. "I'm willing to help anybody."

When she's not at work, Cynthia enjoys time with her family and in her garden.

"There are times I feel like this job runs through my veins. I love this job. I don't take it for granted. I'm blessed."



Kris Ropelewski

Kris Ropelewski is Manager of Erie Heights, Pineview, Agnes R. Priscaro Apartments, and Curry and Schell Apartments. After graduating from Villa Academy and earning an Associate's Degree in Specialized Business from Erie Business Center, Kris joined HACE in 1989 as a Clerk Typist. She advanced to Assistant Manager then Development Manager in 2007.

She loves that she's able to help residents — especially those who are struggling.

"It's most satisfying for me when I'm able to help a tenant, to work with them, to keep them in their apartment. It makes me happy."

Outside of HACE, Kris is an outdoors person, enjoying hours in the garden or on relaxing walks.

While she loves animals of all kinds, cats are her favorite — they've been her close companions for over 30 years.

Kris doesn't often talk about her musical talent. "I was a very gifted flutist when I was younger."



It is my pleasure to introduce you to the Housing Authority of the City of Erie (HACE) Development Managers. The mission of HACE is to provide Safe, Quality and Affordable Housing and assist our residents on their path to Economic and Family Self-Sufficiency. Our managers reflect our mission and in many cases are the primary contact in assisting residents with any problems they may need to have resolved and to be their partner on the journey to Self-sufficiency.



Maggie Villa

Maggie Villa is Manager of John E. Horan Garden Apartments. She started as a Clerk Typist with HACE nearly a decade ago, quickly moving into the Development Manager role.

Maggie loves providing for those in need. "I enjoy helping the residents."

Maggie was born and raised in New Jersey, and her background with the City of Erie and the Erie Times News made her move to HACE a surprising one. "I wouldn't have expected to see myself here."

Maggie credits her mentor, John Horan, with getting her to where she is today. "Mr. Horan gave me an opportunity that I never saw myself in. I'm here to keep things going for him."

Maggie winds down outside of work by spending time with her daughter and her dog.

Anna Kirk

Anna Kirk is Manager of Friendship Apartments. She earned an accounting degree from Edinboro University and joined HACE in 1995 as an accountant. Anna took the role of Development Manager in 2005.

Anna loves that she does more than merely house people — she helps people. "We give them opportunities that I don't know they could get someplace else."

Anna enjoys meeting the diverse needs of residents, from teaching kids to fish and golf to providing meals and scheduling doctor visits for the elderly and helping those who speak English as a second language. "We provide so many things for people. I'm happy to be a part of it."

Anna is an avid quilter and a snazzy vegetarian. She also spends time in her garden or with a good book.

"If you're doing something you love, it's never work."



Elizabeth Twohig

Elizabeth Twohig is Manager of Schmid Towers, C. Ted Dombrowski Apartments, and Better Housing. A Penn State Behrend graduate, she started with HACE as a Clerk Typist in 2010, moving into the Development Manager position three years later.

Having family members as residents gave her work at HACE a more personal meaning. She likes that she can give back for her loved ones who have benefitted.

Elizabeth recounts how her mentor, former manager Joan Peterson, described her job: as a problem solver. "I still think that's very true."

Spending her free hours walking her dog or knitting, Elizabeth still values the experience of reading physical books over screens.



HACE College Student Begins Summer Internship at Knox Law Firm

Last July at the Housing Authority of the City of Erie Ellen Curry Scholarship Awards celebration at the Erie Art Museum, Attorney Tim Sennett was introduced to Chrinesse Mpunga, a Gannon University Pre-Law Major who was working for HACE as a summer intern in the administrative offices. He was so impressed, he encouraged her to apply for a summer internship at the Knox Law Firm for the summer of 2020. Chrinesse was accepted for an internship that began on June 1st. She recently completed her sophomore year at Gannon earning Dean's List honors for the fourth consecutive term.



The Knox Law Firm is very excited to welcome Chrinesse to our summer internship program. We are hoping to enhance her interest in the law and provide a variety of experiences.

– Attorney Tim Sennett

Housing Authority Insurance Scholarship Winner

The Board of Commissioners and staff of the Housing Authority of the City of Erie would like to congratulate Abizandra Burgos for being selected by the Housing Authority Insurance (HAI) Company as one of six college students selected in a nationwide contest to receive a \$6,000 college scholarship. Ms. Burgos was also a recipient of 2019 Ellen Curry Foundation Louis J. Tullio Scholarship.

