



# THE RESIDENT NEWSLETTER



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## Spring Creek Towers Resident Learns to Weatherize Homes



*Kahryl Fann is a paid intern with Community Environmental Center. Photo: CEC*

Kahryl Fann, a resident of Spring Creek Towers in the New York City borough of Brooklyn, is a paid intern learning to weatherize apartments. Spring Creek Towers is the nation's largest federally assisted housing complex where \$6 million in ARRA funds is retrofitting over 5,000 apartments. Fann is helping weatherize apartments, like Spring Creek Towers, under the Weatherization Assistance Program.

Weatherization helps buildings have the appropriate heating or cooling for the seasons. It also lowers energy bills, and lessens the impact of climate change. "It's something I want to do," says 21-year-old Fann. "Seeing how effective weatherization is, I want to help people save money and make sure they're healthier."

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## Federal Funds Are Changing the Feel of Public Housing

Funds from HUD and the Department of Energy (DOE) are helping public housing agencies (PHAs) around the country make their developments more energy efficient and comfortable for residents. HUD awarded \$600 million in funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009 to 169 PHAs for energy efficiency and sustainability efforts. Typical repairs and renovations include connecting neighborhoods and green spaces, improving rainwater management or water conservation, meeting Energy Star standards for new construction, insulating pipes, replacing lighting fixtures and bulbs, and sealing air leaks. The funds are also being used to purchase and install high efficiency boilers and heaters, programmable thermostats, double-paned windows, smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, and Energy Star appliances.

HUD is also working with the DOE Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). DOE provides funding to States, U.S. overseas territories, and Indian tribal governments. They, in turn, fund a network of local nonprofit organizations and local governments that provide weatherization services for multi-family buildings and for homeowners who meet low-income and other qualifications. DOE recently made it easier to use WAP in public housing. Recent changes now allow buildings identified by HUD and included on a list published by the DOE to meet the latter's weatherization program income requirements automatically. DOE's program received \$5 billion under the ARRA.

To decide what improvements should be made to a building, an energy audit is conducted. Audits point out where a home is losing energy and determine the efficiency of the heating and cooling systems. An assessment may also show you ways to conserve hot water and electricity. Assessments often use equipment such as blower doors, which measure air leaks, and infrared cameras, which reveal hard-to-detect areas of air leakage and missing insulation. The audit determines which changes will have the greatest impact and make the most financial sense.

## UPCOMING DATES

- » **February 15, 2011 - 2pm-3:30pm**  
Healthy Neighborhoods webinar:  
Caring for the Mind  
(see Help Corner for details)

# Ten Things to Know About the Rental Housing Revitalization Act

Six million households pay more than half their income for housing; yet, every year, America loses tens of thousands of affordable homes. In addition, many of these units need \$20 to 30 billion in repairs. In response, early last year, HUD offered a proposal which would allow PHAs to convert their public housing stock to project based contracts, access one of the nation's safest forms of lending and bring \$25 billion in much-needed repair and renovation to the public's affordable housing stock.

Last month, Congressman Keith Ellison of Minnesota introduced the Rental Housing Revitalization Act (RHRA). The bill builds on and refines HUD's earlier proposal and reflects months of briefings and listening to residents and key stakeholders in America's diverse communities who share a commitment to preserving the nation's inventory of affordable rental housing—and improving the way the system serves families—for generations to come.

- 1. Completely Voluntary:** The Rental Housing Revitalization Act explicitly says the conversion of public housing to project based contracts will be voluntary. Further, the legislation requires that all terms and requirements will apply only to properties that convert to the new system. Owners will have the right to renew under the current system if they so choose.
- 2. Access to New Funding:** HUD funding to public housing under RHRA will be based on local market rents. This will increase funding per converted unit in most communities. For rural and other markets that have rents too low to keep properties operating, the bill allows HUD to provide an above-market "exception rent." Tenants will continue to pay 30 percent of their income. With these new resources, PHAs that convert will be able to attract additional public and private financing to repair and rehabilitate their properties.
- 3. Safe Borrowing:** Under RHRA, public housing will be able to access funding tools that every other affordable housing program has safely borrowed with for decades. Other property owners have already saved thousands of affordable homes by using Section 8 funds to bring in other sources. This has protected their buildings from foreclosures too. Now, public housing owners will also be able to receive Low-Income Housing Tax Credits and private financing to increase their budgets.
- 4. Permanent Affordability:** If the property is in good condition and owners have obeyed HUD rules, RHRA requires HUD to offer contract extensions and for local agencies to accept them: This will preserve these properties forever. If the property or owner is not in good standing, HUD may, after consulting with residents, transfer the assistance to a nearby property or provide other forms of rental assistance to tenants.
- 5. Foreclosure Protections:** RHRA requires that public housing will remain publicly-owned. In the highly unlikely event of foreclosure HUD will be required to purchase a property or assign the right to another public entity. Protections exist even before a property reaches this point. If a property goes into default, HUD must be notified immediately and can make the loan current using rental assistance funding. There are other protections: a PHA cannot sell or transfer a property without HUD approval. HUD may only approve a sale or transfer to a non-profit entity if there is no capable public entity willing to take ownership of the property. Even if a PHA uses Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to rehabilitate a property and partners with a for-profit entity, the PHA must have an option to purchase the property at the end of the tax credit compliance period and maintain an active role in property management decisions.
- 6. Real Resident Choice:** RHRA makes certain families can choose where they live and that owners have the opportunity to renovate their properties to bring them up to standard. That is why the Resident Choice Option will only apply to converted properties and become available after 2 years. The only exception would be if no rehabilitation is needed. To be fair to families waiting for vouchers, HUD cannot require a PHA to use more than one out of every three available vouchers for Resident Choice. HUD may also establish new wait list procedures to deal with any delay for these families as a result of the Choice option.
- 7. Strong, Fair Resident Rights and Protections:** Real choice also means the option to stay in decent, well-maintained housing in your current neighborhood. That is why RHRA protects residents from eviction, rental assistance termination or re-screening as a result of conversion. Residents must be consulted prior to, during, and after conversion. For the first time in history, RHRA extends these rights and protections to voucher holders as well. Also, tenants have a right to organize, independent of PHAs and owners. HUD is required to fund legitimate organizing efforts. Organizations currently receiving funds for tenant organizing will continue to under RHRA.
- 8. Less Bureaucracy:** Today, HUD has 13 different rental assistance programs. Families must wade through a mass of paperwork to receive assistance. And owners face a maze of regulations to provide it. Under RHRA, the Federal government will get its house in order. It will make HUD's programs easier to use. Local partners can then focus more on the needs of their communities and less on complying with inflexible, one-size-fits-all rules.
- 9. Closer Ties to Community:** To bring neighborhoods out of isolation and encourage a mix of incomes, owners may distribute units in their contract between properties with HUD approval so long as the total number of affordable units is maintained. Owners will also be able to create commercial spaces on their property for grocery stores or other needed businesses.
- 10. Overall 300,000 Jobs:** By helping public and multifamily housing property owners to access \$25 billion in public and private funds for repairs and renovations, RHRA would create more than 90,000 new jobs across the country in the first year—and 300,000 overall. These are the good-paying construction, contracting, and maintenance jobs—jobs that cannot be outsourced and will be created in the communities that need them most.

