



**MEMORANDUM FROM  
THE DESK OF THE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

To: Springfield Housing Authority Board of Commissioners  
From: William H. Abrashkin, Executive Director  
Date: September 29, 2010  
Re: Report of the Executive Director for 2010

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This Annual Report presents highlights of the condition and activities of the Springfield Housing Authority. An Annual Report can only provide a summary for each of our divisions and departments. Further specifics will be provided as the Board may request.

As in the past, the preparation of this Annual Report was a collaborative effort among all of the staff listed in the various sections below. I would like to thank all of those who participated in preparing this report, and particularly Assistant Executive Directors Nicole Contois, Michelle Booth, and Wallace Kiesel, and Executive Department Manager Isabel Serrazina, for their diligent, thoughtful help. Without their close knowledge of our operations, this report could not have been created. Needless to say, any errors that may have found their way into this report are my responsibility.

**INTRODUCTION**

Last year's report summarized SHA activities with the phrase, "Looking Inward and Looking Outward." The twin themes for this year have been physical improvements and new resident opportunities.

***Physical Improvements.*** The largest physical improvement project to be undertaken by the SHA in decades, known as "***federalization,***" is now underway at our three state family developments, Duggan Park, Reed Village, and Robinson Gardens. Together, these developments contain 482 units. Although our maintenance staffs have worked hard with the resources available, over the years the state allocations have been too low to meet the needs of these developments. The periodic upgrading that all rental housing needs (for example, replacement of windows, siding, and kitchen components) has been deferred. While funding from the federal government has been more generous, federal law prohibited the use of federal funds for the repair of state public housing or the transfer of state housing into the federal portfolio.

To the benefit of the SHA, that prohibition was relaxed by provisions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the federal "stimulus" legislation, or "ARRA"). Under ARRA, for the first time it became possible both to use federal ARRA funds on state public housing and to move

state public housing to the federal side. Once “federalized,” previously state public housing qualifies to receive the larger federal capital grants and operating subsidies provided for federal public housing.

The process for moving our developments from the state to the federal portfolio is lengthy and demanding. Many hurdles had to be surmounted before these developments were provisionally accepted into the federal portfolio. With that accomplished in March of this year, the developments still require substantial upgrading before final acceptance. That acceptance is not guaranteed; the test will be whether at the end of the upgrading the developments will be able to pass HUD’s Uniform Physical Condition Standards (UPCS). Upgrading is being done with a combination of ARRA funds and a grant from the state of approximately \$15 million. *This grant constitutes fully half of all “federalization” funds distributed by the state throughout Massachusetts—a testament to the work of SHA staff in making the case.* With these funds, all buildings in Duggan, Reed, and Robinson will get new building envelopes (siding, windows), upgraded kitchens, and a number of other items will also be addressed.

At this writing, we are still assessing the need for additional funding for further upgrading (for example, many porches, steps, railings, and walkways are deteriorated and would not meet UPCS). If necessary funding can be identified and work performed, the SHA estimates that these properties will qualify for full federalization in approximately one year from the date of this report. If finally accepted into the federal portfolio, the properties will then generate an estimated \$1.9 million in additional annual income over and above the state grants currently provided (this includes both capital funds and operating subsidies).

It is not an overstatement to say that these developments are at risk, and that if we can get the developments through the REAC inspections the accomplishment of our staff in achieving federalization will have preserved this affordable housing down into the future.

***Resident opportunities.*** It is well-understood that many poor people in general, and public housing residents in particular, are caught in a cycle in which the lack of education and employment skills are passed from generation to generation. In Springfield, over *half* of students fail to achieve “proficient” scores in English by fourth grade, and the percentage is even higher for populations, such as residents of the SHA, with a high proportion of children who are poor, who are members of minority groups, who do not have English as a first language, and whose parents are also poorly educated.

It is also well-understood that the way to break the cycle and to open up opportunities for our residents is the way of education, starting at the earliest possible time in a child’s life. As parents are their children’s first educators, this means working with families to improve skills, attitudes, and involvement in positive childhood development.

Last fall, the SHA opened its second on-site ***Head Start*** program, at our Riverview Development. As with our first program at Robinson Gardens, opened in October 2008, the SHA provides the facilities in compliance with all regulatory requirements, and the local Head Start provides the program. The results speak for themselves: every graduate from the Robinson Gardens first graduating class received the top readiness ranking for entry into kindergarten, and we are

optimistic that similar achievements will be realized by children graduating from both Head Start programs in the future.

Through its Resident Services Department, which already operates a number of programs for families and young people, the SHA has been invited to participate in a promising new program designed specifically to improve early childhood literacy, which is the basic building block of education. This program, known as “*Talk/Read/Succeed!*” (“TRS”) is funded in part by a \$390,000, two-year grant from the national Kellogg Foundation. Partners in the grant include the local Davis Foundation, the United Way of Pioneer Valley, the Springfield Education Association, and the Regional Employment Board.

Under this grant, two SHA developments, Sullivan Apartments and Robinson Gardens, will be targeted for the most comprehensive possible intervention and assistance to help families overcome obstacles to reach the program goal of appropriate literacy levels for all children in the developments by third grade. This requires a holistic approach and a marshaling of the resources that families need to succeed. At this writing, we have hired two new staff members and are close to contracting with a program evaluator. With the permission of DHCD, we are preparing a unit at Robinson Gardens to use as a community center and hub for TRS program activities. We expect that the program will be up and running within the next 30-45 days.

Because achieving literacy skills and imparting a love of reading and learning is a much longer endeavor than the two-year cycle of this grant, we will be looking for funding mechanisms to carry the TRS program forward when this grant expires.

Our children have the same native intelligence and inherent human potential as children in every walk of life. Our families love their children and want them to succeed as much as parents everywhere. Working together, we can help our residents overcome barriers and achieve a level of literacy that will serve as that all-important foundation for their future.

**Other Matters.** Although the SHA’s conversion to *asset management* was completed in the structural sense last year, there is still much work to do to meet all HUD asset management requirements and to realize the potential offered by this sea-change in public housing management. The SHA’s first full asset management budget was approved by the Board of Commissioners this summer. Also this summer we spent several days working with a HUD asset management consultant team, which offered us recommendations about further steps to take, including the configuration of our AMPs (Asset Management Projects). The upcoming year will see this process develop, for example, as our Property Managers assume full responsibility for budgets and periodic financial statements.

Over the past year, I have made it a priority to deepen my own knowledge of our *developments, departments, and staff*. I have visited each of the SHA’s 27 developments, many multiple times, have met with the staff of each of our AMPs and each department within the SHA, and I am well along with the process of conducting one-on-one meetings with each employee of the Authority. Both informally and in scheduled meetings I have met with many of our residents and resident associations to learn their perspectives and concerns. The basic lesson that comes through

over and over is that the SHA is fortunate to have many dedicated residents and staff members who want to improve our community and help to meet our residents' needs.

