IN THE INFORMER

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Cover photo: Onita Howell Photography
I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our immediate Past President Judy Mellard for her service the past two years. In the short time since I've assumed the duties of president, I've come to appreciate her commitment and dedication to MAHRO, and I will strive to carry on her good work.

At the release of this publication, we will be attending our annual Commissioners' Conference, where we will be looking forward to the activities and training sessions. These training sessions give our commissioners the knowledge and resources they need to make the decisions with which they are tasked. All of us owe thanks to our professional development committee and Commissioner John Bounds for making this conference the success I know it will be.

In the times ahead, we will be faced with many uncertainties such as financial constraints, burdensome regulations, and changing leadership on the state and federal levels. It will be vital for us, as individuals and committees, to work hand in hand with our senators and representatives on both levels. Through constant communication and the sharing of ideas and concerns, we will be able to deal with the problems that we will face. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of each MAHRO member and his or her role in helping us reach our organizational goals.

Over the course of my tenure as president, I look forward to working with the many dedicated MAHRO board members and committee members as well as the entire MAHRO membership. I would like to thank all of those responsible for allowing me the honor to serve as president of this vital organization and offer a heartfelt thanks for the trust placed in me. A very special thank you to the Louisville Housing Authority's board of commissioners for allowing me the latitude to accept this responsibility.

Ginger Ming, MAHRO president

MAHRO holds an annual board meeting to be determined by the board of directors. A special meeting of the members for any purpose may be called at any time by a majority of the board of directors, or upon the written request of 10% of the voting members.

The board typically holds the annual meeting in conjunction with the annual conference. MAHRO reports any business necessary to the attendees at the conclusion of the annual conference.
Ginger Ming is the executive director of the Louisville Housing Authority where she has 15 years of service. She is currently the president of MAHRO and serves on the MAHARM insurance board. Ginger is currently serving as the chairperson of the SERC housing committee. She also serves on the housing committee for NAHRO.

Bob Farrar is the director of operations for Mississippi’s West Point Housing Authority. He has 34 years’ experience in the housing industry and serves on the board of directors as senior vice-president for MAHRO. He served as MAHRO president in 2009-2011. Bob serves on SERC’s history and archival committee and the small agency task force committee and is a past member of the education and training, member services, professional development, and executive committees. He also serves on NAHRO’s member services and small agency task force committees.

Kaye Judson is the executive director of the West Point Housing Authority in West Point, Mississippi. Kaye has 31 years’ experience in public housing and holds a bachelor’s degree in science and accounting. She currently serves as secretary-treasurer of her state association and is co-chairperson of the scholarship committee for SERC. She has served on SERC’s small agency task force, scholarship, housing, professional development, and education and training committees. Kaye also serves on NAHRO’s professional development and small agency task force committees.

Paula Dempsey is the occupancy administrator at the Louisville Housing Authority of Louisville where she has 2 years of service. She is currently serving as SERC’s vice president for professional development in MAHRO and is currently serving on SERC’s professional and development committee.

Alan Ingram is the executive director for the Natchez Housing Authority. He has 36 years’ experience and serves as the vice president of member services in MAHRO. He is also a member of MAHRO scholarship committee, legislative committee, the MAHARM Insurance advisory board and is the editor for the MAHRO Informer. Alan is currently serving on SERC’s scholarship and member services committees, and is a past state representative and former member of the executive, legislative and scholarship committees. He has a bachelor’s degree in public administration from the University of Mississippi.

Katina Pace is deputy executive director for Mississippi Regional Housing Authority VI (MRHA VI) in Jackson. Prior to joining MRHA VI in December 2013, she served as vice president of the allocation division of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program for the state of Mississippi at Mississippi Home Corporation. She has over 17 years of affordable housing experience. Ms. Pace received her bachelor's degree in economics with an accounting emphasis from Tougaloo College.

