

## EVACUEES SAFE AND SOUND

When hurricane Katrina hit the Schief family in Louisiana, life as they knew it was changed forever. Nik and Viola were renting a 5 bedroom home there with huge front and back yards. Their careers were stable and they were finally to the point of planning to buy a home of their own. Their eight children's ages are 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2, 1, and 8 months. Viola says "I don't think we could've been happier, we loved our situation, and I was getting ready to be promoted in my job".

Suddenly, with the onslaught of Katrina, all ten of the Schiefs found themselves living with Viola's cousin in a 4 bedroom house with 30 other people. "It was just people everywhere. We slept on the living room floor with 8 other people," says Viola. The Schiefs knew after a week that something had to change. "We went to the Red Cross there and were told they couldn't help us. We went to the shelter there and they couldn't help us, they didn't have any more space. There was a shelter that was set up in a prison and they wanted us to sleep in a cell. We thought



**The Schief Family**

that was just awful. How could that have possibly worked out? It was altogether a horrible experience from beginning to end." The Schiefs decided to come to Flint. The family boarded a bus on September 12th and after 27 hours of road travel, they landed in Flint. They first arrived at a shelter called Harvest House, where they were greeted with food and kindness. During their three days at Harvest House, the Genesee County Land Bank was preparing a home for them. A four bedroom home was finally ready and the Schiefs moved in. "Greg Mitchell from the Land Bank is great. He still calls to check on us," says Viola. "They are some truly wonderful people who are looking out for our family's best interest. One day I came home and my porch was full of stuff from the employees of the Land Bank. They took our kids sizes and I can't even remember there was so much stuff. They did whatever they could to make us feel comfortable in the city of Flint. We have come so far... just stepped out on faith with no money and nowhere to go. The outcome has been truly wonderful."

Viola can't say whether they will stay in Flint, it all depends on jobs. They will eventually need a bigger house too, but Viola feels that she has been healed from this terrible experience by the kindness that she has experienced from strangers in Flint.

## PROVIDING MORE QUALITY THROUGH RENTAL MANAGEMENT

The rental management program of the Genesee County Land Bank is one of the most cutting edge and humanitarian programs in land management today. While the Land Bank is not interested in becoming long-term landlords, it is interested in securing responsible ownership of tax foreclosed properties. Making this goal a reality happens in a variety of ways, if a home has been tax reverted, (often without the knowledge of the renter), the renters are given the option to rent from the Land Bank. If so, the houses are brought to code and those that quali-

fy will have an opportunity to purchase the property. The Land Bank has even given renters options to move into better housing owned by the Land Bank.

The Rental Management Program got its first employee in November of 2004 with one property Manager, Dave Fedorco who had just two units to manage. Hundreds of properties needed to be sorted through and cataloged. Once the organization of the properties was completed, the next job was to determine which properties were occupied.

"To date, the Land Bank has spent approximately \$170,000 on improvements, thus enhancing the quality of life for over 60 local families that have already benefited from this important program", says Dave. "This rental program, which ultimately is a revolving housing rehabilitation

program, is a great tool which will enable many tenants to become homeowners in the not too distant future. Homeowners are assisted in the process as they are credited for a portion of the rent paid towards the final cost of a house, if they so choose to purchase one."

"While homeownership is not for everyone, and we will continue to offer rentals for those who prefer to rent, I plan on making further improvements on our current housing stock and hope to significantly increase the number of properties now in the program, providing even more quality housing at a very affordable price for the people of Genesee County".

Dave Fedorco  
Property Manager



Fall 2005

## THE NEW LAND BANK CENTER OPENS

After almost thirty years of being boarded-up and empty, the former Hughes and Hatcher Clothing Store will become the Land Bank Center and home of the Genesee County Land Bank Authority. This property, which was owned by A.M. Davison Clothier, was the victim of a tax foreclosure process that hopelessly mired tax reverted properties in a legal limbo. This contributed to urban decline in Flint by keeping properties off of the tax roll and out of circulation for up to seven years.

In 1999 Public Act 123 changed the way foreclosed properties were handled, giving outright ownership of these properties to the local County Treasurer after only two and a half years. With this new act, the Treasurer's Office was able to clear the title of the Hughes and Hatcher Clothing Store of previous liens and the ownership interest of all 22 owners.



**Dan Kildee**

The Genesee County Treasurer, Dan Kildee, carried the process one step further and created the Genesee County Land Bank which takes responsibility for managing properties and planning the return of land to the tax roll. Previously, properties were sold at an open auction. Keeping



**The Land Bank Center: Before and After**

managing control of the properties avoids potential neglect or misuse.

The Genesee County Land Bank Authority took ownership of 452 S. Saginaw, the former Hughes and Hatcher building, and developed The Land Bank Center. Cutting the red tape shaved five years off of the foreclosure process and the Land Bank has developed a derelict building in the center of downtown Flint to an attractive, modern, mixed use building. The new Land Bank Center includes A-1 office space, retail space and 7 loft style apartments.