The SHA is well along in a study of our *office space*, handled by our consultants, Kerry Dietz and Rebecca Mautner. The study has established that the organization of our offices at every level, from districts and departments up to the executive, is haphazard and poorly suited to promote efficiency of our operations. Some of our offices are too small, some too big, some in the wrong locations for their functions, and some in unprofessional condition. Based on this study when completed, we will continue to work on the upgrading and professionalizing of SHA office space. This is a matter not only of productivity, but also of respect for our hardworking employees and the residents and members of the public who visit those offices.

In June, 2010, the SHA launched its innovative *interactive procurement and purchasing web site*, designed by Purchasing Manager Michael Bailey and IT Director Stephen Ethier, with help from consultant Garvey Communication. We are in the process of seeking legal copyright protection for this work, and plan to schedule a public launch event soon.

The Board of Commissioners has voted to honor our Resident Commissioner, *Jennie Choiniere*, by naming the development in which she lives on St. James Avenue, "Jennie Lane." A ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating this event was held on September 17, 2010. We are all delighted and join in our congratulations to Ms. Choiniere, who has contributed so much to the SHA over many years.

On January 1, 2011, the SHA aims to put into operation its new *policy on smoking*, adopted earlier this year by the Board of Commissioners. During the first year of the new policy, smoking will be prohibited in all indoor areas, but allowed in designated outdoor spaces. After one year, the SHA is scheduled to become 100% smoke-free. This policy was adopted after a survey of all SHA residents established that the overwhelming majority prefer to live in a smoke-free environment. We will offer residents and employees access to smoking cessation programs as part of this new policy.

We all join in congratulating *Commissioner Willie Thomas* on his appointment as Executive Director of the West Springfield Housing Authority, after many years of service as Executive Director of the South Hadley Housing Authority. West Springfield is sure to benefit from the same expertise and sound judgment that Mr. Thomas has brought to his responsibilities as Governor Patrick's appointee to the SHA Board of Commissioners.

The SHA's public *Annual Report for 2010* was beautifully done, widely distributed, and has generated much positive response. Thanks and credit to Executive Department Manager Isabel Serrazina and consultant Garvey Communication for creating and producing that report. Because of the time and cost involved, we plan to propose to the Board that we go to a biannual report system, so that our next public report would be scheduled for the middle of 2012.

For the second year running, the SHA's *Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance program*, one of the largest in the state with over 2,500 vouchers in its portfolio, has received a perfect score of 100% from HUD's Section 8 Management Assessment Program (SEMAP). This is also the fourth year in a row that the program earned "high performer" status from HUD. Credit and thanks for this notable achievement are due to Rental Assistance Director Joseph D'Ascoli (who is also

President of the New England Section 8 Administrators Association) and to every member of the SHA's Rental Assistance Office staff, whose work contributed to this result.

The SHA hosted a well-deserved *appreciation lunch* for the RAO staff on Friday, September 24, 2010 in the Gentile Apartments community room.

As can be seen from the above (which necessarily is not comprehensive), it has been a productive year at the Springfield Housing Authority. Once again, it has been the performance and dedication of our employees and the participation of our residents in many community activities and projects that have led to the achievements realized. Further division and department specifics are found below.

### **THE SHA DIVISIONS AND DEPARTMENTS -- OVERVIEW<sup>1</sup>:**

#### **A. EXECUTIVE DIVISION**

1. Finance and Accounting Department
2. Human Resources Department
3. Information Technology Department
4. Legal Department

#### **B. PUBLIC HOUSING MANAGEMENT DIVISION**

1. Property Management Department
2. Applications Department
3. Resident Services Department
4. Public Safety Department
5. Warehouse Department

#### **C. FACILITIES AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS DIVISION**

1. Facilities Maintenance Department
2. Capital Projects and New Development Department
3. Purchasing Department

#### **D. RENTAL ASSISTANCE DIVISION**

### **A. EXECUTIVE DIVISION**

*Supervisor: Executive Director William H. Abrashkin*

Last year, I reported on the model evolving in the Executive Division in which our Assistant Executive directors function as *chief operating officers* with responsibility for many parts of our operations under the overall supervision of the Executive Director. In the more widely used housing authority model, departments (for example, fiscal management, resident services and public safety) are supervised separately from property management. In contrast, our two Executive Division

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that this arrangement of Divisions and Departments reflects some changes from last year, to bring greater logic and clarity to our organization chart.

Assistant Executive Directors, Nicole Contois and Michelle Booth, serve as generalists. Each AED's combined portfolio includes both property management and other departments, and each also takes on special projects of interest.

We now have enough experience with this approach to know that it works well, enabling our AEDs to make constructive connections between functions that would be more difficult with a "silo" approach. As examples, with our AEDs supervising both property management and resident services, it is easier to bring resident services into a particular situation to resolve problems. AED supervision of our Finance and Accounting Department gives close knowledge of the budgets and spending decisions for which the property managers are responsible.

This approach also encourages more interaction with community functions by the SHA's senior management. For example, AED involvement with the coalition working on revitalization activities in the South End of Springfield may open up ways to improve our public housing in that neighborhood, and AED work with local police and other law enforcement officials helps to bring public safety operations into synch with the property management that our AEDs also supervise.

An additional benefit of the generalist approach is that it makes the AEDs' jobs more interesting and engaging, keeping up the energy and creativity that underlie excellence in any endeavor. Most fundamentally, in any organization, everything is in the people. The generalist approach works because Ms. Contois and Ms. Booth excel at what they do.

As outlined in the sections below on our facilities and capital operations, a similar approach taken by Wallace Kisiel, our third Assistant Executive Director, is leading to improvements in systems used to address the physical condition of our properties.

### **1. Finance and Accounting Department**

*Supervisor: AED Nicole Contois*

Following the retirement of Chief Financial Officer Deb Barton, in April 2009, the SHA Finance and Accounting Department has undergone three rounds of reorganization. First, the SHA entered into a contract with Casterline Associates, a CPA/Management Consulting firm, to serve as interim Chief Financial Officer. In that capacity, Casterline made substantial progress in reorganizing our finances and completing financial, budget, and accounting tasks that had unavoidably been left in abeyance prior to its arrival.