John Bounds is the chairperson of the board of commissioners for Mississippi’s Oxford Housing Authority. He has 16 years’ experience in the housing industry. John has a bachelor’s degree from the University of Mississippi, and he serves as the vice president of the board of commissioners for MAHRO.

Ben Washington is the executive director of the Vicksburg Housing Authority and its non-profit Vicksburg Housing Management and Development LLC, where he has over six years’ service. He is a board member for MAHRO, and serves on SERC’s rental assistance committee. He has a bachelor’s degree in science administration from University of Southern Mississippi.

Brian Power is the executive director at Mississippi Regional Housing Authority IV in Columbus, MS, and has 33 years’ service in public housing. Brian serves on the board of directors and as past president of MAHRO. He has been a SERC member for 25 years and has served on numerous committees including maintenance and modernization; public affairs, legislative, education and training committee, executive committee; and as a state representative.

Rita McKissick is the executive director of The Housing Authority of the City of Booneville. She worked for The Housing Authority of the City of McComb for seventeen years, starting as a housing manager and moving up to administrative assistant before coming to Booneville Housing. Rita has two children and two grandchildren.

Helen Werby is the executive director of the Biloxi Housing Authority, where she began working in August, 2004 as the HOPE VI coordinator. She serves as the president of the Biloxi Community Development Corporation. She currently serves on the boards of the Mississippi Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (MAHRO), the Mississippi Housing Authority Risk Management Insurance Pool (MAHARM), Gulf Coast Housing Initiative, Mercy Housing and Human Development, Mississippi Association of Affordable Housing Providers (MAAHP), and Gulf Coast Housing Partnership.

Phyllis Hughes is the assistant director of Greenwood Housing Authority where she has 37 years’ service. She is a member of the MAHRO board of directors, MAHRO education and training, and the SERC education and training committee.

Thomas Coleman, an executive director of Tennessee Valley Regional Housing Authority of Corinth, has over 40 years of service. He has served on the board of directors for MAHRO and on SERC’s legislative committee. He is past vice president of housing (two terms) and has served on numerous other committees. He has a bachelor’s degree from Mississippi State University. Thomas and his wife Mary Kathryn have two sons, Tom and Douglas, and two grandchildren.

Allrick Young is the executive director of the city of Laurel and has 22 years’ experience. He is currently a member advisory committee of the policy committee in the Mississippi chapter, and has served as SERC past president as well as on the nominating and youth development committees. He holds a bachelor’s degree from University of Southern Mississippi in criminal justice. Allrick and his wife Sabrina have two children, Allrick Jr. and Lauren.

Royal Ann Spencer is the executive director of the Clarksdale Housing Authority where she has 39 years of service. She serves on the policy advisory committee for MAHRO, and is currently serving on SERC’s small agency task force committee. She has also served on the board of directors of MAHRO as well as president, senior vice-president, and vice-president for professional development. Royal Ann attended the University of Southern Mississippi.

Judy Mellard is the executive director of the Hattiesburg Housing Authority with 16 years of service. She currently serves as the immediate past president of MAHRO. She is the Mississippi SERC representative and has served on SERC’s annual conference, professional development, housing, legislative, and budget committees. Currently, she serves as the chairperson of the SERC-MAHRO IRGE committee and serves on the SERC legislative committee. She received her bachelor’s degree in business administration from the University of Southern Mississippi with an entrepreneurship emphasis. Judy is certified in public housing management.
On November 30, the Mississippi Housing Authorities Risk Management (MHARM) celebrated twenty-two years in operation. On behalf of the MHARM board of directors, I want to thank you for being a part of the MHARM program. We look forward to serving as your insurance provider for many years to come. As always, MHARM is here to help you with your insurance needs. Please call or email us if you have questions or need assistance.

MAHRO/MHARM insurance workshop: On January 23-24, we had another very successful insurance workshop in Ridgeland. There were over 60 attendees, and the subject matter was excellent. Topics included “Sexual harassment”; “Is your cell phone policy working?”; “Immunity: What is it and why is it important?”; “MHARM coverage review”; and “Mississippi Attorney General’s non-profit opinion/new tax code effects on affordable housing.”