"It is our intention to use the Land Bank Center as an example of what can be done by using the new legislation (P.A. 123 and a subsequent P.A. 258) that allowed for the establishment of the Land Bank of Genesee County," Dan Kildee states. "These laws also allow us to

create other development opportunities throughout Genesee County." The Land Bank Center consists of 36,000 sq. ft. over four floors. The first floor will be used to house a

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#### BOARD MEMBERS

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Linda Barber *Secretary*  
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retail tenant. The second floor will be used as the Land Bank headquarters. This space includes a conference room able to seat 30 people, office space for a staff of 12, room for several consultants, and even space for an intern. The third floor will have offices for the Genesee Institute, an attorney's office and three apartments. The Genesee Institute is a sister organization of the Land Bank and conducts research on issues related to Land Banks, smart growth

and other land use matters. The fourth floor has four loft style apartments.

The Land Bank Center will be a source of hope and inspiration for years to come. The process that this building went through will serve as a template for the future that can be passed on and duplicated. The Genesee County Land Bank hopes to sell the property to someone that resonates with the values set forth by those who are working hard every day to revitalize and invest in Flint.



**Community Gardens: Pride in Action**

## COMMUNITY GROUPS BEAUTIFY VACANT LOTS

For years, block clubs, neighborhood associations, churches and other non-profit groups throughout Flint and Genesee County have been cleaning, maintaining and planting gardens on abandoned properties as a matter of pride in their community for no compensation. Now, the Genesee County Land Bank, through its Clean and Green program, partners with capable community-based groups to maintain and beautify Land Bank-owned properties, while providing an added financial incentive to these groups for their work.

The Clean and Green program started as a pilot project in the summer of 2003. Two community groups partnered in the maintenance of 45 Land Bank-owned properties on Flint's east side. Several of these properties were improved with decorative split rail fencing and raised garden beds. During the summer of 2004, four more community groups participated in the program, taking on 290 properties and being paid a total of \$44,725 for their hard work. This year, seven groups have participated in the program, maintaining 476 Land Bank properties in Flint and Mt. Morris Township and planting 11 gardens. Thus far, these groups have received over \$65,000 from the Land Bank for their hard work.

It is the objective of the Genesee County Land Bank to continue partnering with community organizations and encouraging more resident involvement in the maintenance and beautification of Land Bank properties through the Clean and Green program. Look for news about how to get your organization involved in the Clean and Green Program on the web at [www.thelandbank.org](http://www.thelandbank.org).

## THE BIG JOB - DEMOLITION

There is more to property demolition than just getting a work crew to a site - there are environmental clean-up issues, cost analysis, structural conditions to consider, property value establishment and much more. Land Reutilization Council, which was established in 2002 by the Genesee County Treasurer, created the Genesee County Land Bank in December of 2004 to take care of identifying and destroying the most blighted properties owned by the Land Bank. Since 2002 The Council has deemed 629 tax reverted properties were in need of being demolished. In this short time, 446 properties have been demolished in the City of Flint and cities and townships throughout Genesee County.

Here are the stages a property goes through once acquired:

1. Structural inspection
2. Determination of cost of repairs
3. Evaluation of market value (which must be more than repairs to be sold)
4. Assignment to demolition program
5. Environmental inspection (which removes hazards if found)
6. Utilities cut and plugged
7. Request for demolition bids
8. Confirmation of accepted bid
9. Finalization after demolition (seeding and mulch)



**Demolition for Positive Growth**

If a property is structurally unsafe and poses a threat to the neighborhood, it goes on the fast track and is demolished right away. Otherwise, once the bidding process is final, the property is demolished within two months. "The remaining 183 structures are currently in various stages of being demolished", says Lucille James, Program Coordinator for the Genesee County Land Bank. "It's a big job, but ultimately the County will be in better shape."

## ROGER FOUND A GENIE

Roger Mims found himself on his way to the hospital the first week of April 2005. His health had been going down hill mostly because his housing situation was spinning out of control. "The neighborhood I was living in had changed for the worse. There were shootings, yelling, people with guns, and women approaching you on the street. It was not a safe place anymore" says Roger. He'd rented the house that he lovingly nicknamed Sylvan Court for more than 20 years. It was a monster of a house with 21 rooms, four of them kitchens. The utility bills were too big for Roger. The house had a hole in the roof and was in serious need of repair or would be condemned. In 2002, the owner of Sylvan Court walked away, leaving the home to foreclosure and putting Roger in a precarious situation that lasted three years and added to his health problems.

While in the hospital, Roger received a letter from Dave Fedorco, the Rental Specialist of the Genesee County Land Bank. The letter invited Roger to look at some rental homes owned by the Land Bank. "I called him from my hospital room. I still had tubes in my arm. That was the beginning of what I call my genie", says Roger. "We thought about fixing up that monstrosity." But rehabbing



**Roger Mims In His New Home**

that house was a no-win situation. Dave spent a lot of time helping Roger feel good about living in a different home. Roger had mixed emotions because he believed "if you only have one thing to hold onto, you hold on very tightly." Eventually, Dave and Roger looked at several houses. "They weren't something I'd feel comfortable in", says Roger. Then Dave said he had one more that was pretty nice. "As we approached in Dave's car a feeling overcame me that said - this is the one. It was like the feeling of God touching you in church. I've had the feeling ever since."

Roger is now full of hope and gratitude as he describes his newly renovated two-bedroom home.

"It's beautiful I see birds, squirrels. I can sleep." He specifically credits Dave, his genie, and Dave's boss, Art Potter, for changing his life. "I was living a mere existence. The Land Bank worked with me and now I have my self esteem and confidence back. They were a god send."