

In Trenton, a neighborhood takes shape

New homes to transform run-down portion of city

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TRENTON — Twenty homes here. Twenty homes there. Before you know it, you have a neighborhood.

Surrounded by construction equipment, Trenton officials and builders celebrated the latest phase in the revival of an old-line capital city neighborhood yesterday where a 22-home project at 240 N. Broad St. known as Canal Plaza is scheduled to be completed by March.

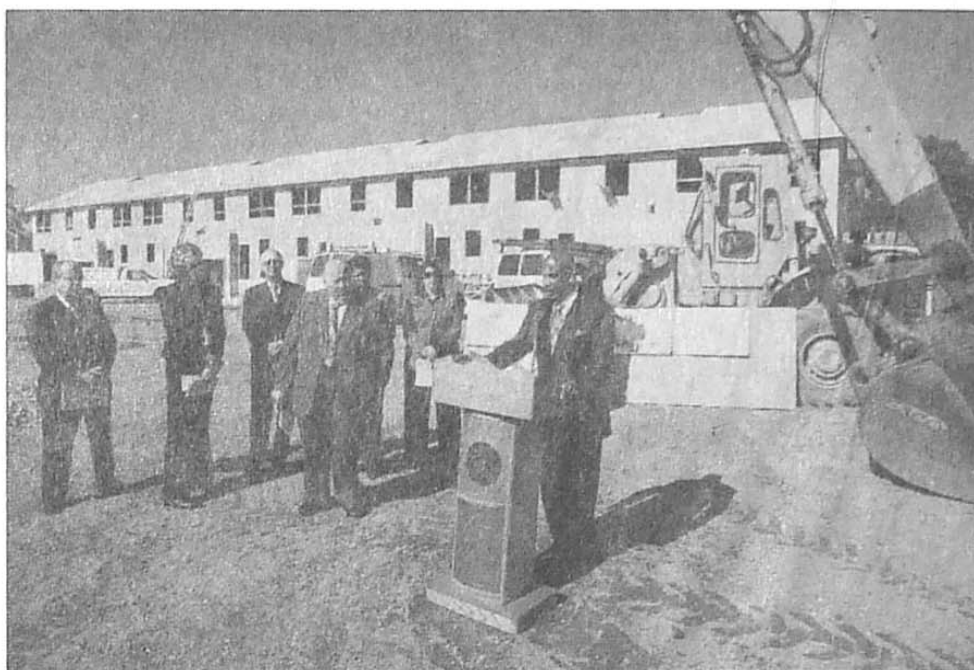
The project is something of an extension of an earlier, larger, adjacent project known as the Canal Banks Homeownership Zone in the city's North Ward. The most recent portion of the homeownership zone, known as Southwest Village II, will involve rehabilitating 25 dilapidated or vacant homes and building 27 new homes nearby at Spring and Passaic streets.

The homeownership zone will involve 306 new homes by the time it is completed in December 2008. Those homes, coupled with the 22 at Canal Plaza, will transform the run-down area in the vicinity of the historic Battle Monument, according to city officials.

"This once was described as one of the worst, most dangerous areas in the city," said Mayor Douglas H. Palmer. "Affordable housing is critically important to neighborhoods being reshaped throughout Trenton."

At the Canal Plaza, site of the former Borden Dairy, units will range from 1,800 square feet, two-story homes to 2,300 square feet, three-story units, and will be marketed to a variety of incomes:

- Nine will be market-rate and priced at \$220,000;
- Seven will be moderate income,



MARTIN GRIFF/THE TIMES

Trenton Mayor Douglas H. Palmer, at podium, speaks at a celebration of the 22-home Canal Plaza project under way on North Broad Street yesterday. The city drew five winners from a lottery of 18 participants interested in buying the low-income residences.

priced at \$202,000;

- One will be low- to moderate-income, priced at \$148,000;
- Five will be low-income, priced at \$110,000.

Yesterday, the city drew five winners from a lottery of 18 participants who had expressed interest in purchasing the low-income homes. The winners, none of whom were present, were Courtney Carr Womack, Gloria Nunez, Futsum Libanos, Kathy Marte and Jean Wilkins.

When informed later in the day that she was one of the lottery winners, Marte said, "I was surprised. I didn't believe it. I was in shock. I am happy."

It fulfills a dream, the Trenton resident

explained. "It's going to be a new property. That is everybody's goal," she said, "to be in a brand new house."

One future homeowner in the area who was present was Murtis Alexander, who is looking forward to eventually moving in to her new home on Borden Way. "It will be good to have my own space," she said as she surveyed all of the construction activity. "I can envision what it's going to be like."

To make sure the area really does resemble a neighborhood, and not just a collection of buildings with no character, the homes will maintain the look of existing housing stock, be oriented toward the

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A neighborhood is taking shape

street, have stoops and minimum front setbacks, backyards and garages, according to Sasa Olessi Montano, acting director of Trenton's Department of Housing and Economic Development.

But the dream of affordable housing does not exist alone, according to Joseph Doria, commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs and former Bayonne mayor. "The commitment we have in the state to affordable housing cannot happen unless we build market-rate housing together in one place," he said.

Bob Kahan, of Tara Construction of Bala Cynwyd, Pa., which is building the Canal Plaza as well as the Southwest Village II, said he enjoys building affordable housing. Earlier, when asked about the Southwest Village II project, he had said, "It helps eliminate blight. It helps eliminate empty housing. It's the best way to turn a neighborhood around."

Southwest Village II is a \$15 million project that includes a federal Balanced Housing Award of \$5.8 million, a commitment of \$2.2 million from Trenton via grants and programs, and \$6.4 million through the sale of the units. In Southwest Village II, the low-income homes will be sold for \$115,000 to \$120,000, and the moderate-income units will be sold for \$130,000 to \$138,000.

Southwest Village I, an earlier component of the 212-acre homeownership zone project, included 11 rehabilitated and eight new homes.

The first project in the homeownership zone was Monument Crossing I, directly across from Canal Plaza. It included 38 low- and moderate-income homes that sold for \$53,900 to \$73,900 in 2001, Palmer said.

Peter Villa, first vice president of Roma Bank, which secured a grant of \$459,000 from the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York toward Village II, said such projects are about more than just building affordable homes. "It spurs cleaning up, there is less crime, it returns people to the real estate tax rolls, and blocks of the city become better communities," he said.

Roma also was credited yesterday with helping to secure funding for Canal Plaza along with Delanco Federal Savings Bank and Third Federal Bank.