Second, with the assistance of Casterline, the SHA reassessed the organization of our financial operations, concluding that efficiency and cost savings could be realized by creating the position of Finance Department Manager to supervise our accounting operations and to work with an outside fee (contract) accountant on finance and budgetary matters. In other words, the SHA determined that with strong internal management, knowledgeable contract accountant help, and the supervision of Ms. Contois (who herself previously managed our accounting operations), the position of Chief Financial Officer was no longer needed. This change led not only to a more efficient organizational structure but also to cost savings. Hence the SHA hired a Finance Department Manager. For personal reasons, however, that Manager left after a short time with the SHA.

Third, the SHA took the departure of the Finance Department Manager as an opportunity for another assessment. By that time our finance and accounting operations were coming into shape. Budgets and financial statements were being prepared on a more timely and accurate basis, and the recommendations and findings of auditors were being implemented. At that point, we recognized that Casterline was expertly handling many of the functions previously performed by the Chief Financial Officer, and then by the Finance Department manager. What the SHA really needed was sound management of our accounting operations.

After a careful assessment, it turned out that the talent we needed for that management function had been part of the SHA staff for many years, in the person of **Michele Decoteau**, who this summer was promoted to the long-vacant position of Accounting Department manager. Michele brings 23 years of experience within the SHA to this position. Michele is ultimately responsible for the output of the finance team. It is the belief and practice of the current SHA management team that opportunities for advancement should be afforded to all SHA team members who have demonstrated the knowledge and skills required to be successful in an advanced position.

Between Casterline and Ms. Decoteau, our Finance and Accounting Department is more up to date and is operating more smoothly than it has for many years in meeting its responsibilities for the management of the SHA's annual budget, the implementation and oversight of internal controls, sound fiscal management, timely payment to vendors and staff, and the preparation of financial statements.

**Highlights:**

- As noted, the SHA Finance and Accounting Department continues to work in conjunction with Casterline Associates, although the assistance that the Casterline Associates team provides has changed. Casterline Associates is acting as a more of a mentor and trainer to Michele in her new position as Accounting Department Manager. Michael Petro of Casterline Associates brings 19 years of experience in the public housing field and has helped to upgrade numerous public housing agency finance departments.
- In the current year, the department plans to continue to improve a number of areas including the organization, cataloging and central filing of all critical financial documents, ongoing cross training of staff, continued training of the Accounting Manager, and full implementation of all of HUD's project-based requirements.
- HUD's Public Housing Assessment System ["PHAS"] measures performance of the SHA's management of its federal public housing portfolio. An asset management based scoring process has yet to be finalized although HUD continues to review this possibility. A draft financial score for the fiscal year 2010 has not yet been released, but based on preliminary scores for some of the indicators using the previous "Agency Wide" system we expect that the SHA will be a "Standard Performer." Our goal, of course, is to become a "High Performer" as soon as possible.
- As the Accounting Department continues to make the transition to the new form of organization, time and training will be required. We continue to believe that the results

will be a strong Accounting Department leader, more accuracy and efficiency, and ultimately cost savings.

## **2. Human Resources Department**

*Supervisor: Assistant Executive Director Nicole Contois*

Since she joined the SHA in April 2009, Human Resources Manager **Kathy Hardy** has been rebuilding the SHA's human resources department from the ground up. Working with employees from every division and department, she has upgraded our HR systems and protocols, handbooks, and record-keeping. She has made connections throughout the SHA, earning the trust and confidence of employees of every part of the Authority. She has also forged connections with the outside HR community and with our Legal Department to help ensure that matters of employee discipline and grievances are handled in a uniform, neutral, and effective manner.

### **Highlights:**

- Implemented automated time and attendance system.
- Converted the in-house payroll to an external payroll company. The conversion included an HR information system giving the Human Resources Manager tools to manage the HR function.
- In collaboration with General Counsel, Ms. Contois, and Ms. Booth, Ms. Hardy is reviewing and revising the Employee Handbook. Eight policies were revised, approved by the Board of Commissioners, and implemented during the course of the year. Work continues on the rest of the handbook.
- In collaboration with General Counsel, Ms. Hardy is updating the Affirmative Action Plan. It appears as though the last update was completed in 2007.
- Appointed Safety Officer by the Executive Director.
- Hired 22 employees, 9 Putnam Students, and 22 employees from the pre-release/day reporting Vocational Training Program sponsored by the Hampden County Sheriff's Department.
- Collected salary data from other housing authorities for a comparability study of SHA's salaries.
- Coordinated safety training for maintenance staff.

## **3. Information Technology Department**

*Supervisor: AED Michelle Booth*

[Please note the new Department name, "Information Technology," an update of the former "MIS," or "Management Information Systems."]

The IT operations at the Springfield Housing Authority have been consolidated into a single Department. The Department consists of **Terrelle Castle, Michael Laprade and Director Stephen Ethier**. The primary benefits of this consolidation include better overall IT related support to the entire agency, a more efficient use of agency resources, and a diminished dependence on any one individual.

The Department has been working hard to meet the growing technology needs of a modern business organization. The Department is also working to ensure that the SHA has the proper foundation so that current software and hardware can work as seamlessly as possible with future solutions to the SHA's technology needs. At the close of this year, the Department is working to introduce a new telephone system, server virtualization, and the eventual migration of all PHA software to a single platform.

### **Highlights:**

- Over 200 different pieces of documentation tied to critical IT operations and support have been created. This documentation ensures that information stays with the agency in the event of an employee departure.
- A new Backup Domain Controller and DHCP server was added. This server allows for better fault tolerance and quicker connections to our network.
- A new program was created in which the Department has partnered with MCDI in Springfield to provide internship and resume building experience opportunities for the agency's students. Not only is the partnership program a great opportunity for the interns to gain some real world work experience, it also provides the SHA with some extra help in a very busy Department. Two interns have successfully completed internships at the SHA.
- The Department's internal capability to create reports has increased significantly. This is no easy task since different parts of the agency are currently run by different versions of software.
- The Department has made some real progress with respect to cross training. All Department members are getting better at supporting the needs of the entire agency. This cross training has allowed for increases in the level of Department expertise, greater flexibility, and increased employee productivity.
- Automated monitoring of crucial servers and connections has been put in place. This has helped to identify and deal with disruptions as soon as they occur.
- Continued stabilization of workstations, networks, software and servers has been accomplished.

#### **4. Legal Department**

*Supervisors: Executive Director William H. Abrashkin; AEDs Nicole Contois and Michelle Booth; Legal Assistant supervised by Executive Department Manager Isabel Serrazina*

The primary function of the Legal Department is to advise the staff, the Board, and the Executive Director on all legal matters relating to issues such as personnel and employment, the administration and management of public housing and leased housing, procurement, contracting, fair housing, human resources, and tort claims. The Legal Department handles evictions and other court proceedings and represents the SHA at civil service hearings and tenant grievance panel hearings. The Legal Department is the chief negotiator in collective bargaining with the units represented by AFSCME.

