

Chatter

Flickering flames

"Affordable housing is a huge national issue, and alarms that are increasingly loud are summoning our attention to the problems of hunger and homelessness. These are issues that get incredibly short shrift in a plutocracy. They are Democratic issues. Or at least they were when the Democrats had some fire."

— **New York Times** columnist **Bob Herbert** on Nov. 7, 2002, after the Democrats' poor election showing.

Housing the homeless

"What we don't see in the Bush proposal is any attempt to produce housing. Any serious attempt to address homelessness has to include a housing production program."

— **Donald Whitehead**, executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless. (See story, page 30)

Farmworker group moves into new territory

Los Angeles — Cesar E. Chavez, best remembered for establishing the famed United Farm Workers (UFW) union, also left behind a group that builds affordable housing throughout the West.

The National Farm Workers Service Center, Inc.'s Housing and Economic Development Fund (HED) has seen substantial growth in the last decade. Since 1993, HED's portfolio has grown from about 245 units of rental housing to more than 2,000 multifamily units in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. It has also developed more than 600 single-family homes.

Chavez and the UFW leadership founded the center to supplement the union's efforts by helping to address the social and economic needs of farm laborers. Although it has been around since 1966, the center has never been as well known as the union.

In recent years, HED has become more focused on developing housing and more diversified, said Manuel Horacio Bernal, executive vice president.

The core constituents of the farmworker movement have been agricultural laborers, but HED decided in the 1990s to build not only farmworker housing, but also housing for low-income seniors and families in urban and rural settings.

HED has a dozen projects, representing about 1,000 units, in the pipeline. Many of the group's projects are financed with low-income housing tax credits and tax-exempt bonds.

HED made a big move in 2002 by expanding its reach into Texas with the acquisition and rehab of **Aguila Oaks**, a 346-unit expiring-use property in San Antonio.

The group is now working on its first construction project. The 138-unit Village at Meadow Bend in Temple will be completed in the spring.

Related Capital Co. and its affiliate PW Funding have provided \$10.1 million in debt and equity to the service center and co-developer The Encinas Group. Related provided \$6.4 million in equity for tax credits and PW Funding provided \$3.7 million in debt financing. ■



Hispanics face highest level of housing discrimination

Discrimination nationwide against African-Americans seeking to rent has declined 18% since 1989 while remaining unchanged for Hispanics, according to a new study sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

For African-Americans and Hispanics looking to buy a home, discrimination is down more than 25%.

The study, released in November, is the most ambitious effort so far to measure the extent of housing discrimination in the United States. Conducted by The Urban Institute, this is the third nation-

wide effort sponsored by HUD to quantify the discrimination faced by minority homebuyers and renters.

Conducted in more than 20 metropolitan markets, the study used a technique called "paired testing" to measure the level of housing discrimination. In a paired test, two individuals — one minority and the other white — pose as otherwise identical homeseekers and visit real estate or rental agents to inquire about the availability of advertised housing units.

Whites were consistently favored over blacks in 21.6% of the tests. In particular,

whites were more likely to receive information about available units and had more opportunities to inspect apartments.

Discrimination, however, declined between 1989 and 2000. The overall incidence of consistent white-favored treatment dropped by 4.8%, according to the study.

Hispanic renters now appear to face a higher incidence of discrimination than African-American renters. Non-Hispanic whites were consistently favored in 25.7% of the tests. Overall, the discrimination against these renters remains about the same as it was in 1989. ■