

A Gateway Opens Buckman Road Complex is State-of-Art Center

By Chuck Hagee
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The greatest threat to peace and security is when people have no hope.

Those words could have been spoken to describe the conflict in the Middle East, or many other hot spots around the globe. But, they were actually delivered by Ambassador Alan Kyerematen, Republic of Ghana, at the official opening of The Gateway at Buckman Road.

A HUD Neighborhood Network Center, it is a cutting edge computer learning facility situated within an affordable housing complex located just off Route 1. It is one of seven operating in the greater Washington area under the aegis of the Community Preservation and Development Corporation (CPDC).

Last Thursday afternoon, more than 100 residents and dignitaries gathered at 3606 Buckman Road to unveil a state-of-the-art community technology center designed to help residents gain basic computer literacy skills, to access technology, and to gain workforce skills that 21st century industry demands.

Ambassador Kyerematen was the featured speaker and guest of honor because of the 525 residents of CPDC's property on Buckman Road, 320 are Ghanaian and 105 are Pakistani. Included in that total are 280 adults, 44 children age five and younger, 133 children between five and 12 years of age, and 68 between the ages of 13 and 18. Approximately 98 of the families use English as a second language.

A PRACTICING ATTORNEY in Ghana, Ambassador Kyerematen, holds degrees in Economics and Law and is a Hubert Humphrey Fellow at the School of Management, University of Minnesota. He is also a member of the Council of Governors of the British Executive Service Overseas in the United Kingdom. He established and served as Chief Executive of the United Nations Empretec Program for private sector development in Africa.

The Buckman Road facility houses two computer learning centers with a total of 27 computers, two offices, a conference and tutorial room, a reading room/library, a work room, and a reception area. It will provide technology training to both students and adults.

"Through the center it doesn't matter how old you are, there is a future for you. Today is a day of celebration and I am here because I really believe in the philosophy behind this center," the ambassador said.



That philosophy was probably best summarized by Lee District, Fairfax County Supervisor Dana Kauffman when he said "This center is about doing affordable housing the right way. We have by name and fact indeed, created a gateway." he said.

"This is another success story along the Richmond Highway. Another example of partnerships. By pooling resources we are making opportunities real," Kauffman said.

This was buttressed by Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman, Katherine K. Hanley. "Our strength is in our diversity. This is a success at all levels. Education is the most important investment we make in our society," she said.

KEITH KROELL, CPDC's Director of Funds Development, explained, "We are trying to develop safe affordable housing where people can grow into the community and integrate into the larger community of Northern Virginia. Technology helps us accomplish this."

CPDC's President, Leslie A. Steen, added, "We want to address the social issues as well as the bricks and mortar. That is why we try to create things like the Gateway projects."

Also involved in the Buckman Road endeavor, and participating in the dedication ceremonies, were representatives of the U.S. Departments of Labor and Housing and Urban Development. On the non-government side was the National Capital Area Neighborhood Networks Consortium (NCANN) composed of technology centers in Northern Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

"Dollars don't mean anything unless you have quality centers like this," Thomas Dowd, Regional Administrator, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, said. "This center will go a long way to closing the skills gap. It will give people the necessary means to go up the ladder of success."

Fritz Hirsch, NCANN Director, explained their mission as to provide the resources to develop and sustain community technology centers throughout the region. To get them to work together to support each other.

CPDC acquired the Buckman Road community in 1996 under the Low-Income Housing and Resident Homeownership Act. As a non-profit corporation, CPDC creates and preserves financially sound, socially responsible, affordable housing for low and moderate income individuals and families through acquisition, development, and ownership.

Since its inception in 1989, CPDC has acquired 17 affordable housing properties totaling 1,847 units. It operates and coordinates community service programs, such as its Gateway centers, in seven of those properties in conjunction with various partners.

CPDC's philosophy is to combine physical rehabilitation, resident involvement, and ongoing community development programs to ensure that affordable housing communities return to, and remain a healthy part of, the social and economic mainstreams, according to its literature.

One of those partners, the Fairfax County Consolidated Community Funding Pool, recently awarded the Buckman Road project \$25,000 for both Fiscal Years 2003 and 2004. The grants are to strengthen their after school academic enhancement programs.

WITH THE EXPANSION of the Buckman Road community-learning center, CPDC will be able to enlarge its range of services by offering a grater variety of programs. All residents can identify and access the full range of programs and services they need right in the community in which they live, according to CPDC.

Albert J. Browne, CPDC Vice President and Director of Community Development Programs, summarized the commencement of the new center by reflecting, "It's ironic, when the world is involved in such strife, we are able to come together here to accomplish this common goal."

Other participants in the ceremonies included, Mary Cabriele, Manager, The Gateway at Buckman Road; David Hunn, Executive Director, The Northern Virginia Workforce Development Board; Karina Chicas, Resident and Program Assistant for Buckman Road; Charlie Famulier, Director, Multi-Family Housing, HUD; Milton Pratt, Mid-Atlantic Regional Director, HUD; Eugene Ford, CPDC Board Chairman; and Aroosa Haq, resident.

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