

Genesee County Land Bank gets national recognition

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GENESEE COUNTY -- In the past five years, it's helped demolish about 800 homes and renovate nearly 100 others.

It's cleaned up trash in neighborhoods and handed about 500 vacant lots over to neighboring residents.

The Genesee County Land Bank has helped transform blighted areas of the county -- and now communities worldwide are taking notice and looking to follow its example.

The land bank was recognized this week for its urban renewal efforts as the winner of the 2007 Fannie Mae Foundation Innovations Award in Affordable Housing.

The land bank was one of seven \$100,000 winners for the Innovations in American Government Awards, which were created by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University.

The award gives the land bank international recognition and provides it with an opportunity to share its methods with other communities statewide and nationwide, said Genesee County Treasurer and land bank Chairman Dan Kildee.

"It points out that there are ways to deal with vacant and foreclosed properties that are successful," Kildee said.

More than 1,000 programs submitted applications for the awards and were evaluated on their ability to show results and create positive change.

Amy Hovey, interm director of the land bank, said she was thrilled.

"There was a lot of good competition," Hovey said. "We got lots of recognition for the work we put in on creating this jewel."

The land bank was up against a five-year affordable housing production program in San Jose, Calif., and a Connecticut program that helps provide housing a services for homeless individuals.

The award money will be used to help teach other communities the land bank's method of connecting tax collections and tax foreclosure with urban land developments to better manage blighted properties, Kildee said.

"It's not ever going to be a 'snap your fingers to get the solution to the problem,'" Kildee said. "But slowly but surely, it will move the city in the right direction."