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A group of people living in
the same locality, under the
same government, and
having common interests.

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Ground broken for affordable homes in 5th Ward

BY JEFF KELLY LOWENSTEIN

Looking back on his childhood in Southeast Washington, D.C., Benjamin Van Horne felt fortunate to live in a racially and economically diverse community.

On Wednesday morning, Van Horne, now president of Greenline Development, Inc., took a step toward other people having that experience in Chicago.

"I think that [it's] essential for our democracy for people to know each other across those lines," said Van Horne, who has done developing on the South Side since 2001.

Along with partner Dale Mark, Project Manager Andre

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Blacknard, Ald. Leslie Hairston (5th), MetroPro Realty Realtor J. Kirk Darling and representatives from the Chicago Department of Housing, Van Horne broke ground on The Cairo, the first of eight condominium buildings with more than 85 percent affordable units in the Woodlawn neighborhood.

The project began close to two years ago, when Van Horne presented a proposal at a Fifth Ward meeting for lots between 66th Street and 67th Street and on Kimbark Avenue, Ingleside Avenue, Maryland Avenue and Greenwood Avenue. Each lot was owned by the City of Chicago and cost \$1 under the City Lots for City Living Program sponsored by the Chicago Department of Housing.

Developers typically set aside about 15 percent to 20 percent of the units purchased through this program as affordable units, according to Molly Sullivan, department spokeswoman. The city sells about 100 lots per year through the City Lots for City Living Program, Sullivan said.

Sullivan said that affordability is determined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which uses a combination of a percentage of area median income and family size to decide its guidelines. Thus, in Chicago a single person making up to \$61,400 per year, a couple earning as much as \$72,400 and a family of four people with an annual income of \$90,500 would be able to purchase many of the units, Sullivan said.

That Van Horne designated 46 units out of the total number of 53 units to be sold as affordable units did not surprise Hairston, who explained that the developer shared her view of the area's possibilities, even when they were not immediately apparent.

"The project came about because we had vacant lots in the neighborhood and we needed to fill those vacant lots with housing to create a true neighborhood, and Benjamin was one of the first people to come into the neighborhood and see the vision at a time when it was very difficult to see," Hairston said.

Each of the affordable units that Greenline is building has a maximum price of \$165,000, said Darling of MetroPro, the company that will be marketing the buildings. He explained that the price is \$20,000 to \$30,000 below market rate for similar units in the same



From left: Benjamin Van Horne, Andre Blacknard, Dale Mark, Brian O'Donnell, Ald. Leslie Hairston, Patricia Walton, J. Kirk Darling, Clare Leary.

neighborhood.

The Units

Van Horne said the buildings will have three, six or eight units. The Cairo and its adjacent building on the 6600 block of Kimbark will each have four two-bedroom, two-bath units as well as two three-bedroom, three-bathroom duplexes on the building's first floor and basement. The two-bedroom units will be about 1,100 square feet, according to Mark, vice president of MPI Construction, Inc., while the three-bedroom units will be about 1,800 square feet.

The buildings will have brick over masonry construction on all four sides, and each unit will have a deck that is 12 feet by 16 feet, according to Darling of MetroPro. Forced hot air heat and air conditioning will accompany every unit, as will a full appliance package ceramic baths, hardwood floors in the public areas and carpeting in bedrooms.

Third floor units will have vaulted ceilings, according to Darling, who explained that upgrades such as marble baths and hardwood floors are available for additional money.

Blacknard added that the duplex units will have a window curtain wall with three sections that have a total of about 120 square feet, while the second floor units will have windows that are close to 80 square feet. Darling said the windows' size is designed to capitalize on the

buildings' location near the corner of 66th Street and Kimbark Avenue.

Darling said that MetroPro will seek to fill many of the units with people from the community. "The affordable housing will let us go and find people in the area," said Darling, adding that MetroPro will communicate with people from the University of Chicago, a local YMCA and Ald. Hairston's office. Other outlets of publicity include South Shore Metra lines, local newspapers, and a range of web sites.

Although much of the marketing will focus on the city's South Side, MetroPro will also try to connect with potential buyers on the North Side through the use of billboards, Darling said.

For his part, Van Horne said he has secured permits for three of the eight buildings and hopes to complete the project in about two years. He explained that he wants to have an impact in affordable housing beyond what is happening with government subsidies.

"I'm trying to have a niche where we use private funds to build affordable housing and I'm here on the South Side because the South Side has the land and a fantastic opportunity to create neighborhoods," Van Horne said.

People who want more information about The Cairo should contact Darling at 773 667-1000 x 524.