The local law firm of Lyon and Fitzpatrick now serves as SHA General Counsel. The services it provides to the SHA are substantially broader than those provided by in-house counsel in the past. Lyon and Fitzpatrick handled the complex legal work necessary for our federalization applications. It reviews all of our contracts and personnel practices and advises us on a range of matters ranging from the legal steps needed to implement our smoking initiative to whether our snow and ice policies are in compliance with evolving legal standards.

Legal Assistant **June Ball** maintains legal files and prepares and tracks court cases. Student Law Clerk **Erika Scibelli** works with our property management staff to prepare legal notices and files involved in our legal enforcement work.

#### **Highlights:**

- Staff training in lease enforcement has been a focus of our General Counsel. The goal is to have Property Managers and staff handle many steps previously handled by counsel, in order to save on legal costs while increasing communication between residents and staff.
- Labor matters are being handled by a separate local law firm, Sullivan, Hayes and Quinn, with the General Counsel coordinating the work of that firm with SHA staff.
- Closer coordination with Resident Services is a goal of our legal approach, so that problems may be identified and addressed before they turn into costly and disruptive legal proceedings.

#### **B. PUBLIC HOUSING MANAGEMENT DIVISION**

*Supervisors: Assistant Executive Directors Nicole Contois and Michelle Booth*

As noted above, the Public Housing Management Division is supervised by Assistant Executive Directors **Nicole Contois** and **Michelle Booth**. In addition to the Property Management Department, the Public Housing Management Division contains the Applications Department, the Resident Services Department, the Public Safety Department, and the Warehouse Department.

Ms. Contois supervises Districts A (state), C (federal), and D (federal), as well as the Resident Services and Warehouse Departments. Ms. Booth supervises Districts B (state) and E (federal), as well as the Applications and Public Safety Departments.

1. **Property Management Department**

*Supervisors: AEDs Nicole Contois & Michelle Booth*

The Property Management Department is primarily responsible for the management of the SHA's public housing portfolio, consisting of 1,327 federal and 1,060 state units spread across 27 developments throughout the City. Daily activities managed by our five Property Managers, **Sonia Colon-Diaz** (District A), **Johanna DeMicheli** (District B), **Brenda Clinton** (District C), **Celina Correa** (District D), and **Sandra West** (District E) include lease enforcement, maintenance, rent collections, inspections, response to tenant concerns, coordination of resident programming with the Resident Service Department, coordination of issues relating to criminal activity with the Public Safety Department, and participating in efforts to address legal matters, such as termination of tenancies, with the SHA's legal team from the firm of Lyon & Fitzpatrick.

**Highlights:**

- In the past, the SHA had used the services of an outside inspection company to inspect properties and report conditions back to Management. The SHA and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) partnered to develop and implement a new inspection program designed better to identify and address maintenance and lease enforcement issues that affect the overall condition of our developments. In this program, management staff and maintenance staff conduct unit and development inspections as a team. Although initially designed for implementation in state-aided public housing, this new, comprehensive inspection program was also implemented in federal properties. Throughout the year, maintenance and management staff received training concerning the principles of effective inspection, the Massachusetts State Sanitary Code, and HUD's Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) standards for property conditions.
- Recognizing that effective lease enforcement plays a critical role in the cost-effective maintenance of properties and quality of life for residents, the SHA placed a heightened emphasis on providing legal training to housing management staff to increase our capacity. This ongoing training, conducted by attorneys from the SHA's legal counsel, Lyon & Fitzpatrick, has included training in legal principles involved in lease enforcement, housing court process, and evidence standards.
- Property Managers have forged a strong working relationship with the Public Safety and Resident Services Departments to address security and quality of life issues and to promote resident engagement in their communities and in resident councils. This relationship has resulted in new in crime watch meetings and increased rates of reporting from residents that have resulted in significant police action concerning drug and other illegal activity in public housing. The outcome of this police action is a higher rate of lease enforcement, issuance of no-trespass orders, and eviction actions that have served to remove persons who have violated SHA standards by their illegal activities.

- The poor economy and resulting job losses and underemployment of our residents, coupled with the cost of food and other essentials, have contributed to elevated rates of rent delinquencies in some Districts. Working closely with the Resident Services Department, Managers make referrals to the SHA's Homeless Intervention and Prevention Program (HIPP) in an effort to assist residents experiencing financial difficulties to stabilize their situations and preserve their tenancies. The program assists residents in curing delinquencies with emergency monies (funded by an ARRA "stimulus" grant coordinated by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development), while providing residents with money management skills and other social services that seek to prevent a recurrence of non-payment of rent.
- Property Managers continued working to support Resident Services Department activity by disseminating information about the range of SHA programming designed to promote self-sufficiency and economic opportunity. This dissemination includes providing information at annual recertification meetings and at other meetings with residents throughout the year.
- With hard work from maintenance staff and assistance from residents and the community, the SHA has continued to experience a decrease in graffiti and litter and improved curb appeal at SHA developments.
- The SHA has continued to maintain a long-standing partnership with the Hampden County Sheriff's Department by engaging three pre-release crews to help maintain grounds, clean hallways and prepare vacant units for re-occupancy, including a new crew that assists District A at Reed Village. This low-cost program, coupled with the dedication of our maintenance staff, has allowed the SHA to continue to decrease its turnaround time for vacant units, allowing the SHA to house needy families promptly after a unit is vacated.
- Using the Electronic Income Verification System for federally-funded public housing and the Wage Match system for state-funded public housing, Property Managers have been able to detect unreported income and fraud and take steps to recover \$99,354.00 owed to its programs. In the next year, the SHA will work to forge a partnership approach with appropriate law enforcement agencies for possible criminal prosecution of fraud perpetrated against our public housing program.

## **2. Applications Department**

*Supervisor: AED Michelle Booth*

The Applications Department is managed by **Jacqueline Banks**, who oversees the daily operations of the Department and supervises a staff of three. Applications Department staff include **Natasha Lopez, Ruth Maio, Dianna Martinez**, and former employee **Luz Negron**. The Department is the first contact that prospective tenants have with the SHA. It is the goal of the Applications Department to provide excellent customer service as it assists applicants in navigating a process that can be confusing for many. In addition to processing applications for federal and state-aided public housing, the Applications Department coordinates the offer and assignment of units for applicants and for tenants being transferred within SHA housing, and determines whether an applicant is entitled to a priority or preference in admissions or transfer. For example, displacement due to fire and

homelessness without fault are priority categories in state public housing. In addition, if an applicant is a Springfield resident, is employed in Springfield, or is a veteran, that applicant will take preference on the state housing waiting list. In federal housing, examples of preferences are also Springfield residence and displacement due to (federally declared) natural disaster.

