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Nation's Largest Affordable Energy Star-Certified Building Complete

By Erika Schnitzer, Associate Editor

Bronx, NY—The Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDCo), a Bronx-based non-profit organization that builds affordable homes, hosted an open house event yesterday to celebrate the completion of its \$39 million, 128-unit Intervale Green, the largest affordable Energy Star-certified high-rise building in the nation. With the project complete, residents will begin moving in within the next two weeks.



“Trying to pull together the best in aesthetics and energy efficiency and affordability is really a challenge, but we want to show that it can be done—and it can be done even on the worst of sites,” Nancy Biberman, founder and president of WHEDCo, tells MHN.

Intervale Green was built on a former brownfield site that contained contaminated water and soil. WHEDCo filtered the water so that only clean water went into the city's sewer system and replaced the soil with clean topsoil, says Biberman.

In addition, Intervale Green is 30 percent more efficient than a standard building and reduces resident utility costs by 33 percent. The development's green features include a high-performance building envelope, which comprises rigid exterior insulation, low-E argon windows and apartments that are air sealed and ventilated, as well as space and water heater boilers that are 85 percent efficient.

All units feature low-flow faucets aerators, showerheads and toilets, as well as Energy Star refrigerators, wheatboard kitchen countertops and recycled-content flooring. Compact fluorescent lights, lighting sensors and Energy Star washing machines are available throughout the community, as are low-VOC paints, sealants and adhesives. In addition, 40 tons of marble and Italian porcelain tile—that would have otherwise been thrown out—was donated for use on kitchen backsplashes.

“It's a first of its kind and we are trying to show that it can be done, that you need to pay

a lot of attention to detail and that green is a word that has multiple meanings,” says Biberman. “Part of it is saving money and making sure that you deal with environmental pollutants, but a lot of green is also aesthetic.”

Intervale Green includes two green roofs, one of which is usable for resident gardening, as well as two fully landscaped courtyards, a community room with a kitchen and a public garden with sculptures—made of recycled materials—by local artists. A wall collage in the building’s lobby makes use of recycled scrap metal.

The project, says Biberman, has “[shed] light on what a green-collar job could mean, what products are needed, where we could create a market if a movement for building green and affordable took root—and it’s demonstrating that it’s possible.”

The development offers one-, two- and three-bedroom residences, ranging in size from 700 to 1,000 sq. ft. Monthly rents range from \$782 to \$1,089. The community is targeted for residents earning 60 percent or less of the area median income, with 30 percent of the residences reserved for families coming directly from homeless shelters. WHEDCo will provide every family at Intervale Green with window A/C units and a recycled, refurbished computer, as well as low-cost Internet access.

Additionally, WHEDCo recently launched www.movingday.org, an interactive website to help furnish each apartment. Visitors can take a virtual tour of a model apartment and select a donation—which is tax deductible—for anything from a single piece of furniture to an entire apartment.

Intervale Green’s project team includes Astoria-based Mega Contracting Inc., Edelman Sultan Knox & Wood Architects and architect supervisor Peter Franzese. Steven Winter Associates Inc. consulted on the green building features.

Financing for Intervale Green was provided through Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTCs), NYC Housing Development Corp.’s (NYCHDC) tax-exempt bonds and its Low-Income Affordable Marketplace Program (LAMP), the Department of Housing Preservation & Development’s Mixed-Income Rental Program (MIRP) and capital funding appropriations from the New York City Council and the Bronx Borough President.

Green financing was provided through NYSERDA’s (New York State Energy Research and Development Authority) Energy Star Multifamily Performance Program, Enterprise Green Communities, the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (BOEDC), the Bronx Initiative on Energy and the Environment (BIEE)—an initiative for green roofs—and the Home Depot Foundation