Advisory committee: The MHARM advisory committee met on January 23rd during the insurance workshop in Ridgeland and reviewed the MHARM structure and coverages. The committee is invaluable to MHARM operations by providing feedback and ideas. Thanks to all who serve on the advisory committee.

2017-2018 renewal: In early October, we completed the 2017-2018 renewal. Despite the fact that nationally 2017 was one of the worst years for catastrophic property losses, we were able to negotiate very favorable pricing and retain good coverages. This included a reduction of just over 2% from the expiring property rate and less than a 1% increase from the expiring casualty rate. We are proud again this year to furnish each MHARM member with an extra $1,000,000 of excess liability coverage at no cost and to offer additional excess liability coverage with limits available for purchase in increments of $1M to $5M. This is in addition to your regular general liability coverage of $1,000,000.

Dividends: Again this year, the MHARM board of directors declared a dividend (non-liquidating credit) in the amount of $600,000. To date, the board has returned $6,450,000 to the membership in the form of non-liquidating credits.

Model fire prevention plan: As a reminder, the MHARM board adopted a model fire prevention plan that has been distributed to the membership for guidance and use as a management tool. The model plan addresses fire prevention tips for executive directors, resident education, and employee training. It also covers what to do after the fire and discusses claims reporting and follow-up procedures. If you need additional copies, please let me know.

Proposed state legislation that extends Tort Claims Act protection to non-profit entities of Mississippi housing authorities: MHARM and MAHRO have partnered to encourage the introduction of state legislation that extends Mississippi Tort Claims Act (MTCA) protection similar to that Mississippi housing authorities currently enjoy. A MHARM/MAHRO joint committee requested and received an attorney general’s opinion on the subject. The opinion suggests that certain non-profit entities may already have protection under the MTCA, depending on how they were established. Absolute factual examination and determination will have to be done on a case-by-case basis. The committee will continue to study the situation to determine whether to go forward with introducing the proposed legislation.
Secondhand smoke: why should we be concerned?

Secondhand smoke exposure poses serious health threats to everyone. In Mississippi, over 500 nonsmokers die every year from exposure to secondhand smoke. There is no safe, risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Even brief exposure can be harmful to your health and damage cells in ways that set the cancer process in motion.

Secondhand smoke is defined as a mixture of gases and fine particles that comes from the smoke of a burning cigar, cigarette or pipe. It also includes the smoke that has been exhaled by a smoker. Secondhand smoke stays in the air for at least four hours. It then travels from other units and common areas and comes through doorways, cracks in walls, electrical lines, plumbing, and ventilation systems. Smoke-free policies are the only way to protect people from exposure to secondhand smoke. Separate smoking sections, ventilation, and cleaning the air do not eliminate secondhand smoke exposure.

Everyone is affected by secondhand smoke, especially children, pregnant women and employees who work in areas where smoking is allowed. Secondhand smoke can cause lung cancer and heart disease in adults who have never smoked. Nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke at home or work have a 20-30 percent increased risk of developing lung cancer. Secondhand smoke can trigger an asthma attack and increase the severity of the attack. Children are especially affected by secondhand smoke, since they breathe more rapidly than adults, and therefore take in more smoke comparable to their body weight. Secondhand smoke exposure in children causes ear infections, more frequent and severe asthma attacks, respiratory infections and symptoms, as well as a greater risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Infants who live in a home with secondhand smoke are 50 percent more likely to die from SIDS. Pregnant women who smoke or are exposed to secondhand smoke have a greater risk of miscarriage, premature birth, and stillborn babies. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all heart disease patients should avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.