The SHA is required to use separate application forms for state and federally aided public housing. Once an applicant has been determined preliminary to be eligible for public housing, the application is date and time stamped and placed on the appropriate waiting list(s). Although applicants often request an estimate of when the SHA will make an offer of housing, it is very difficult to predict precisely when an applicant will reach the top of the waiting list. The factors that influence this waiting time include the level of priority or preference (if any), date of application, unit size, and current vacancy rates. Applicants must document that they meet the state and federal income limits, have satisfactory landlord references, and pass a credit and criminal background check. To qualify for elderly housing, a person must be 60 years of age or older, or be disabled or handicapped as defined under federal and state law.

The wait for priority applicants can range from three to six months or longer. The waiting list for non-priority applicants can be several years. SHA housing is in such demand that we have only an average of thirty-five available apartments per month against a waiting list of thousands. In recent months, this reality has often discouraged applicants from filing an application for public housing, despite urgings from staff to apply.

#### **Highlights:**

- **Occupancy Rates/HUD.** HUD has instituted financial sanctions when a public housing authority's occupancy level drops below 97%. The Applications Department has maintained an average occupancy rate of at least 97% in the federal public housing portfolio. At the end of the fiscal year (03/31/10) the SHA federal housing occupancy rate was 99%.
- **Occupancy Rates/DHCD.** DHCD has established a standard occupancy rate of 96%. The Applications Department has maintained an average occupancy rate of at least 97%; at the end of the last year's fiscal period (03/31/09), the SHA state public housing occupancy rate was 98.6%. The occupancy rate for this year's fiscal period (03/31/10) was 99%.
- **Certain Waiting Lists to be Closed.** Near the close of this reporting period, the Applications Department examined the waiting list for the SHA's federally-aided public housing program and determined, regrettably but realistically, that there are unit sizes for which new applicants would have no reasonable hope of receiving a unit offer within the foreseeable future based upon projected unit turnover. These unit sizes/programs included:
  - Two-bedroom family federal, 749 applicants, 36 vacancies in 2009;
  - One-bedroom federal elderly, 660 applicants, 109 vacancies in 2009;
  - Riverview Near Elderly, 425 applicants, 10 vacancies in 2009
  - Three-bedroom family federal, 328 applicants, 41 vacancies in 2009.

In accordance with the SHA's ACOP (Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy), the Department recommended that the SHA close these waiting lists and stop

accepting new applications; the Board of Commissioners accepted the recommendation and voted to approve closing the designated waiting. These lists will be closed as of October 1, 2010.

- **Unit Turnaround Time.** The Applications Department staff continues to work on decreasing unit turnaround time for the state and federal public housing developments. Currently the average turnaround time can be up to twenty-one days. Our goal is a turnaround time of ten days or less.
- **Application Rates.** Last year the Applications Department processed over 160 applications per month. This year the rate of applications has increased to approximately 200 per month, with exceptions in November 2009 – February 2010 when the SHA received a small decrease of 160 applications monthly. Last year, staff serviced an increased number of applicants who were facing homelessness due to domestic violence. This year there is a number of applicants applying for emergency housing due to domestic violence and foreclosures.
- **Training.** All Department staff participated in a training provided by DHCD on eligibility and rent calculations.
- **Project Homeless Connect.** The Applications Department staff participated in Project Homeless Connect, a daylong event at the Mass Mutual Center designed to link homeless individuals with housing and other supportive services.
- **Veterans Stand-Down.** The Applications Department staff also participated in the Western Massachusetts Veterans Stand-Down, a day-long event at the Greek Cultural Center, servicing the needs of veterans and their families.

### **3. Resident Services Department**

*Supervisor: AED Nicole Contois*

The Resident Service Department, with **Pam Wells** as Manager, has continued to grow over the past year. The Department is now comprised of seven full-time and seven part-time positions, funded by and carrying out the grants outlined below.

An important addition to staff this year has been two part-time positions that work with our GED students in the areas of math and English composition. These two areas have been identified as problematic for our students and the addition of these part-time positions have enabled us to decrease the length of time that students spend studying for their GED.

In addition, one of the two staff members hired for the Talk/Read/Succeed! initiative will be an employee of the Resident Services Department (the other is an employee of the Regional Employment Board, assigned to the SHA Resident Services Department to work on TRS).

#### **Highlights:**

- **Transitional Housing Program and Housing First.** Funded by DHCD for 35 units, these programs have continued to be successful even as our vacancy rate at SHA has been reduced

significantly. We have managed to keep occupancy at 90% during the past year for THP and 100% for Housing First. We will continue to look for opportunities and resources to help clients make the transition to permanent housing within the nine month time frame provided by program regulations, and will continue to identify community resources that will benefit our residents in these program.

- **Deb Barton Neighborhood Network Center.** The center continues to be the hub of our family self-sufficiency activities. As word has spread amongst SHA properties, we have seen the use of the center increase significantly. Residents are not only taking advantage of the GED program but also of the other resources such as computer training, ESL training, financial literacy, employment search, nutrition training, and other workshops provided by our community partners.
- **ROSS Family/Homeownership.** Funded by a HUD grant, with programs including GED and pre-GED classes, job placements, and collaboration with “Cherish Every Child” to address literacy issues for school age children.
- **ROSS Elderly/Disabled.** Also funded by a HUD grant, and operating at the Saab Court and Riverview elderly developments, this program has brought in guest speakers, networked with community agencies addressing elder and disability issues, provided case management services for residents, provided English classes for Russian speakers, produced a monthly newsletter for residents, and conducted introductory computer classes for seniors.
- **ROSS Service Coordinator.** Funded by HUD in the amount of \$390,000.00 for two resident service coordinator positions aimed at assisting federal family and elderly/disabled residents, for a period of two years, effective July 29, 2010.
- **Hoarding.** Working with MassHousing (formerly the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency), we have implemented a program to deal with the difficult and frequently-encountered “hoarding” issues affecting a number of our residents. This program is evolving and will continue to do so over the course of the next year.
- **Tenancy Preservation Program.** Working with the Department of Transitional Assistance, the SHA developed a pilot program that provides an “early warning” under which residents at risk of nonpayment evictions are placed on protective payments before their nonpayments escalate into court eviction cases. The SHA received a grant from DHCD in the amount of \$153,500 to support the “Homeless Intervention and Prevention Initiative” which will institutionalize this successful program with three years of funding for a program coordinator. This program was implemented in December, 2009, and has been another successful vehicle for helping tenants with short term financial assistance to deal with rental arrearages and has also helped promote the services available within the Resident Services Department.
- **After School and Summer Programming.** The after school and summer programming continues to operate at seven of our family developments. We continue to evaluate programming to develop and refine what is offered to make it an extension of the classroom learning environment. We have developed relationships with the schools located in the

neighborhoods where our family developments are located. These relationships have led to discussions on ways to partner to ensure that our shared populations have successful outcomes.

