

MaineHousing Communications: Annual Report

The genesis of MaineHousing's 2007 Annual Report was two years ago, when the agency acquired paintings by Maine artists to display in its newly renovated and enlarged office in downtown Augusta, Maine.

The paintings were selected to evoke images of home and of the people that MaineHousing serves by financing housing that is secure, safe, and affordable. This works well with the story that MaineHousing tells in its annual report of financing first homes for working families; providing funds to make housing safe and warm; financing apartments that are affordable to low-income families; maintaining affordable rental housing; and creating housing for people who have been homeless.

Using the artwork in the 2007 MaineHousing Annual Report has several advantages:

- The "art" theme fits well with one of MaineHousing's priorities – the revitalization of Maine's downtowns. Converting unused building space into affordable housing supports the State's growing creative economy.
- Using Maine artists' paintings provides a distinctive look for a housing finance agency annual report, many of which rely on photographs of agency-financed housing.
- Using the paintings took advantage of a resource the agency already owned. MaineHousing frequently tries to get a "two (or more) for one" benefit from its activities.
- Not inconsequentially, using the paintings saved money. MaineHousing sharply reduced its annual report budget from \$40,000 two years ago to a goal of \$25,000 for 2007. This report cost \$23,733.

The first step in producing the report was securing permission from the artists to use images of their paintings. Once permission was granted, MaineHousing began writing the report and working with its marketing agency on the design.

Most sections, such as "A home of their own" and "A place to call home," relate MaineHousing's accomplishments in these different housing areas in 2007. The "Home again" section outlines the changing face of Maine's housing and how MaineHousing is adapting its programs to meet future needs.

Two sections – "From a warehouse to our house" and "From no home to our home" provide a chance for some people that MaineHousing helped during the year to relate their own stories.

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“It’s already like a little community here,” one resident of a new downtown apartment development says.

Other sections of the report include:

- An opening letter from MaineHousing’s director that highlights some of the agency’s 2007 most significant accomplishments, including that the agency remained a safe haven for investors and borrowers alike despite the turmoil in the housing and financial markets.
- A message from the Governor stating the critical importance of affordable housing to Maine’s economic strength and future growth, including the role of MaineHousing’s investment in downtown revitalization, energy efficiency, and sustainable building practices. The message noted that for these reasons the Governor’s budget supported full restoration of state funding for MaineHousing’s programs.
- A financial summary page showing the significant financial differences between 2006 and 2007. A complete copy of the audited financial statements is available at the agency website (www.mainehousing.org), or a printed copy may be requested.
- A listing, photo, and short bio of the Board of Commissioners and listing of business partners and MaineHousing staff.
- An acknowledgement of the artists and paintings used in the report.

In the past MaineHousing has printed and distributed about 2,000 copies of its annual report. In a further move to save money, and to increase MaineHousing’s commitment to green business practices, only 500 of the 2007 annual reports were printed and distributed.

Most of the people who once received printed copies were instead notified via an e-mail from the MaineHousing Director that the annual report (and accompanying audited financial statements) could be found on MaineHousing’s website. Those who want a printed copy of the annual report could request one.

The design of the annual report has been so successful that it is being used in other agency events and publications.

This year’s annual state Affordable Housing Conference (being held in September) picked up the theme from the annual report – “Home is Where the Heart Is” and is using the same design as the annual report cover. The “art” in Heart is subtly emphasized in the design. Framed copies of the paintings as used in the report also have been presented as staff awards.

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MaineHousing demonstrated a creative use for already existing art by incorporating it into its annual report. The distinctive look of the 2007 report is helping the agency reach its intended audience – opinion leaders and housing leaders throughout the state.

The design achieves several goals simultaneously – it advances a MaineHousing objective of creating more housing in downtown areas; it provides additional publicity for Maine artists; it tells MaineHousing's story in an eye-catching format; and it demonstrates an effective use of resources.

Beyond leading to an attractive report, the use of the artwork combined with the decision to make most reports available electronically rather than printed, saved the agency a significant amount of money and used fewer natural resources. It is an effective use of existing resources that achieves the agency's strategic objectives by emphasizing both MaineHousing's accomplishments during the year and the ongoing need for affordable housing in Maine.