

# COMMUNITY STARTS AT HOME

Canal Plaza is city's newest gateway to home ownership

By L.A. PARKER

Staff Writer

**TRENTON** — Ernest and Murtis Alexander put a down payment on a new condo back in the 1980s as they chased the American dream of home ownership.

But the project in the shadow of the Battle Monument disintegrated, and the developer returned their \$400 deposit attached to their broken plans.

Yesterday, the Alexanders returned to the near identical spot and gained another shot at a new home when Mayor Douglas H. Palmer joined federal and state housing officials as they announced the 22-home Canal Plaza project.

"This time it's going to happen," said Murtis Alexander, 63, as she and her husband stood amidst the wooden shell structures of low, moderate and market-rate homes.

"When we didn't get our home the last time, of course, we were disappointed. We had put money down and everything. They are behind schedule here but we are optimistic about moving into our new home by the spring," said Ernest Alexander, 69.

The Alexanders, both former General Motors employees — she took a buyout and he retired several years ago — invested \$2,200



Trentonian Photo/GREGG SLABODA

HUD Field Office Director Diane Johnson (left) draws the name of a person who can purchase a home at the new Canal Plaza project in Trenton yesterday. Holding the fishbowl is Robert Kahan (right) from Tara Developers, and looking on is city Housing and Economic Development Director Sasa Olessi Montano.

this time for a \$202,000 home that will include three bedrooms.

They have lived in Texas, Ohio and Georgia since their initial home-buying plans fell through, but they returned to Trenton several years ago.

"We live with our daughter right now, but we want our own place. So we decided to move into the city," Murtis said.

Palmer called home ownership "critically important to every individual and family, and also to the neighborhoods that are being reshaped throughout Trenton."

"This is a victory for working families and especially for those who can make the transition from renting to owning their home," Palmer said.

Sasa Olessi Montano, the city's acting director of housing and economic development, said the Canal Project "will help bring about complete redevelopment of the Battle Monument neighborhood."

All homes will include backyards, garages, three bedrooms with two-and-a-half baths, eat-in kitchens and living rooms.



Trentonian Photo/GREGG SLABODA

Ernest and Murtis Alexander are waiting for their Canal Plaza home on North Broad Street in Trenton to be completed by next spring.

All home buyers can apply for recently announced state Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency "Live Where You Work" benefits that offer financial assistance to any person who earns up to \$140,000 — providing they buy a home in Trenton.

Incentives include lower interest rates and assistance with down payments and closing costs.

A drawing for five low-income housing ownerships produced Kathy Marte, Futsum Libanos, Gloria Nunez, Courtney Carr

Womack and Jean Wilkins as winners.

The Palmer entourage of officials included state Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Joseph Doria, HMFA Executive Director Marge Della Vecchia, and Robert Kahan, president of Tara Developers.

"I always like when a shovel goes into the ground where families will reside, and when a community comes back. And that's exactly what we have here," HUD New Jersey Field Office Director Diane Johnson said.