For assistance and resources on cessation, smoke-free multi-unit housing policies, please call the Mississippi State Department of Health Office of Tobacco Control at 601-991-6050.
The Mississippi Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (MAHRO) annual executive directors’ retreat was held in “The City Beautiful” - Laurel, Mississippi - this past September. Over 30 directors attended the meeting hosted by Executive Director Ailrick Young and staff. The retreat was held at the James A. Townley Community Center where the Laurel Housing Authority is located. Laurel Mayor Johnny Magee spoke to the group about the activities and sites available in the city. Also welcoming the executive directors were the Laurel Housing Authority staff members, dressed in full cheerleader uniforms.

The 2-day retreat offered updates from Sheila Jackson from the HUD office in Jackson and a tour of the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art. The museum was erected in 1923 and dedicated to Lauren Rogers who died an untimely death from appendicitis. Family members and friends continue to support the museum to this day. Today the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art displays one of the finest collections of nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings to be found in the South.

The group wrapped up the 2-day meeting with dinner at the Gables in Laurel.
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HOUSING & REDEVELOPMENT OFFICIALS

“WHAT HOME MEANS TO ME” poster contest

STATE COMPETITION:
The State Association holds a poster contest competition submitted by local PHAs. The State Association selects a 1st, 2nd, & 3rd place winner (for each category). The winning posters are submitted to compete in the SERC-NAHRO regional competition.

SERC COMPETITION:
SERC-NAHRO holds a regional poster competition. NAHRO Fellows select a 1st place winner in each category. Winning artists receive a gift card & select posters are published as blank note cards. The winning posters are submitted to compete in the National Housing America competition.

COMPETITION DETAILS:

3 Categories:
Elementary (K-5th grade) | Middle School (6th-8th grade) | High School (9th-12th grade)

Entry Requirements: 22”x28” poster, short essay explaining the design & entry forms. SERC-NAHRO winners will be selected & announced at the Annual Conference. State entries must be submitted to SERC-NAHRO & received by June 22, 2018. Posters MUST be submitted through the State Association, in order to be eligible in the Regional & National competition.

Mail: Norfolk Waterside Marriott 235 E Main St, Norfolk, VA 23510, Attention: Sharita Oates
Hand delivery: To your State Emerging Leader at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott

ENTRY FORMS & RULES:
http://www.housingamericacampaign.org/what-home-means-to-me.html
If you have questions, please contact Sharita Oates at soates@hacg.org.

PLEASE JOIN US @
SERC Annual Conference & Exhibit - Norfolk, VA
June 24-27, 2018
A strong, sincere message was sent to members who attended the 73rd annual MAHRO conference in August. It was not about all the changes that go along with a new administration; it was not about the insurmountable workload; it was not about the tests we face with capital expenses being scrutinized and possibly cut (although that is a strong topic for this year’s conference!). Instead, it was directed at the over 400 attendees who are diligent in their tasks, responsibilities and day-to-day challenges. Judy Mellard (2017 MAHRO president) put it in simple words “FOR ALL YOU DO, HATS OFF TO YOU.” This industry continues to do more with less every day. Our executive directors and staff spend hours in training to stay updated on additional regulations. Our commissioners take on heavy responsibilities with NO pay-checks.
At the opening session, we were honored to have Congressman Steven M. Palazzo as our keynote speaker. Congressman Palazzo has served the state of Mississippi since 2011. He was vital in introducing HR 4816 - aka SHARP - that has a big impact for small and medium housing agencies.

HUD Director Sheila Jackson welcomed members and provided HUD updates. Ginger Ming introduced the exhibitors and vendors, giving each an opportunity to introduce themselves and their businesses.

Entertainment at the president’s banquet was provided by a group from Clarksdale–Blackwater Trio. It was a special treat with two outstanding guitarists and a very talented violinist who also performed the National Anthem at the opening ceremonies.

Concurrent sessions began Thursday, August 17 with topics covering public housing, commissioners training, maintenance training, RAD training and section 8. Meeting concluded Friday with MAHRO scholarship awards and HUD awards presented by Claude Weathers.