- **Talk/Read/Succeed! Grant.** As noted in the introduction to this Annual Report, The SHA Resident Services Department will be working with other participants to administer this program at our Robinson Gardens and Sullivan developments. In June, the Board of Commissioners authorized the expenditure of up to \$120,000 of restitution funds held by the SHA over a two-year period, to hire additional staff to assist in this program. At this writing, the SHA's offer to a leading candidate has been accepted and we anticipate that she will be joining the Resident Services Department in approximately two weeks from the date of this report.

#### **4. Public Safety Department**

*Supervisor: AED Michelle Booth*

The Public Safety Department, supervised by Manager **Rosa Lebron**, is comprised of Ms. Lebron and three other staff, including **Francis Caicoya**, a newly hired part-time public safety officer, and **Camilla Turnorutsky**, part-time clerk. (The position of full-time Public Safety Officer is currently vacant and will be filled soon.) In addition to daily public safety services provided by staff, the Department has also developed public safety strategies through contracts with contract security services and the Springfield Police Department. In collaboration with outside contractors, the SHA has developed security patrols and building walk-throughs that serve to deter crime and promote public safety. In addition, the SHA works closely with the Springfield Police Department to preserve public peace, foster crime prevention strategies, and address quality of life issues throughout all SHA developments.

#### **Highlights:**

- This year, the Public Safety Department worked closely with the SHA's Information Technology Department to implement a new incident recording system that provides more in-depth information that allows the SHA to track and monitor crime trends effectively. This system provides a snapshot of incidents at both the district and development levels that allows for targeted, place-based approaches to effective crime prevention in neighborhoods throughout Springfield.
- The SHA has evaluated data collected by this recording system and identified an increased rate of incidents. This increase is thought to be attributable to increased reporting of incidents by residents and managers, targeted enforcement actions in several SHA developments identified as problems areas, and increased police outreach, presence and enforcement actions in neighborhoods in which our developments are located.
- To address this increase in incidents, the SHA has applied a three-pronged strategy that involves preventing residents from becoming victims of crime, deterring the motivation of perpetrators by making consequences apparent and swift, and reducing opportunities for

perpetrators to engage in criminal activity on SHA property. Components of this strategy in this year included:

- Providing prevention information, conducting crime prevention programs, fostering the operation and development of new crime watch groups.
- Providing information and investigative services to support aggressive lease enforcement actions, issuing and enforcing no trespass orders, and participating in task force efforts that coordinate law enforcement actions directed at tenants and others who engage in criminal activity.
- In addition to partnership with the SPD, the SHA continued working in collaboration with the Hampden County Sheriff's Department and the Hampden County District Attorney's Office.
- Serving as an active member of the Western Massachusetts Gang Intelligence Roundtable, the Springfield Youth Violence Prevention Task Force, the Springfield Safe Neighborhood Initiative Committee (North End), and Operation Blue Night (supporting the SPD's efforts to engage residents in efforts to report crime).
- Increasing Public Safety and SHA Management Department presence in our developments.
- Engaging in multi-disciplinary initiatives designed to increase our awareness of new trends and challenges that could impact the safety of SHA residents and employees.

##### **5. Warehouse Department**

*Supervisor: AED Nicole Contois*

Under the direction of Manager **Rosa Leo**, the warehouse consists of a staff of two employees responsible for receiving equipment and supplies and for distribution of those items to the developments.

On the SHA's "to-do" list is a re-thinking of our approach to our Warehouse operations. From the advance purchase and warehousing of components, modern businesses are turning in the direction of real time purchasing managed by interactive electronic communications with their suppliers. This approach has the potential to avoid a number of costs, including maintaining warehouse space, stockpiling expensive items that may not be used for some time, tracking inventories, transporting items from the warehouse to field operations, and loss of value due to the obsolescence that comes ever more quickly in a changing economy.

Until we are able to take on this project, however, our goal is to bring added efficiency to our current warehouse operations.

##### **Highlights:**

- Upgrades in warehouse on plumbing and heating, new flooring and shelving. This has been completed.

- Bar code systems are needed on fixed assets (snow blowers, copiers, computer equipment etc.).
- The auditor and the Financial Department recommend a reduced inventory of stock items ordered and stored in the warehouse. The Warehouse Manager and AED Nicole Contois will work to address this during the upcoming year.
- The warehouse should develop a greater backup capacity for the Warehouse Manager.
- The Warehouse Manager recommends moving the office supply storage area from 18 Saab Court to 82 Division Street, to provide one location for all office supplies. Office supply storage space has been completed and set up at 82 Division Street.

### C. **FACILITIES AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS DIVISION**

*Supervisor: Executive Director William H. Abrashkin*

Since last year's Annual Report, the SHA has reorganized operations related to its physical facilities and placed those operations under the direction of **Wallace Kisiel**, who has been promoted to the newly created position of Assistant Executive Director for Facilities and Capital Improvements.

Under the prior system, the SHA had a "Trades" Department that provided specialized services to our developments -- plumbing, electrical, extermination, locksmith, painting -- and a "Modernization" Department responsible for capital projects.

Although on paper the SHA had a preventive maintenance program, in practice such preventive maintenance practices as existed were handled at the level of individual housing developments. Planning, supervision, execution, and quality control were observed largely in the breach.

Recognizing that maintenance and capital investment are two sides of the same coin, and that the trades are closely tied to preventive maintenance, the SHA has eliminated the distinction between these functions, consolidating them into one Department under Mr. Kisiel's supervision.

Because purchasing and procurement are so closely tied to our facilities and capital operations, these functions as well have been placed under Mr. Kisiel's supervision.

Although this approach is new and is still a work in progress, the SHA is already realizing significantly improved efficiency and accountability in its operations related to its physical plant. The best example is that this Division is currently able to manage and coordinate the complex series of capital and "operational" (i.e., large maintenance) projects involved in our \$15 million federalization program, and to begin to develop an overall preventive maintenance program for the SHA, while at the same time managing the trades and non-federalization capital projects as before--all without an increase in staff or other resources.

