

A Drive through Newtown: From Stabilization to Revitalization



by Don Hadsell



by Jan Thornburg

When the Sarasota Office of Housing and Community Development received a \$23 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in January 2010, the intent was to help stabilize a deteriorating neighborhood. Ultimately, the desperately needed federal dollars went beyond stabilization and played a critical role in a much larger movement to revitalize the Newtown community in North Sarasota. During the past several years, more than \$100 million has been invested in the area. Individually, each project has been special, injecting new life into the area. In totality, the initiatives are resulting in a rebirth of Newtown, something many lifelong residents had given up on long ago. Just take a drive through Newtown and you'll see the vast improvements, which are drastically improving the quality of life throughout the community.

When residents and visitors enter Sarasota from the north, it's on a stunning new roadway: U.S. 301, a major

artery which serves as the gateway into Newtown. With a \$19 million investment from the Florida Department of Transportation, the road was widened and beautified, and now sends a strong signal that Newtown is important to Sarasotans.

As you drive along the newly widened U.S. 301, you will see an impressive 44,000-square-foot structure. It's eye catching not only because of its multi-colors, but because it's new construction in this impoverished area. The Robert L. Taylor Community Complex is a recreational facility with a vast array of activities for all ages. The aquatic center, fitness center, recording studio, commercial kitchen, basketball courts and many other amenities are now filling a community void which existed for years. But, the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex isn't intended for Newtown residents solely. Funded through a countywide penny surtax, it is hoped the \$10 million facility becomes a destination for anyone who lives throughout Sarasota County.

A short drive from the Robert L. Taylor Community Center will take you down Martin Luther King, Jr. Way through a compact business district with many new storefronts. The new awnings, signs, window treatments and more were a mutual investment by the City of Sarasota, federal government and business owners. Whether it's a fresh coat of paint or a new front door, the storefront improvements convey a welcoming message to potential customers by greatly improving the look and feel of the heart of Newtown.



The Market Place at Janie's Garden will have 10,500 square feet of retail space and 68 new, affordable apartments.

A few blocks from the business district, a new construction project is underway. A dilapidated apartment complex with a notorious reputation as a drug den was purchased

with HUD Neighborhood Stabilization Program dollars. The 66 dilapidated apartments soon will be razed and replaced with 22 loft-style apartments, which will be rental units and permanently affordable to people in the community.

And, lastly, a few blocks north from Janie's Garden, you will encounter another significant construction zone. The Sarasota County School District is investing approximately \$45 million rebuilding Booker High School. When the project is finished in 2013, there will be five additional buildings on campus and major renovations to five other structures.

The revitalization in Newtown is evident. Each construction project fostered another one and another.

By targeting HUD NSP funds for much needed housing improvements, the Sarasota Office of Housing and Community Development invested in the overall renewal of Newtown. Just take a drive and see for yourself. **HNN**

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Habitat for Humanity Goes Green

Habitat for Humanity South Sarasota County, Inc., received funding through the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) Program to purchase a home in Venice Florida. Built in 1978, the home had very little energy saving features and was a great candidate for a deep retrofit. Habitat partnered with Calcs-Plus, Pacific Northwest National Labs and the Florida Solar Energy Center (FSEC) to provide pre- and post-performance testing and data collection.

Habitat decided it was necessary to insulate the exterior walls; replace the windows with vinyl, thermal insulated, low e units; seal the attic with R-21 open cell spray foam insulation; reduce air infiltration; install a new energy efficient HVAC system and a new heat pump hybrid hot water system. The roof was also replaced with a light colored energy star shingle and a secondary water barrier was added. All of the materials are Energy Star certified.

The preliminary Home Energy Rating System (HERS) score was 185. After the rehab, the HERS score was 57. The newly rehabbed home has an estimated annual utility bill of \$949. Before the rehab, the annual cost for power was \$2,580. This indicates a 63% projected savings compared to the original home. The FSEC provided a monthly data monitoring system to track energy consumption in the home. The home received an Energy Star certification, a green certification from the Florida Green Building Coalition, met the Building America's Builders Challenge criteria and was awarded an Energy Value Housing Award (EVHA) from the National Association of Home Builders.

Habitat dedicated the home June 30, 2011, to a very deserving family. They are currently enjoying an extremely efficient home, with reduced energy costs thanks to our dedicated volunteers who helped complete the deep retrofit. **HNN**