The annual MAHRO business meeting was presented at the end of sessions by the MAHRO board. Scholarship baskets were given to lucky members who stayed for the duration of the conference. MAHRO awarded four $1,000 scholarships and a $1,500 Michael A. Robertson Scholarship based on academics and contributions to their community.
Scholarships

$1,000 MAHRO SCHOLARSHIP
Nigel Davion Dent
Natchez Housing Authority

$1,000 MAHRO SCHOLARSHIP
Caine Andrew Page
TVRHA-Corinth

$1,000 MAHRO SCHOLARSHIP
Joshua Mackenzie Moore
West Point Housing Authority

MICHAEL A. ROBERTSON SCHOLARSHIP
Koby Lee Quave—MRHA VIII

SHIELDS SIMS HUMANITARIAN AWARD
Glen Bates—Meridian Housing Authority

HAROLD PANTER MAINTENANCE
EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR
Charles Jenkins,
Amory Housing Authority

PUBLIC HOUSING RECIPIENTS OF CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE IN MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

PUBLIC HOUSING RECIPIENTS OF CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE IN MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

VETERANS AFFAIRS SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (VASH)
South Delta Housing Authority
Meridian Housing Authority

RECIPIENTS OF FATHER’S DAY INITIATIVE CERTIFICATE
OF APPRECIATION

MAHRO gives awards throughout the state to those recognized for setting high standards and providing quality service.
Scholarships are awarded to children of housing authority employees who have excelled academically.
HUD also recognizes high performing housing agencies and excellence in housing.
Awards are based on grades given to housing authorities based on HUD criteria.
Our vendors and sponsors help to make the MAHRO annual conference successful. We thank them for their hard work and participation. You are awesome!
Appreciating senior residents

The Starkville Housing Authority’s resident council decided to start the year by showing our senior residents that they are appreciated. The council met in January to make fruit bags for all residents 65 years and older. The bags included apples, oranges, nabs, peppermint and bottled water. Bags were delivered to each resident’s unit by a member of council.

Starkville Housing Authority—
MSU transit bus services update

Residents of Starkville Housing Authority (SHA) met with representatives from MSU Parking Transit to review city transportation bus routes. Residents were given maps and bus schedules to plan their daily errands around town. SHA has worked with the MSU Parking Transit in past years to secure two SMART Bus pick-up locations at Reed Road and Zuber Street communities. Residents were given MSU Transit bags, cups, pens and pocket mirrors for attending the workshop.

Mississippi HomeCare visits residents

Starkville Housing Authority residents met with Ms. Lacee Jones from Mississippi HomeCare for a fun-filled day of games, food and fellowship. Residents participated in several rounds of BINGO and won prizes including cleaning supplies, home décor, office supplies and lawn décor. The housing authority works closely with Mississippi HomeCare to have programs for all residents. In the past, there have been health fairs, health screenings and cookouts for residents.

Laurel Housing Authority—hosts 17th annual dinner/dance for seniors

More than 100 senior citizens from the Laurel Housing Authority (LHA) sat down to a hot festive Christmas meal – Tuesday, December 5, at the Laurel Train Depot. The event hall was decorated with holiday décor. Each year the housing authority hosts a dinner and dance which provides seniors time to socialize and be among others that are sometimes alone during this time of the year. Senior residents were served dinner and entertainment was provided. For seniors who were unable to attend, a meal was delivered to the resident with a side of holiday cheer.

Along with the housing authority, the event was sponsored by many community partners to whom the LHA extends sincere thanks. The staff and youth groups of the housing authority volunteer each year to organize and staff this successful event.
Laurel Housing Authority— Pink it up! Breast Cancer Awareness

On October 6, the staff of Laurel Housing Authority’s Brown Circle Homes along with Ailrick Young, executive director, hosted their third annual “Pink it up” day in recognition of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The students of the Friends of Children Early HeadStart Program and Oak Park Elementary Choir were showcased for the occasion.

