



Rural Delivery

Rural Housing Coalition of New York's Quarterly Newsletter

FALL 2021

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of New York

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From Blight to Asset: The Benefit of Adaptive Reuse

Interview with Amy Casciani, Vice President of Real Estate Development

There are few communities in our service areas that you can drive through and find no vacant buildings or no vacant storefronts. They may be seen in our downtowns, in our suburbs, or in our residential neighborhoods. They can be the big box stores closing their doors after decades or the Rite Aid once in the downtown and now has moved to a major intersection.



Sears Project, Rochester

A study from the Brookings Institution notes, “the construction of new buildings alone will destroy one-third of our existing building stock by 2030. We’ve treated old buildings like we once treated plastic shopping bags... preservation must stand alongside conservation as an equal force in the sustainability game.”

The nationwide trend to transform vacant properties into alternative uses is on the rise and PathStone Corporation in Rochester has found an opportunity to convert a vacant Sears building into affordable housing.

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Rebuilding Together Saratoga County

*Awarded Older Adults Home
Modification Pilot Program Grant*

Rebuilding Together Saratoga County, founded in 2003 by Michelle Larkin, responded to a HUD request for proposals to fund a pilot program focused on providing low-income older adult homeowners with accessibility modifications

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Rural Delivery

Rural Delivery is published by the New York State Rural Housing Coalition, Inc. The Coalition is a non-profit statewide membership organization dedicated to strengthening and revitalizing rural New York by assisting housing and community development providers.

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 Rural Housing Coalition
of New York

Executive Director Update

As you can see, the Rural Delivery has been given a facelift and updated to a quarterly newsletter that provides more in-depth content on our members and their organization's activities and accomplishments.



Unfortunately, due to the uncertainty that the spread of the Delta variant has had on large gatherings, we have transitioned our Annual Conference with Habitat for Humanity into a virtual event again this year. The dates remain the same – November 9-10th, with a day and a half of workshops and panel discussions on a range of topics including CDBG and Mobile Home Replacements to Working with Zoning and Planning Boards and Top Ten HR Issues.

We have launched a membership drive this Fall and hope to get to 200 members by the end of year. RHC has already grown 66% since the end of our last fiscal year. If you can recommend at least three potential members via this form on our website, you will be entered into a drawing to win a \$25 Amazon gift card. [Enter Here.](#)

In addition, by early Spring we hope to have all the Census data RPCs need to complete their state or federal grant applications as well as maps that show service areas.



We appreciate the generous support of our sponsors





Member In Focus

April Ramadhan



The Member In Focus is a new feature of the revamped Rural Delivery newsletter, which will transition to a quarterly publication with more in-depth stories about our members and their organizations. The Rural Dispatch, which is the weekly email newsletter, will focus on more timely issues like grant announcements and deadlines, RHC news and job postings, etc.

For our inaugural publication of the quarterly Rural Delivery, we interviewed April Ramadhan, Executive Director of the Rural Revitalization Corporation located in Olean, Cattaraugus County.

April is originally from a very small town named Waterfall, population 462, in rural Pennsylvania. She moved to New York for college and lives in a burgeoning metropolis called Hinsdale, which is about four times the size of her birthplace.

After graduating high school at the age of seventeen and spending a year in college, she joined AmeriCorps. She lived on ramen noodles due to the miniscule stipend provided, but found her calling helping others and making communities better.

She went to work for Healthy Families New York and then a private Catholic school before ending up at Rural Revitalization Corp. (RRC). She became the Executive Director in 2019.

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Community

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From Blight continued from page 1

Amy Casciani is the Vice President Real Estate Development and when I asked Amy to talk about PathStone's adaptive re-use project, she began by describing the community and surrounding neighborhoods where the project is located. Amy grew up in the Rochester area and knows the history of the towns and cities throughout western New York. "The project is located in one of the first suburban areas in Rochester and today has a large senior population", said Amy. "The Sears two-story building connected to an interior mall, was vacated in the 1990's and the mall retail stores began to leave once Sears closed their doors".



Skyview Park Apartments - May Drone Flight 2021

In a meeting with one of her contractors on an entirely different project, Amy mentioned how she would "love to convert the Sears building into affordable housing". The contractor, also from the area and was familiar with the property, made a call to the owner of the Sears building to inquire about the property. "What started as a side-bar discussion in a meeting unrelated to the Sears property, became the future Skyview Park Apartments".

After several meetings with the owner of the Sears Building and the contractor, Amy brought in an architect and together they formulated the feasibility of converting this vacant structure into affordable housing. And once the idea was fully formed, the next step was to introduce the project to the town. Of course, the time and energy to develop an idea, research the feasibility, receive all the approvals, find the funding, and move the project forward, can be arduous. (You can learn more about the process at Amy's presentation at the conference in November).

