



CAN-DO ATTITUDE PAYS OFF FOR CREIGHTON/GERRISH DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

When it comes to developing affordable housing, nothing replaces persistence.

From its inception in 1995, Creighton/Gerrish Development Association (C/GDA) sought to develop a mixed residential and institutional development on a decaying, vacant block of land in the north end of downtown Halifax. Along the way, the organization has had to overcome drawn out land-purchase negotiations, a lengthy municipal strike, an unexpected \$100,000 soil contamination clean up, municipal amalgamation, and a protracted historical-site review.

"Everything that could have happened, happened," says Grant Wanzel, President of C/GDA. "If the Creighton/Gerrish project had been a private business venture, we would have walked away."

But they didn't. And thanks to C/GDA's resolve, today a new 19-unit apartment building for low-income people sits on the Creighton/Gerrish site. The apartment building represents the first phase of the \$7.25 million mixed-use project, which C/GDA plans to complete by 2004. The other phases include 52 units of affordable housing and a 20,000 square-foot multi-purpose community centre for the City's black population.

Four community-based non-profit groups make up C/GDA: the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, a province-wide research and lobby group; Harbour City Homes, Halifax's former non-profit housing society; the Black Community Work Group, an organization that serves Halifax's black community; and the Metro Non-Profit Housing Association, which houses low-income single persons.

Together these groups have concentrated on a block of land bounded by Creighton, Gottingen, Gerrish, and Cunard streets. By revitalizing this block, the C/GDA hopes to see a domino effect that will lead to a renewal of adjacent residential properties.

For this reason, C/GDA recognizes the importance of building high-quality properties that will last. By limiting its administrative costs and saving on big expenses such as land, construction financing, and design, C/GDA avoids having to cut corners during construction.

The C/GDA development offers affordable home ownership in a neighbourhood where 87 per cent of households rent and 50 per cent of those renting live in non-profit and public housing. The project addresses homelessness not by building shelters, but by constructing permanent affordable housing. It also gives material shape and identity to an important community institution.

A streamlined organizational structure and no-nonsense culture have helped C/GDA succeed, but Mr. Wanzel credits strong teamwork with an equal share of the limelight. "If we hadn't been a team, we would not have accomplished what we have," he says, "and we wouldn't be able to accomplish what's left to do. The people who are involved are extremely sound, and they believe in what they're doing. That's the most important part."

Creighton/Gerrish Development Association is a finalist in the Process and Management category of the 2002 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Housing Awards Program, **Affordable Housing Innovations**. The Housing Awards recognize individuals, companies and organizations that have made significant contributions to improving housing affordability in Canada.

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