

## **Nevada Housing Division**

**Sarann Knight Apartments**  
**Developed by the Community Development Programs Center of Nevada**  
**Frank Hawkins, Executive Director**

### **‘Innovative Housing in Challenged Communities’**

#### **An Innovative, Replicable Project, Responsive to an Important Housing Need**

As one leaves the neon and playful atmosphere of downtown Las Vegas, you quickly see a change as you travel down Main Street towards the ‘west side’. Soon you are in the company of businesses whose buildings are of the 1950’s and 1960’s style. Homeless individuals are seen wandering aimlessly down this corridor along Main Street and Bonanza Road.

As you turn off Main Street onto Bonanza Road there are those 100+ individuals who are daily standing and waiting in front of the Rescue Mission for any kind of day-labor work. Traveling west you soon approach H Street. A Street that has been often forgotten and is part of the area called ‘West Las Vegas’. The west side was a primarily African-American community but is gradually changing through growth of a Hispanic population. One thing in common, and which all seem to share, is their low-income economic status and exposure to violence and crime.

Some of the area’s residents, you can easily see, have a pride of homeownership while others appear to have given up. The housing inventory for this area has been primarily single family units developed during the 1950’s. The quality of the housing stock is mixed, some streets reflect housing that are ‘homes’ to its residents while others have a withering look of abandonment, or others just needing care and attention. A number of lots are vacant and overgrown with weeds and dead grass.

Then, all of a sudden, as you gradually make the faint climb up H Street, you’re hit with a ‘wow’; here in the midst of this older, lower-income, and seemingly overlooked community stands a magnificent, modernistic designed building which immediately gives you energy, a feeling of change and a sense of a future for the area. You are immediately drawn to it; it’s the new Sarann Knight multi-family apartment complex that provides affordable rental housing for low-income families. The old, dilapidated, crime ridden, boarded up Sec. 8 public housing project which previously occupied this lot is no where to be seen.

The architect reported that when his company was asked to design the Sarann Knight Apartments they immediately looked at the community for inspiration and the first thing that occurred to them was that this was going to be an anchor project for the revitalization of the community; therefore, they wanted to design something very distinctive, timeless, and inspiring for both the residents and the neighborhood.

The Sarann Knight Apartments’ design was in direct response to the sordid past of the former tenant. The architect and the developer, Community Development Programs Center of Nevada (CDPCN), Frank Hawkins, Executive Director, collaborated on various features and

decided upon providing a safe, well built, and exciting place for families and their children. This focus led to the creation of a courtyard design that gives the residents what is called ‘passive defensible space’; all of the entries are visible from the other units; the courtyard provides a very safe place for the children to play, and the openness of the sky decks provide airy natural places for the residents to congregate, enhancing the sense of community yet providing visibility and a secure place to gather. This courtyard design could be easily replicated in any environment and could be particularly attractive for higher density areas where safety features are paramount and where less ground area is available.

### **Measurable Benefits to Nevada Housing Division’s Customers**

The Nevada Housing Division awarded CDPCN \$1.1 million in low-income housing tax credits in 2007 for the 82-unit Sarann Knight Apartments. This project scored very high on the point system because of the amenities offered and because it was family housing in a challenged area. The apartment complex offers rental housing for people at 60% of area medium income with rents set at 40% of the median income which means the 2-bedroom size rental units are offered to its residents at rental rates of \$588 a month, including all utilities.

In addition to the 82-unit family complex, two adjoining parcels are under development. This development is targeted to serve the 55+ age group. To date these additional developments of 38 senior rental housing units have been awarded \$771,491 in tax credits. When construction is completed for the Sarann Knight parcels, additional affordable units are targeted to be built on a site across the street. When all of these projects are constructed, the former dilapidated public housing project area will provide a total of 150 units of modern, affordable, safe, and energy efficient living space for families and seniors.