## **1. Facilities Maintenance Department**

*Supervisor: AED Wallace Kisiel*

The Facilities Maintenance Department (including the prior Trades Department), under the management of **Paul Spedero**, assisted by Administrative Assistant **Virma Santiago**, is responsible for providing specialized trade services to SHA public housing developments and to the administrative offices of the SHA. These services include painting, plumbing, electrical work, extermination, locksmith service, and vehicle maintenance and repair. Two members of this Department staff are scheduled to work nights and weekends to answer maintenance calls from the answering service. The Department is also responsible for coordinating work performed by outside vendors and contractors (for example, coordinating with the Hampden County Sheriff's Department to schedule pre-release and day reporting crews who help maintain grounds, hallways, and prepare vacant apartments for leasing). The Department consists of 14 full-time employees. In addition, the Department also includes 11 student interns from Putnam Vocational Technical High School who are deployed in the field with other SHA employees to hone students' skills in their respective trades. It is also responsible for developing a comprehensive preventive maintenance plan for SHA developments.

### **Highlights:**

- This Department, along with maintenance staff, prepares units for HUD REAC inspections and the Department oversees the HUD REAC inspection process for the SHA. In last year's HUD physical inspection, the SHA received an overall score of 64.7%. An overall score of 80% or greater moves the agency to a bi-annual inspection schedule, allowing for less time devoted to inspections preparations and more for the work needed in the developments.
- To compensate for limitations on the state budget, the Department has continued to secure low-cost and no-cost staffing through a variety of programs. These include: the Hampden County Sheriff's Department Pre-release Program crews, the Day Reporting Program, the Senior Aides Program, the Putnam Vocational Co-op and Internship program, and the MCDI student work program. These resources play a significant role in decreasing overall SHA costs, maintaining developments, and reducing the turnaround time for vacated units.
- In response to a national pandemic, this Department, in collaboration with Property Management Department staff, especially District D staff and outside experts, developed an aggressive strategy for addressing bedbugs in our public housing. Implemented in collaboration with the Management Department, this strategy is successfully controlling a problem that cannot be eliminated as long as residents and items of furniture move into our apartments. This Department is responsible for overseeing the contract with an outside extermination contractor, scheduling treatments, and monitoring the ongoing results of the SHA strategy. To date the SHA has expended approximately \$250,000 on bedbug control.
- Department staff, in collaboration with Management Department staff, represent that SHA on the Western Massachusetts Bedbug Prevention Task Force. This Task Force, funded by a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture and coordinated by the University of Massachusetts – Amherst, seeks to identify and implement innovative strategies for treating and preventing bedbug infestation.

- An important goal for this Department is to expand its capacity to perform preventative maintenance and repair in house, thus reducing the costs associated with outside contractors. Towards this end, the Department is in the process of establishing a program to provide technical training certification to tradesmen and Mechanic-I employees through vendors, technical schools, and field technicians. The Department anticipates implementing some aspects of the program in the next calendar year.

## **2. Capital Projects and New Development Department**

*Supervisor: AED Wallace Kisiel*

This Department is responsible for the supervision of millions of dollars worth of procurement and projects per year and its staff is expert in state and federal procurement requirements.

This department has two additional employees, **John Healy** and **Naomi DeChristopher**, who assist in the daily administration and oversight of the nearly \$5 million dollars of modernization work this year.

On February 17, 2010 the Springfield Housing Authority completed the task of obligating \$2.8 million dollars of ARRA funds. This windfall has allowed the Authority to take on the ambitious task of federalizing 482 family state units.

*Capital Projects.* The primary responsibility of the Assistant Executive Director with respect to capital projects (the term is sometimes used interchangeably with “modernization”) is to analyze the capital (i.e., major repair/improvement) needs of all buildings and equipment owned and managed by the SHA. With 27 separate housing developments, administrative and operational offices, and many complex systems (electrical, heating and air conditioning, elevators, etc.) this is a demanding and complex task. Once capital needs are identified, Mr. Kisiel and his staff meet with all staff members and residents interested in modernization planning to formulate and cost out a list of priorities. This list projects modernization projects five years into the future, and is updated on an annual basis to keep in step with new needs and circumstances. Highlights of those projects are set forth below.

Department staff also identify and pursue all sources of funding for modernization, obligate and expend capital funds within the standards and deadlines specified by HUD and DHCD, and develop and implement resident training initiatives relating to the SHA’s maintenance and modernization programs. The financial records and modernization budgets are maintained by the Finance and Accounting Department.

*Development.* The Development arm of this Department, which was created by the Board of Commissioners in 2009, is exploring the development initiatives of consolidating the central administrative offices, creating a new office facility and building a new community room at Moxon apartments, upgrading various property management and department offices, and addressing numerous handicap accessible requirements through out the Authority. The urban renewal initiative in the South End neighborhood of Springfield, home to our Marble Street development, is still being considered. This department along with other SHA staff continues to

explore South End possibilities together with members of the Springfield Development Department and many other interested participants.

**Highlights:**

- In the past year, the SHA closed out one Capital Fund budget for 2007, thereby demonstrating that funding is being obligated and expended in a timely manner. At this time the 2008, 2009, 2010 & ARRA budgets are active. The date to have all ARRA funds expended is February 17, 2011, which the department expects to meet and the date to have all 2008 funds expended is July 2012.
- This past year SHA Inc. continued the challenge of a court receivership program. Concentrating on heat related problems, the Department successfully prevented sixteen households, over the Christmas holiday season, from losing their homes by taking the necessary measures to provide the residents with restored heat. The heating season is upon us again, and we will likely carry out additional receiverships with funding provided by the Mass. Housing Partnership and other sources.
- Thanks to the assistance of a \$250,000.00 grant from the Massachusetts Division of Health Care Finance and Policy the SHA was able to renovate the Community Room at Forest Park Manor. The new offices, bathrooms and nurses station will allow the elderly residents in the neighborhood to have a place to visit for exercise, health screening and social gatherings.
- Highlights of state capital projects include:
  - Water main pipe replacement at the Joseph P. Gentile Apartments, completed in February 2010.
  - Planning for the installation of video surveillance cameras at Joseph P. Gentile Apartments, with installation anticipated for early Spring 2010.
  - Replacement of 518 sets of kitchen cabinets, part of the work required for federalization of the 482 state units, began in June and will be completed by late November.
- Highlights of federal capital projects include:
  - Utilization of part of the \$2.8 million dollars of ARRA funds to replace 518 sets of kitchen cabinets in our state units (as noted above); repairs needed in connection with the federalization of our state family developments.
  - Construction of seven new maintenance storage buildings with the remaining ARRA funds, currently undergoing construction.
  - \$1.2 million of the FY 2008 Capital Fund Program, to include new roofs, back-up power generators, one new storage building, heat controls and intercom systems have been obligated.

- Replacement of water main system in the basement of 115/117 Sanderson Street was completed.

