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Become an Angel today and help improve the quality of life for local men, women and children living with HIV/AIDS.



Angel Program Kickoff Party featuring Maxine Nightingale on October 13th.

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Coachella Valley Housing Coalition CELEBRATES 30 YEARS of Community Service

By Kristy Kneiding



The Coachella Valley Housing Coalition (CV Housing) is celebrating

its 30th Anniversary of building communities, improving the lives of thousands of low income families, and opening the door to higher education and achievement for its youngest residents.

CV Housing was founded in 1982 when a small group of caring citizens and business people gathered to find solutions for the Eastern Valley's farm workers and other poor families living in deplorable housing conditions within a few miles of luxurious desert golf resorts. The Aetna Foundation came through with the organization's first grant, \$10,000, which enabled the group to hire John F. Mealey to take action. John continues to serve as executive director and has been with the organization every step of its proud journey.



Today CV Housing has a 13-member board of directors comprised of caring and accomplished community leaders and a staff of 33 dedicated employees with expertise ranging from grant writing and credit counseling to land acquisition and construction management.

"I am proud of this organization and the fact that it has stayed true to its roots, providing quality housing and services for those who need it most," said Founder/Executive Director John Mealey.

CV Housing's mission is to provide more than just housing—it is to "help low-income families improve their lives through advocacy, research, construction and operation of quality housing and community developments." Through the years they have done just



that. To date, CV Housing has built more than 4,000 multi and single-family residences, making it one of the largest developer of low-income housing in Riverside County and the largest residential developer in the Coachella Valley.

In its single-family division, CV Housing serves families who have a strong motivation to become homeowners but are unable to purchase housing on the open market. More than 1,600 single family homes have been constructed in rural areas as part of the successful Mutual Self-Help program.

This program is designed to assist families in becoming first-time homeowners by providing them an opportunity to build their own home and earn "sweat equity." This equity is used as the down payment on that home. Under the skilled supervision of CV Housing's construction supervisors, groups of

fun energy meets mid-century cool and gets served with a twist (and great food!)

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10-13 families work together to build each other's homes. Each family contributes a minimum of 40 hours of labor for 10-12 months to complete all houses in that group. No family moves in until all homes

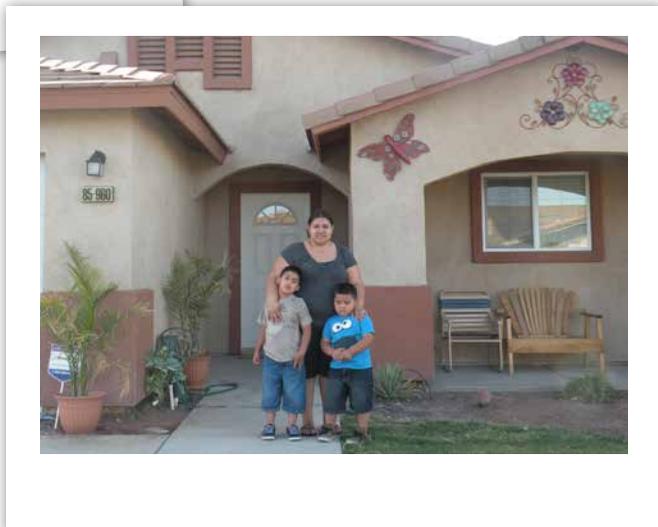
In response to the increase in foreclosures in the Valley, CV Housing offers participants of its new Lease-to-Own program with a variety of services to assist families with credit issues and help them realize their dream of homeownership. The organization's credit and housing counselors work with the families to improve their credit and build savings in order to qualify for a mortgage and buy the home when they are ready.

Mealey recognized early on that in addition to housing, hard-working, low-income families and their children need community support and enriching activities to be successful as well. As a result, CV Housing sponsors child-care centers, after-school programs, computer technology centers, medical clinics, a computer-based family learning center, community gardens, and a variety of summer programs. Plus, young residents learn about their culture and gain music and dance skills through the Coalition's sponsored mariachi bands and ballet folklorico dance troupes.

are completed. Along with learning construction methods, participating families also gain valuable homebuyer and financial management skills, through education provided by CV Housing staff in group and individual meetings.

"This has been an extremely successful program that not only builds homes, but builds a sense of community," said Mealey. "These neighborhoods are well-kept and safer than others, as these families have literally built their community from the ground up and take pride in their accomplishment."

Through its multi-family department, CV Housing has developed 32 rental housing complexes, totaling more than 2,500 homes, including a 128-bed migrant farm worker community. The rental projects are developed to house low-income families and individuals looking for a stepping stone to homeownership.



In 2002, the board and staff founded the JFM Scholarship fund, in honor of the major contributions of Executive Director John F. Mealey. The scholarships provide financial assistance for college-bound student residents to help defray the cost of tuition and books. To date, more than \$460,000 in scholarships has been awarded to 520 student residents. This year, of the 91 scholarship recipients, 75% are the first in their family to go to college and 68 of the students enrolled in a 4-year university.

In order to keep the housing affordable and programs available CV Housing relies on a combination of public and private financing and support. Bank loans, federal and state government grants, city and county programs, tax credits, foundation grants and private gifts are the main sources.

"We are grateful for all those entities that have helped support us through our 30 years," said Mealey. "We are looking forward to many more years of providing high-quality, affordable housing and programs to those who need it most."

For more information on the Coachella Valley Housing Coalition, visit www.cvhc.org or call 760-347-3157. ■

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