The first of two guest speakers was Celeste Brown who was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer. During a routine self-exam at the age of 39, she found a lump in her breast which tested as malignant. She had no family history of breast cancer. Triple negative breast cancer is an aggressive subtype that occurs in about 10-20% of diagnosed breast cancers and is more likely to affect younger people, African Americans & Hispanics.

Celeste decided to learn as much as possible about breast cancer, its causes, treatment options and ways to reduce toxins in everyday life. She believes beating cancer doesn’t make her a survivor; her outlook on life and desire to educate and help others distinguish her.

Her journey of breast cancer diagnosis, lumpectomy surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation treatment birthed The Pink Lady, a breast cancer support organization started by Celeste to support women affected by the disease. The Pink Lady provides port pillows, care packages, support, resources, & ways to live toxic-free.

The second speaker was Karrie Leggett-Brown, WDAM news anchor, who reports behind WDAM’s franchise medical segment “Medical House call.” Her talk focused on becoming more aware of the seriousness of this disease and how it affects families and loved ones as well as the patients themselves. She encouraged the audience to become more educated and active in battling breast cancer.

Mayor Johnny Magee, Sheriff Alex Hodge, staff, residents and neighboring community guests took part in a block walk which was followed by a balloon release.

Annie Jackson, director of Early Head Start Center and also a partner of the housing authority located at Brown Circle, hosted a literature table to provide educational materials to participants.
The U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration awarded The Natchez Housing Authority $720,000 for a Youth Build program. Youth Build is a community-based alternative education program that provides job training and educational opportunities for at-risk youth ages 16-24. Youth learn construction skills while constructing or rehabilitating affordable housing for low-income or homeless families in their own neighborhoods. Time is split between the construction site and the classroom, where youth earn their high school diploma or equivalency degree, learn to be community leaders, and prepare for college and other post-secondary training opportunities.

Youth Build includes significant support systems such as mentoring, follow-up education, employment, personal counseling services and participation in community service and civic engagement opportunities. There are approximately 210 actively-funded DOL Youth Build programs at any given time in more than 40 states, serving over 6,000 youth nationally per year.

A Youth Build program must contain three basic components:

1) Educational and job training services
2) Leadership training, counseling, and other support activities
3) On-site training through actual housing rehabilitation or construction work

To adequately support and implement these program components and ensure the best possible program outcomes, it is recommended that the following program elements also be in place:

- participant outreach, recruitment, and selection plan; job and college placement services;
- post-graduation follow-up; accounting, reporting, and program evaluation systems.

Alan Ingram, executive director of Natchez Housing Authority, fully supports the staff in our efforts to secure funding to enhance the quality of life for the citizens in the city of Natchez, especially the residents of public housing. Bridgett Pollard and a distant grant writer realize the need for a program of this magnitude to be funded in the Adams County area. Pollard recognizes the fact that the best way to help our youth is by fully understanding what our youth need in order to succeed. Our increasingly knowledge-driven world dictates that people, especially youth, have the education and skills to thrive in a competitive marketplace and to understand the complexities of the world in which we live. This means that in order to compete and succeed, all young people will need an effective education to prepare them for work and for life.

Many residents of the Meridian Housing Authority’s (MHA) affordable housing communities have expressed a desire to own their own homes, start businesses, or return to college to complete their degrees. MHA has a variety of programs that help make these dreams come true. Workshops to assist anyone who wants to develop skills that will make it possible for them to start and run a business are being scheduled.

Although owning a home is a dream that many have felt unattainable, MHA is determined to provide assistance to all who are willing to put time and effort toward fulfilling their dreams of home-ownership. MHA works with a number of agencies and banks to help give anyone desiring to do so the opportunity to own a home. Workshops are held twice a month for residents who are interested in making their dreams come true.

On November 14, the junior and senior high school students of the Laurel Housing Authority toured the Mississippi State Capitol and Jackson State University.
Is compassion enough?