### 3. Purchasing Department

*Supervisor: Assistant Executive Director Wallace Kisiel*

Our Purchasing Department operates under the direction of Purchasing Manager **Michael Bailey**. It is primarily responsible for the procurement of supplies and services and adherence to public bidding laws. Mr. Bailey supervises a Purchasing Clerk, **Bette Goulet**, and is responsible for providing ongoing guidance to the SHA staff on appropriate procurement methods.

The Authority recently launched its online procurement solicitation system available on its website. The combined input of many people went into this project, highlighted by efforts of the SHA publicist, Garvey Communication, IT Director, Stephen Ethier, and Purchasing Manager, Michael Bailey. This simple and intuitive system enables potential vendors to register and to check off as many contracting areas of interest as they wish (e.g., “plumbing services”) and to be made aware of upcoming Purchasing Department IFB/RFP opportunities within the Authority.

#### **Highlights:**

- The SHA remains a member in good standing of the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP). Mr. Bailey recently attended its annual forum & products exposition where he was able to “network” with other purchasing professionals as well as meet with vendors who can assist the Authority in advancing its Purchasing Department initiatives.
- The Purchasing Assistant, Bette Goulet, will continue to pursue her MCPPO (Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Officer) designation. She has completed the Public Contracting Overview class.
- Mr. Bailey successfully completed the re-certification requirements necessary to maintain his MCPPO designation.
- Mr. Bailey was chosen for inclusion in the “meet the SHA staff” feature of the 2010 SHA Annual Report highlighting his role as Purchasing Manager.
- In addition to its many annual IFB/RFPs the Purchasing Department also issued RFPs to obtain commercial real estate consulting services to assist in potential office upgrading, and an RFP for legal services from private law firms.
- The Department continues to monitor Authority spending patterns and where applicable creates annual IFBs to take advantage of bulk purchasing savings opportunities. The Department works closely with all departments in specification development to assure that required goods and services are procured in accordance with all SHA and statutory policies and procedures.

- The Purchasing Department continues to increase its vendor base both locally and into Connecticut and Northern Massachusetts, as well as utilizing the internet to locate and purchase various commodities.

#### **D. RENTAL ASSISTANCE DIVISION**

*Supervisor: AED Michelle Booth*

The Springfield Housing Authority Rental Assistance Division (the only Division containing a single Department, the Rental Assistance, or Section 8, Department) under the direction of **Joseph D'Ascoli**, is primarily responsible for the management of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program consisting of 2,570 allocated vouchers. In addition, it manages the State funded Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) program consisting of:

- 112 Mobile Vouchers (tenant based) (but due to freezes we are under contract for 73)
- 9 "7H1" Project Based Units through Chestnut Park
- 8 Project Based Units through Martin Luther King Development
- 137 Moderate Rehabilitation I & II
- 6 Project Based Units through Miracle House (Gandara)
- 8 Project Based Units through Memorial Parish House

The Rental Assistance Department is comprised of a staff of eighteen, increased by four staff members since last year. The Department is responsible for the expenditure of over \$16 million in Housing Assistance Payments received from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. In addition, the Department administers \$1million in state funding for MRVP. Administering these programs involves processing requests for tenancy approvals, rent reasonableness determinations, annual and interim certifications, annual and special inspections to ensure that units participating in the program meet Housing Quality Standards, determining applicant eligibility, and maintaining the program waiting lists. Department staff also conduct informal hearings to ensure that landlords and participants comply with the regulations and requirements of the programs, hold participants and landlords accountable for program violations, and recover public funds if fraud has occurred. The Department also provides responses to inquires from landlords, participants, and from the general public. In addition, Department staff conducts informational meetings, creates Requests for Proposals and evaluates responses, and administers the Home-Ownership Program.

#### **Highlights:**

- The SHA is pleased to note that HUD recently designated the SHA as achieving "High Performer" status under the Section 8 Management Assessment Program (SEMAP) for fiscal year end March 31, 2010, with a score of 100% for this past year. This is the fourth year in a row that our Rental Assistance Office has achieved this status. This designation is the result of the hard work and dedication of the Department staff under the direction of Joseph D'Ascoli and **Blanca Spencer**, Rental Assistance Manager.

- The SHA continues to be well-represented in organizations that serve professionals in the leased and public housing fields, with Joseph D'Ascoli continuing to serve as president of the Section 8 Administrators' Association, as a member of the Leased Housing and Legislative Committee of MassNAHRO, as Vice President of Member Services on the New England Regional Counsel (NERC-NAHRO), and as a member of the National NAHRO Board.
- The greatest challenge for this Department in the past year has been the successful management of the program in the face of unpredictable HUD funding patterns. Utilization planning becomes a real challenge when HUD funding levels are not announced in a timely manner, given that it takes an average of approximately four months from the time an applicant is drawn from the centralized waiting list until final lease-up into the program. Despite the challenges, this year the Department was able to utilize 100% of funds allocated by HUD.
- The SHA has collaborated with the City of Springfield and others to create and implement the Federal Chronically Homeless Program, an innovative project-based voucher program to address the homeless needs in the community. Through the issuance of four RFPs, the SHA has awarded project-based funding to six landlords who have leased a total of 50 units to the program. Per recent Board authorization, the SHA issued a fifth RFP for the remaining 50 units that SHA has allocated to the program; the SHA anticipates awarding these project-based vouchers to landlords in the fall of 2010.
- The SHA has increased its number of homeowners in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program from 31 to 37 in the past year, making us the second largest such program in the state.
- The Department will be conducting a work flow and efficiency study in the next several months to determine how best to use existing positions and to determine if additional staff will be needed to support the potential expansion of Department initiatives.
- Department staff continues to work diligently to ensure that the SHA complies with HUD and DHCD regulations to prevent and address fraud (including unreported income, discrepancies in financial information, identity theft, anonymous complaints, and others). The Department currently has \$212,000 in active repayment agreements arising from fraud investigations.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Although there is still much room for improvement, the work of reassessing and improving our internal operations has produced a stronger and more efficient operation over the past year. With many of the fundamentals addressed, the SHA has reached a point at which it has the capacity to take on important initiatives, including federalization, analysis of our office needs, and the educational initiative embodied in the TRS program, all explained in the body of this report.

With continued hard work and good fortune, by this time next year the SHA will have completed its first asset management budget cycle and will have begun to realize the efficiencies offered by that system.

With the various parts of SHA operations pulling together, I believe that many elements of the broader community now regard the SHA as an accountable and competent agency, available to serve as a partner in addressing a range of community concerns. It has been my privilege to participate in this process, which I look forward to continuing with our Board and staff in 2011.

It only remains to say: *thank you* to the entire SHA team for your contributions and accomplishments.