

group says.

Beginning in 2014, the credits will be provided to

for the nonprofit Families USA.

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director of Families USA, told *The Greenville News* that the program will en-

its also help for lower-income people through the Medicaid safety net."

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Once-blighted neighborhood finds hope



HEIDI HEILBRUNN / Staff

Marilyn Stephens has been living in her new Homes of Hope house on Kings View Street since August. Stephens said she feels part of a community now.

New homes tear down area's bad reputation

By **Angelia Davis**

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A West Greenville neighborhood that Marilyn Stephens at one time would never drive through at night has become the place where she joyfully resides.

Stephens lives in one of the 20 new Charleston-style duplex rentals built in the Queen Street area as part of a revitalization effort resulting from a partnership between the Homes of Hope and the city of Greenville.

Along with the du-

plexes are new streets lined with sidewalks and trees and seven new single-family houses for affordable homeownership opportunities.

Gone are all traces of former duplexes that some say were an anchor to the drug and

gang-related crimes that had cast a dark shadow over the community.

Before, it "was not a place I would consider living," Stephens said.

That is one reason why Homes of Hope

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didn't just plant houses there. The organization made a commitment to cultivate a revived community.

“Our philosophy is about helping the families, but we saw way beyond that when we started working with the neighborhood association and the city to see the benefits of these other things,” said Don Oglesby, executive director of Homes of Hope, a nonprofit organization that aims to provide safe, affordable housing for low-income and homeless people.

Homes of Hope adopted the West Greenville area in 2002. But when the organization first started building houses there, the duplexes would stick out like a sore thumb, Oglesby said.

“Those were the worst looking houses in the neighborhood,” he said.

“Every neighborhood association meeting I went to, they (residents) would always say, ‘When are y’all (the city) going to do some-

thing’ because ‘it’s terrible,’” Oglesby said.

Ginny Stroud, community development administrator for the city of Greenville, said the city’s master plan included redeveloping the property which was “dilapidated and functionally out of date.”

Oglesby said he started praying about the duplex situation, saying, ‘Lord, I think we’re supposed to do something about it.’ Sure enough, I was hearing that from Him.”

Oglesby said the city and the West Greenville Neighborhood association already knew what they wanted. He said Homes of Hope just implemented their vision.

“It had stuff like not just bringing in new houses, it had getting rid of blight and getting rid of dead-end cul-de-sac areas where crime tended to happen,” he said.

“The city said, ‘We’ll help you. We’ll build the roads and open up these areas if you’ll bring the houses in.’ So, we learned how to do the community development way beyond the housing where we actually saw

the needs of the neighborhood.”

Most Homes of Hope projects, from conceptual idea to completion, take about two years and cost about \$1.25 million. This one, Oglesby said, not only took five years but cost more than \$3 million.

“Every possible hurdle, obstacle that you could encounter, we had to encounter with that project,” he said.

The result, though, was “a real gateway into the community,” Stroud said. “It’s a great example of bringing together good quality rental with homeownership opportunities, which was what the community really wanted to see.”

As part of the renewal, the duplexes in question became Kings View Pointe.

Oglesby said, “As a Christian organization, we wanted to have two connotations. We have the Kings View Pointe as far as God’s view, and so it’s a cool name change to reflect what we see is happening out there,” he said.

“Lives of people are be-

ing changed because of the changes to the housing and the neighborhood.”

Stephens is among residents benefiting from the change. She applied for a home in the neighborhood after her Section 8 apartment failed inspection and she had to move. Around the same time, she learned her daughter had cancer.

“We were really desperate and being on Section 8, I had a lot of doors shut in my face because there’s such a stigma with people on Section 8,” Stephens said. “They accepted me due to my circumstance. It was really a blessing.”

Stephens said her new home is a place where she feels a part of a community.

“Sometimes I sit outside and you don’t see any cars, you don’t hear any people, you look at the stars. It’s amazing,” she said. “In the middle of an urban neighborhood, you can see the stars so brightly.”

Groups that have helped Homes of Hope in the revitalization include the state Housing Finance and Development Authority, the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development,

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