

Fund-raising for homeless goes to next level

By Paula S. Stephens
Industry Focus Editor

For most organizations, it would have been enough to raise large amounts of money for various shelters and agencies that help homeless women and children.

But members of Commercial Real Estate Women-Atlanta, whose fund-raising "Compassion Action" luncheons have been praised and imitated, wanted to do more. Their plan: Develop housing for the homeless.

So, at the same time they were pitching a national convention, CREW-Atlanta also became a developer of what it calls "affordable, permanent housing" in a campaign dubbed the Supportive Housing Initiative.

The group's first obstacle was finding a site. CREW members put the word out, figuring it would not take too long to come up with a location meeting their criteria: an existing apartment complex of 50 to 60 one, two- and three-bedroom units accessible to public transportation, job centers and education and cultural facilities, and located in an established neighborhood in DeKalb, Fulton or Clayton counties.

Their original timetable had them closing on a site this past summer. But a selection proved difficult.



"It took a little over a year to identify a site," said Ann E. Cyphers of Ackerman & Co., CREW-Atlanta's vice president of community affairs.

The group then found a partner in Atlanta-based Progressive Redevelopment Inc. (PRI). The nonprofit developer has experience in urban renovation

to benefit homeless people, with the Imperial Hotel project. PRI will be the actual buyer of the property, Cyphers said.

Because the deal hasn't closed yet, Cyphers didn't want to precisely describe the site's location. She did describe it as a 65-unit apartment complex valued at nearly \$1 million. The transaction is scheduled to close on Oct. 31.

The entire project will cost about \$3.5 million, Cyphers said. "We will convert it into 55 units of two-, three- and four-bedroom units," she said.

Social services in the apartment community will be handled by Families First, a United Way agency, Cyphers said.

The corporation for Supportive Housing is providing predevelopment money at a low interest rate. Some foundations, including the Woodruff Foundation, are providing development expertise, she said.

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Ann E. Cyphers
Ackerman & Co.

The completed apartment will not be solely transitional housing, but permanent housing. Residents won't have to leave if they don't want to.

There will be an on-site community center where lifestyle skills training will be provided. The Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS) will supply two people to provide case-management services.

The goal is to build a community atmosphere, Cyphers said. "The next level [for a resident] may be a co-op or owning their own home."

At 1992's first Compassion in Action luncheon, Jane Fonda was the guest speaker. Cyphers credits her with inspiring CREW-Atlanta to do more.

"Jane challenged us at the first luncheon to actually get out and build some housing," Cyphers said. "She said something like, 'You're in real estate--why don't you take the next step?'"

During its 1997-98 year, as part of its traditional Compassion in Action fund-raising, the organization also plans to raise \$100,000 for distribution to homeless women and children. The Atlanta Women's Fund, headed by Stephanie Davis, helps identify the recipient facilities and agencies.

And CREW-Atlanta hopes to raise \$100,000 toward its Supportive Housing Initiative.

Cyphers cited several firms that have given in-kind contributions. Troutman Sanders donated all of the legal work required to obtain the apartment site. First American Title and Commonwealth Title provided title searches. In addition, landscaping and roofing companies offered donations, she said.

"We've had an incredible response from the community."