

Champions of Housing honorees stress private/public partnerships, coalitions

270 business, community and civic leaders came together on November 10 to honor three advocates of affordable housing who, through ongoing commitment and action, continue to improve the quality of life for businesses and residents in cities and towns throughout Fairfield County and the state of Connecticut. Citizens Bank/RBS, Joe McGee, and Charlotte Suhler and were honored at the fourth annual New Neighborhoods, Inc. (NNI) Champions of Housing luncheon in Stamford. NNI is Fairfield County's oldest active nonprofit developer and manager of affordable owner-occupied and rental housing.

2010 Champions of Housing marked NNI's 43rd year of championing affordable housing that acts as a safety net and springboard for low and moderate income families working to achieve and sustain economic self-sufficiency.

The 2010 honorees exemplified the theme of this year's luncheon: BUILDING BROADER, BUILDING DEEPER, BUILDING SMARTER.

- Joseph A. Hoffman (President of Bridgeport-based RBS Consumer Lending Solutions, part of Citizens Financial Group) and Lori Lindfors (Senior Vice President, Director of Community Investment for Citizens Bank of Connecticut) were recognized for seeking out and mentoring nonprofit organizations at the community and regional level, equity loan programs, and advocating in Hartford on behalf of nonprofit housing developers to secure critical project financing.
- Fairfield, CT resident Joseph McGee (Vice President of Public Policy and Programs with The Business Council of Fairfield County) and a former NNI Board Director was recognized for his indefatigable advocacy over the past 35 years for affordable workforce housing as a key component, along with transportation and education, of smart growth and regional economic viability. He was instrumental in creating the Housing Development Fund. McGee emphasized that the issues are so complex and broad that they require the private, the public, and the nonprofit sectors together to build coalitions and work collaboratively at the local, regional and state level.
- Fairfield County community activist Charlotte Suhler of Darien was recognized for making the connection between education, mentoring, and affordable housing for low and moderate income women trying to improve their situations and in the process becoming a driving force behind the Fairfield County Collaborative Fund for Affordable Housing which leverages funding from United Ways, community and family foundations and groups and corporate funders to help high performing nonprofit developers increase housing production. She was also recognized for her advocacy as Chair of the Darien Affordable Housing Advisory Committee that resulted in inclusionary housing policies.

U.S. Congressman Jim Himes briefed attendees about the challenges ahead and introduced keynote speaker Wilton, CT native Maureen Friar. Ms. Friar, President & Chief Executive Officer, National Housing Conference (Washington, DC) who expressed her delight in 'coming home' to Fairfield County for the occasion, spoke about the impact of national policies on local economy and reiterated the importance of working collaboratively to support smart growth to revitalize inner city neighborhoods and downtowns. She also spoke about the impact that one person working locally can have, citing NNI's founder Gertrude 'Pat' Marshall.

Since the first Champions of Housing, which celebrated NNI's 40th anniversary in 2007, the annual event aims to raise awareness about the role affordable housing plays in revitalizing communities and helping tenants and first time buyers move up to and sustain economic self sufficiency. Mary Marple Thies (Co-Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Stamford), was 2010 Champions of Housing Committee Chair, Reyno A. Giallongo, Jr. (President and Chief Operating Officer, First County Bank), served as Champions of Housing Honorary Chair, and New Neighborhoods, Inc. Board Chair Phil Wolford (Chief Operating Officer, Patriot National Bank) was Master of Ceremony. Wolford also welcomed tenant leadership from NNI's newly completed 56-unit complex at 80 Fair Street in Norwalk, CT, and from Stamford: NNI's flagship 88-unit MLK Jr. Apts., and 121-unit Friendship House where a \$23 million upgrade is nearing completion.

Champions of Housing was made possible in no small part by banner sponsors Citizens Bank, HSBC Bank, by Bank of America, First County Bank, Kelley Drye, the Suhler Family Foundation at the Fairfield County Community Foundation, and media sponsors Advocate/Greenwich Time and the Fairfield County Business Journal. For information on Fairfield County's persistent affordable housing crisis and how NNI and others are rising to challenge, or to join NNI in working on solutions, visit www.nnistamford.org.

About New Neighborhoods, Inc. (NNI):

NNI is a Stamford, CT based 501(C)3 nonprofit Housing Corporation.

The oldest actively operating nonprofit housing developer in Fairfield County traces its beginnings to 1967. NNI is committed to improving the quality of life in our communities by addressing the critical shortage of affordable housing. It builds new homes, redevelop, rehabilitate and preserve existing homes, and manage rental properties for families and individuals unable to afford market rate housing in Western Connecticut. NNI believes that stabilizing and revitalizing neighborhoods improves the quality of life for everyone who lives and does business in our communities. For four decades, NNI has sought to promote changes in community attitudes and public policy in support of affordable housing.

NNI has developed, redeveloped and preserved more than 500 affordable rental and ownership housing units and manages 375 units of low and moderate income family, supportive, and senior rental housing in Stamford, Norwalk and Danbury; started a

Tenant Advocate Program for tenants working their way up the economic ladder and seeking to revitalize their communities; established the Child Development Center at its MLK Jr. Apartments for neighborhood families, and has helped countless families to home ownership. It has plans to add up to 200 additional units of new and rehabbed affordable ownership, rental and supportive housing in Western Connecticut communities over the next couple of years. More information can be found at www.nnistamford.org.

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