



At a Glance

Location:

Jersey City, NJ

Founded:

1938

Employees:

300

Specialty:

Developing safe, affordable, sustainable, and accessible housing

Annual Operating Budget:

\$63 million

Always Pushing

The people behind the **Jersey City Housing Authority** make the most of its (sometimes intermittent) support systems without sacrificing quality of construction

by *Kelli Lawrence*

AFTER MORE THAN 30 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY, MARIA MAIO knows how to keep the wheels of public-housing progress in motion. In short, it's in the phrase, "If at first you don't succeed, try—try again." This despite dealing with people, rules, and opinions that are in a constant state of change.

Maio's work as executive director of the Jersey City Housing Authority (JCHA) is all about building restoration, coordinating neighborhood revitalization, and constantly pushing to see both efforts to fruition. "Once we've decided that we're going to do a revitalization project, we can't stop," Maio says. "We have to keep up the momentum by always doing something tangible so people understand this will eventually happen."

JCHA's mission is to develop safe, affordable, sustainable, accessible housing, but like many housing authorities, it often encounters serious budget shortcomings. Such is the case with the A. Harry Moore development, a collection of mixed-income rental apartments that got underway in 1998 and that are only in the third of five development phases.

"We dedicated the first two phases of the project with three [previously occupied] high-rises standing and no money to tear them down," Maio says. "But as luck would

Above: Barbara Place Terrace—67 mixed-income rental townhouse units on the old barracks-style Lafayette Gardens site—was a hard-earned success for the JCHA.

Photo: Jeffrey Totaro



Left: Only in the third of five development phases, the JCHA's A. Harry Moore development already has 144 townhouse units, and another 60 are in construction.



Photo: Ron Jackson Artistry

The Michaels Organization is proud to be a partner to the Jersey City Housing Authority as it transforms distressed areas of concentrated poverty into viable and sustainable mixed-income neighborhoods, and congratulates the Agency for its winning development strategies, neighborhood revitalization efforts, and service to its residents.

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have it, we received federal stimulus funds, which we used to tear down the buildings.” The result, as of May 2011, is 144 townhouse units completed and another 60 townhouses in construction, which receive a steady stream of praise from those who have witnessed the site’s transformation. “It’s that idea of momentum again,” Maio says. “When opportunity knocks, you do have to be ready.”

In addition to A. Harry Moore, opportunity also came calling for the JCHA to get behind several other developments. One is a HOPE VI-funded revitalization at Curries Woods, completed in 2005, which replaced obsolete high-rises with townhouse rentals and for-sale homes. Other developments JCHA currently is working on include the HOPE VI-funded revitalization at Lafayette Gardens, which will replace barracks-style public housing with traditional townhouses; a large-scale revitalization of Montgomery Gardens and McGinley Square, a high-rise public-housing complex and its surrounding neighborhood; and an energy-performance contract that will bring almost \$10 million worth of energy-efficiency items into existing area public housing.

JCHA’s projects are opportunities lost, however, if they can’t secure contractors prepared to meet their standards. “A very large market-rate developer looked at a development to see if we could join forces with them,” says director of development and design Joan Pollock. “And after hearing what we expected from a contractor, they decided they could not support that high a level of construction. We don’t let low-income housing equate with shoddy housing.”

Such demands often end up as more complications for JCHA, but Maio has found a sense of reward that helps keep her eyes on the prize no matter what the day-to-day difficulties. “One of your residents will come up to you and say, ‘My child can now sleep in peace; I don’t hear gun shots in the middle of the night,’” she says. “[Then] all the obstacles are forgotten, and we can do this again.” **ABQ**

A Message from Michaels Development Company

Michaels Development and Interstate Realty Management have collaborated with the Jersey City Housing Authority on nearly 400 mixed-income residential units in six separate developments since 2001. We are proud of our award-winning partnership and congratulate JCHA for its industry leadership. Michaels Development and IRM are companies of The Michaels Organization.