Abizandra is a sophomore at Gannon University. She is majoring in criminal justice with a minor in social work. She attended the Charter School of Excellence Skill Center. Her career goal is to work with youth who have become involved in the criminal justice system. For the past two summers she has participated in the Housing Authority summer internship program. Through the internship program she worked at the John F. Kennedy Center in the youth department. Her hobbies include playing wheelchair basketball, baseball and swimming. Abizandra is an only child and has lived with her mother in the John Horan Garden Apartments since she was three years old.



Food Program

When the Coronavirus pandemic began, HACE had discussions with social service partners on closing their programs and still finding a way to provide services to public housing residents who were identified as at-risk. In conversations with Gary Horton from the Quality of Life Learning Center, it was decided to use a portion of his unspent budget to provide 150 hot meals to senior and disabled residents. When that funding was exhausted, HACE agreed to continue to provide funds for the meals from the CARE funding HACE received through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

This partnership led to discussions with several other service providers who had funds they wanted to use to get meals to children, families and seniors. The HACE Resident Initiatives Coordinator identified the families and assisted in coordinating the delivery of food. HACE provided masks and gloves to any agency in the food program that needed them. The program has grown to providing hot and “grab and go” meals to over 400 residents.



HACE also partnered with the Second Harvest Food Bank to provide over 100 food boxes to seniors. Just recently, HACE staff met with a local church who took it upon themselves to deliver food boxes to the John E. Horan Garden Apartments. This led to discussions with HACE staff to combine resources and provide food boxes at the three public housing senior high-rise buildings. These efforts proved the old adage that a small group of committed and caring people can make a significant difference in the lives of those in need.

CARE Funding

The Housing Authority of the City of Erie (HACE) was recently provided additional funds through the Housing and Urban Development Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARE) program. HACE received \$976,439 in additional public housing funding and \$147,538 in additional Section 8 administrative funds. The funds are to be utilized for resident support programs, to make HACE offices safer for staff, who are considered essential workers, to work with school districts to promote online learning, to upgrade HACE computer and phone systems to permit working from home when necessary and to conduct virtual meetings.

HACE has begun to use some of the CARE funding to provide hot meals for senior/disabled residents, partner with the Erie School District to provide incentives for youth to utilize online learning, to disinfect common areas and elevators in senior buildings, to purchase laptops and printers for staff to be able to work and conduct meetings remotely and to upgrade our current phone system.

CARE funds must be spent by December 31, 2020. HACE staff will continue to work with the Board of Commissioners, our program partners and residents to identify support services that would benefit residents and continue to assist HACE staff in housing individuals and families during these challenging times.



Capital Fund Projects

HACE is again moving forward on several construction projects funded through the 2019 HUD Capital Fund Programs. Projects include completing the installation of electric panel boxes in 131 apartments, working on balconies at Friendship Apartments, installing metal roofs at several scattered site homes, replacing roofs at Harbor Homes, the John E. Horan Garden Apartments and Bird Drive, replacing hallway flooring at Friendship Apartments, resurfacing the parking lot at Pineview, replacing sidewalks and porches at various sites, replacing the floors in the Ostrow apartment community room and completely renovating the Quality of Life Learning Center building.

Housing Authority of the City of Erie Board of Commissioners

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"It's About People!"

Visit us at hace.org

Summer Internship Program

For the past 30 years HACE has provided full-time paid summer internship opportunities to college-bound residents of public housing and Section 8. They work in our offices, our maintenance departments, our recreation programs, our accounting department and this year as noted in an earlier article a partnership with the Knox Law Firm to offer a specialized internship. The internship program was the vision of John E. Horan, past Executive Director (1977 – 2016) who wanted to make sure that HACE youth attending college could earn extra money in the summer to pay for the extra items (books, activities and travel) that are all part of the college experience. He would remind all of them they had earned this opportunity because of their hard work and commitment and that it was important that when they became successful to help others in the same situation. This year HACE has hired twelve summer interns who attend colleges and universities throughout the tri-state area. They are our future and through their success we can begin the journey of addressing and hopefully ending poverty and racism.