Looking at the larger issue, perhaps the financial constraints we now face as a nation will change government from giving a handout to a hand-up for those who truly need it. It’s no wonder that the struggling middle class gets angry when the limited pool of government money goes to help the poor, while those who work hard every day continue to struggle and subsidize the lives of others who, in some cases, do not.

Demonizing the poor and the many families (especially kids) who, for a variety of reasons, live in public housing complexes is misguided and mean-spirited. But it is reasonable to expect those who are given free - or very inexpensive - housing on the taxpayer dime to be good stewards of that investment.

Those who receive government-subsidized housing should be respectful of that property and contribute to our community, rather than simply benefiting from the system and being rewarded for, in some instances, making irresponsible personal decisions. Far too often, it seems, people who live in public housing have a sense of entitlement that they’re owed something for a lousy lot in life.

Despite having access to better educational opportunities and more help than ever, generation after generation become reliant upon public housing and entitlement programs, and these numbers have expanded throughout the U.S. Public housing complexes in cities across the country have become ghettos and projects riddled with drugs, violent crime and an overall lack of decent societal mores.

Housing authorities need to swiftly evict and sanction those who abuse the privilege of living there by breaking the rules or the laws of our community to show that disrespect and illegal activity will not be tolerated. Programs that build community and encourage public housing tenants to give something back to their neighborhood and community should be developed and expanded. Until those who receive government help are required to give something back to our communities in return, we will continue throwing money we don’t have at our problems and see these weathered buildings and our once-strong neighborhoods crumble.

There’s no doubt a place in a compassionate society that provides a safety net for those who need it; but, those people also have a responsibility to use that help wisely and give something in return. Will we see the dire economic realities we face as an opportunity to take a new path toward self-sufficiency, or continue down the dangerous path of overgrown and unsustainable government dependency on which we’ve been traveling?

Alan Ingram, executive director
Natchez Housing Authority

hud update

HUD SECRETARY CARSON LAUNCHES NEW FINANCIAL CONTROLS TO ENHANCE DEPARTMENT’S FISCAL STRENGTH AND INTEGRITY

New chief financial officer to lead effort to improve system of checks and balances

WASHINGTON - U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Ben Carson recently announced new measures to protect the financial integrity of the agency and correct lax internal processes and controls. Secretary Carson directed HUD’s newly appointed Chief Financial Officer Irving Dennis to design and implement a transformation plan and lead an internal taskforce to combat waste, fraud and abuse.

In a statement announcing these measures, Secretary Carson said the Department’s current financial controls are outdated, “We simply need to do better. An updated system of internal controls will provide our agency with greater certainty that the dollars we spend are spent in a manner that satisfies all laws and regulations, and most importantly, the American people. We will approach this as any business would by increasing transparency and accountability. In the end, we will also support a culture that respects the fact that HUD funds belong to the public.”

As a former partner at the internationally recognized accounting firm Ernst & Young, Dennis will institute new processes and controls, empower employees, and strengthen compliance and enforcement-related functions at HUD. “I’m excited to apply a business acumen to a task that is necessary for us as an agency,” said Dennis. “These new internal controls and management practices must be embedded into our organization to help prevent misuse and misappropriation of assets. The goal is to create more robust processes and systems of checks and balances to ensure our expenditures not only meet all of our requirements but pass a common sense ‘smell test’.”

HUD’s new plan will consist of:

- Agency-wide governance: Implementing an agency-wide governance structure that allows for more oversight, transparency, monitoring and accountability;
- Finance transformation: Developing a plan to restore discipline and accountability in the financial and reporting systems across the agency.
- Grant modernization: Developing a holistic grant modernization plan to improve grant processes and reporting, including improved IT systems; and
- Process improvement: Promoting a HUD culture focused on documented and repeatable process with a focus on transparency and cost reasonableness.

As part of this effort, HUD’s office of the CFO, with support from the agency’s office of general counsel, are currently reviewing processes to ensure HUD is within all guidelines and utilizing resources effectively.