

Arbor Heights wins housing award

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Sarah Peck, president of Progressive Housing Ventures LLC accepted a Synergy Award for Best Affordable Housing for Arbor Heights, a community of townhomes on Dekalb Street in Norristown. Submitted Photo

NORRISTOWN— At their annual awards ceremony on May 17, the Home Builders Associations of four Philadelphia suburban counties presented the Synergy Award for Best Affordable Housing to Arbor Heights, a successful new townhome community on DeKalb Street in Norristown.

Sarah Peck, president of builder Progressive Housing Ventures of Malvern, was on hand to accept the award.

The event was held at the King of Prussia Radisson and attended by homebuilding professionals from Montgomery, Bucks, Chester and Delaware Counties.

Arbor Heights is the fulfillment of a 10-year dream by the Municipality of Norristown and Montgomery County.

For decades, Norristown has been fighting the decay of once-grand Victorian homes on DeKalb Street which over time devolved into multi-family rentals by absentee landlords.

In an effort to spur revitalization of the area, one block at a time, the municipality obtained grants from the county, state and federal governments to demolish and redevelop the worst two buildings in the 1000 block.

Progressive Housing Ventures, a builder whose mission is to revitalize suburban infill neighborhoods with residential new construction, was recruited to undertake the project in 2011.

With help from Barton Partners architects, Progressive Housing designed 12 stacked townhomes integrated into individual mansion-like structures which blend in seamlessly with the surrounding historic buildings. The two and three bedroom homes include such rarities in Norristown as off-street parking, a second bathroom and air conditioning.

In addition to the attractive and marketable designs, the townhomes' affordable pricing from the \$120's to the low \$150's and well as its below-market mortgage financing and cash grants for down payment and closing costs from Montgomery County and Norristown enabled eligible first-time homebuyers to purchase a home at Arbor Heights with as little as \$3,900 total.

Mortgage financing at attractive rates and terms for qualified first time homebuyers was provided by Susquehanna and National Penn Banks.

Norristown's plan is working. Over 90 percent of the homes have been sold since ground breaking last September. Not only are homeowners now moving into their new Arbor Heights homes, the redevelopment has spurred the renovation of a number of other properties in the immediate area. "It's very gratifying to me personally and professionally to see first time homebuyers obtain the dream of homeownership and as well as a renaissance unfolding on Upper DeKalb Street right before our eyes," said Sarah Peck.

The Synergy Awards are the first time homebuilders from the Homebuilders Association of Buck and Montgomery County and the Homebuilders Association of Chester and Delaware County have held a combined awards event allowing builders from all over the region to compete for top honors in a number of categories.

Progressive Housing Ventures LLC of Malvern, PA, develops unique new housing in older, close-in towns. It has received numerous awards, including recognition by the Delaware Valley Smart Growth Alliance.