### **CDPCN’s Track Record**

CDPCN, a non-profit housing organization, has developed more than 1,400 affordable single and multi-family housing units in Southern Nevada, most on the west side, since 1997. The Nevada Housing Division has awarded tax credits for 852 multi-family units to the organization; all of the units being located in areas needing neighborhood revitalization. The multi-family rental projects financed in part by NHD include: David Hoggard Apts. 100 units for families; U.S. Senator Harry Reid Apts. 100-units for seniors; the 3-phase Sarann Knight Apts. 82 units for families with 38 units for seniors and an additional building to provide 37 units for families; Juan Garcia Gardens with 52 units of family housing with rental assistance from the Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority; Louise Shell Apts. with 100 units of rental housing for seniors; Owens Seniors with 72 units for the 55+ population; Senator Richard Bryan Phase I and II apartments providing 240 units for seniors; Yale/Keyes a 70-unit complex for seniors, and (under construction) Smith Williams an 80-unit seniors’ complex.

Other housing developed in the ‘West Las Vegas’ area by CDPCN includes Whispering Timbers a 40-acre development of 208 single-family homes for low- and moderate-income households and Sunset Park a 48-unit affordable multi-family housing apartment complex funded by bank financing and the City of Las Vegas general fund.

### **Benefits that Outweigh Costs**

At the Sarann Knight Apartments, the courtyard is the central theme for providing safety and security, and creating a community atmosphere. The children have a spray play area instead

of a swimming pool. This is part of the energy conservation and water conservation plan rather than having a pool which is costly to maintain; the pool also lends itself to a safety hazard for the children while the spray system is safe, uses very little water and is a fun area for the kids to have a place to play.

Additional energy saving features includes structurally insulated panels. They allow the building to have a higher R rating thereby lowering energy costs; it also increases the speed of construction which contributes to the cost efficiency on the project.

There are a number of benefits introduced by the architect in the project that had cost implications. The project has two elevators that are oversized to allow for any movement of both goods and people; the building also has covered patios with decks with deep overhangs that provide a lot of shade. The same thing on the walkways -- they're all shaded and covered and out of the weather, again this promotes both energy efficiency as well as enhanced sense of community. Other features the apartment provides are tankless water heaters, tile floors rather than carpeting; these features cost a bit more initially but benefits in terms of ease of maintenance and long-term durability are great trade offs and assist in decreasing overall operating costs.

### **Effective Use of Resources and Partnerships**

CDPCN, over the years, has created substantial support and partnerships with state, local, and federal governmental entities along with the local housing authority and other area nonprofit organizations. On the Sarann Knight site, once stood the Emerald Breeze Apartments which was associated with crime, drug activity, and violence in the neighborhood. When financing came to a standstill for the under construction adjacent property, the David Hoggard Apartments, the City of Las Vegas and HUD stepped in to lend support to CDPCN. This was necessary as potential investors for the David Hoggard tax credits actually had such concerns about the criminal activity and the eyesore and the impact on the community that they would not invest in new development. Through the Nevada Housing Division, the City of Las Vegas, and HUD the old project was torn down allowing for financing of David Hoggard and then the Housing Division's Tax Credit Awards giving CDPCN the opportunity to raise \$7.7 million in equity financing for the Sarann Knight Apartments.

### **Strategic Objectives**

The objectives of the developer (CDPCN, Frank Hawkins, Executive Director) are to work to further relationships and partnerships in the communities in which they have developments. The organization cites results of their developmental participation in the 'West Las Vegas' neighborhood revitalization efforts, noting that particularly near the Sarann Knight affordable housing development and planned housing projects, the Clark County School District has built a new school and behind Sarann Knight is an expanded shopping center with new tenants. Frank Hawkins reports that the group works to create economic development not only as a part of the particular apartment project but the overall community. They target their projects to be in areas that are most challenged which in turn supports the economic development, encourages community revitalization, and helps provide incentives to produce decent affordable housing for the area. Over the next five years, CPCSN plans to develop another 600 to 700 affordable housing units within Southern Nevada's challenged communities.