(Cont'd from page 1)

Fann had learned from her high school counselor that Green City Force (GCF) was offering a 6-month training program. GCF is a New York City-based non-profit organization that combines job training with community service to foster environmentally healthy urban communities. Also GCF prepares young people for careers in the green economy. She decided to postpone college and enroll in the program.



Spring Creek Towers where \$6 million in ARRA funds is retrofitting over 5,000 apartments. Photo: CEC

After receiving her certificate, Fann interned at the Community Environmental Center (CEC). The CEC was founded in 1994 to address the housing and energy efficiency needs of low- and middle-income communities. It has since grown into the largest non-profit energy conservation organization in New York State and holds the State's largest contract for weatherization assistance services. Fann's training included going door-to-door informing people of the benefits of weatherization and making presentations. She has also learned two very key weatherization activities: blowing cellulose insulation into walls and attic spaces, and installing new windows. Fann is officially on track to be hired for a weatherization crew. She particularly likes installing windows.

To learn more about GCF, call 718-923-1400.

To learn more about CEC, call 718-784-1444 or visit: [www.cecenter.org](http://www.cecenter.org)

This article was adapted from: <http://bit.ly/f5Rs1c>



# TIPS

## Keep Warm and Safe

As winter gets colder, here are tips to keep you warm and safe.

- Make sure there are 3 feet between the heater and any furniture or things that might burn. It is dangerous to leave a space heater unattended or leave children alone with one. The hot surfaces can cause burns. Electric heaters should be unplugged if you go to bed or leave the house. Don't use electric heaters with frayed or damaged cords.
- Bake something that is cooked at a low temperature for a longer period of time. This includes stews, roasts, casseroles and soups. Then warm up again, by eating what you cooked.
- Make sure furniture, appliances, and other objects do not block your heat vents, radiators and baseboard heating units. To get the most warmth, air should be able to flow freely.
- Try a hot water bottle. A new version of the water bottle: a clean sock filled with uncooked rice or dried beans, warmed in the microwave, is another option.
- Never use your oven to heat your house. An oven is not made for heating a room. It is not good for your stove and it can be dangerous. Using the open oven of a gas stove in a closed house burns oxygen. This can create carbon monoxide gas. Even small amounts of carbon monoxide can cause severe illness and even death.
- If you pay your own utilities, and are having trouble paying your heating bills, contact the National Energy Assistance Referral (NEAR) project. NEAR is a free service with information on where to apply for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which may pay a portion of the energy bills of eligible low-income persons. Please include your city, county and state in your message.

Call NEAR toll-free at 1-866-674-6327 or TTY 1-866-367-6228 or e-mail [energyassistance@ncat.org](mailto:energyassistance@ncat.org) for an energy assistance referral.

## Contact us:

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Information Resource Center (PIH IRC)**

2614 Chapel Lake Drive  
Gambrills, MD 21054

**Toll free number:** 1-800-955-2232

**Fax number:** 1-443-302-2084

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(Put "Resident Newsletter" in subject line)

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## HELP CORNER

HUD Neighborhood Networks and the National Network of Libraries of Medicine are offering monthly health webinars. To participate, go to your local Neighborhood Networks computer center or log-on with a phone and a computer. Connect at: <http://bit.ly/hNMmzz>. Enter as a Guest. Type your first and last name. Follow the instructions in the meeting room to have Adobe Connect call your phone or call 1-866-274-9016 and enter the participant code 741608.

For a calendar of webinars: <http://bit.ly/eKpekq>