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The Sears building was purchased by PathStone, and the ground is leased. The plan to create 77 units of affordable housing in the two-story space was the initial plan but the decision was made to build an additional 80 new units next to the building using a portion of the Sears parking lot. When completed, the two buildings would be connected via a skywalk and have direct interior access to the mall.

"An important piece to this project was to ensure there was an economy of scale between housing and economic development", said Amy. Currently, there is movement to rent spaces in the mall alongside retail businesses, such as a Senior Daycare facility, health and wellness center, local hospital Nursing Program. "Our hope is we are changing the fabric of economic growth by turning blight into an asset".

Amy will be presenting at the 2021 Stronger Together Housing Conference on November 9th from 2:45-3:45 pm. She will be sharing photos of the Skywalk Park Apartments and the entire process involved with an adaptive reuse project

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Rebuilding continued from page 1

and minor home repairs so they can remain in their homes and was awarded a \$1M grant to be administered over a 3-year period. “This is a brand-new initiative with the goal of providing low-cost modifications to adults 60 years and older with a household income of 80% of the Area Median Income or lower to help them age in place,” said Executive Director Michelle Larkin.

Typical repairs will include:

- Adding exterior lighting
- Fixing gutters/downspouts
- Replacing skirting (manufactured/mobile homes)
- Installing ramps
- Installing handrails
- Replacing door locks/knobs
- Eliminating trip hazards
- Repairing floors to remove uneven surfaces
- Removing carpeting
- Modifying bathrooms for accessibility (grab bars, etc.)
- And more!



Working with social service agencies, including the Office for the Aging in the rural communities of Warren, Washington, and Saratoga Counties, Rebuilding Together will track the data over the 3-year timeframe. HUD will then evaluate the program to determine future funding. “The program trainings will be held in Washington DC where we will be educated on tracking protocol, data compilation, and milestones throughout the length of the program,” Michelle said. Among the requirements of the pilot program will be the contracting of an Occupational Therapist to perform an initial in-home assessment and a post-project assessment.

In the 18 years since its founding, Rebuilding Together Saratoga County has repaired 1,379 homes, revitalized 103 nonprofit centers and community spaces, and replaced 20 substandard manufactured homes with the help of more than 10,672 volunteers who have dedicated over 81,847 hours of their time, bringing hope and renewed pride to homeowners in need throughout Saratoga County.

“The opportunity to be a part of this pilot program will increase our capacity to be proactive in helping older adults age in place, as well as addressing home repairs early on before they develop into emergency home repairs,” remarked Michelle.

From Blight continued from page 4

including how the project was funded. Peter Wehner, Architect from Passero Associates and Christa Construction LLC.

PathStone Corporation, a non-profit company serving western New York, develops affordable housing and self-manages many of their properties. PathStone previously known as Rural Opportunities Inc. is a NYS Rural Preservation Company and has been a long-time member of the Rural Housing Coalition.

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RRC administers AHC home improvement grants, collaborates on a variety of CDBG projects, provides first-time homebuyer education, youth/teen financial education programs, three community gardens, and a senior citizens safe homes program.

RRC has been fortunate in finding a generous patron in the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation for Western New York. The Foundation supports RRC's three community gardens and the safe homes program. This funding gives RRC the opportunity to bring people together, and create positive community interactions, which help create healthy neighborhoods. They also continued to award grants during the pandemic, which helped RRC face the numerous challenges of Covid-19.

April was asked what are some of the challenges and opportunities facing her community and she responded, "RRC serves low-income communities which need more higher paying jobs, a problem throughout many parts of rural America. Luckily, we also have a community that believes in partnerships and finding grants to benefit our small cities and towns. Olean has a great Community Development Program, utilizing \$10 million in funding from the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) to modernize and revamp the small city. The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr Foundation has funded multiple playgrounds throughout Cattaraugus County, and the County Land Bank has been a great asset to help demolish or renovate vacant, condemned, unsafe homes. RRC has a lot of partners working to revitalize Cattaraugus County, and that benefits everyone."


RRC was already a member of RHC when April became Executive Director and she believes their membership in RHC helped save the agency during a time of turmoil. "RRC's previous Executive Director abruptly left the agency, and when I assumed the position, I was unsure where to turn for guidance, direction, and advice. Thankfully, I had the support of the Rural Housing Coalition, who was there to answer my many questions as I was learning!", stated April.

In conclusion, she was asked what she would like the Coalition to continue to do or begin to initiate to better assist her and her organization in the future. She replied, "I think it's great that RHC is proving more in-depth training, because many of these trainings often aren't offered elsewhere."



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