

Problem to solution

by Lisa Sink

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Bad news leads to community improvement in Milwaukee



Photos by Nairn Olker, Alloy Photography

A phone call four years ago was the spark that started a major renewal project in Milwaukee's Washington Park neighborhood.

The phone call from a bank delivered the bad news that a building used by nonprofit developer United Methodist Children's Services of Wisconsin Inc. as an emergency food pantry had been sold and had to be vacated.

Rather than simply building a new home for the pantry, the most used in Milwaukee County, UMCS seized the opportunity to pursue its bigger dreams. Cindy Thompson, the nonprofit

group's fund development director, said the agency always wanted to provide affordable housing, particularly for large families that need three-bedroom apartments.

"There is a real difficulty finding three-bedroom units," she said. "We are the first housing organization working with the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Unit to offer three-bedroom units."

In 2008, residents moved into the first phase of the group's project, which included six new town homes, each with three bedrooms and a full basement. Just after Christmas 2009, families started moving into phase two: the Washington Park Apartments, which includes 24 three-bedroom units.



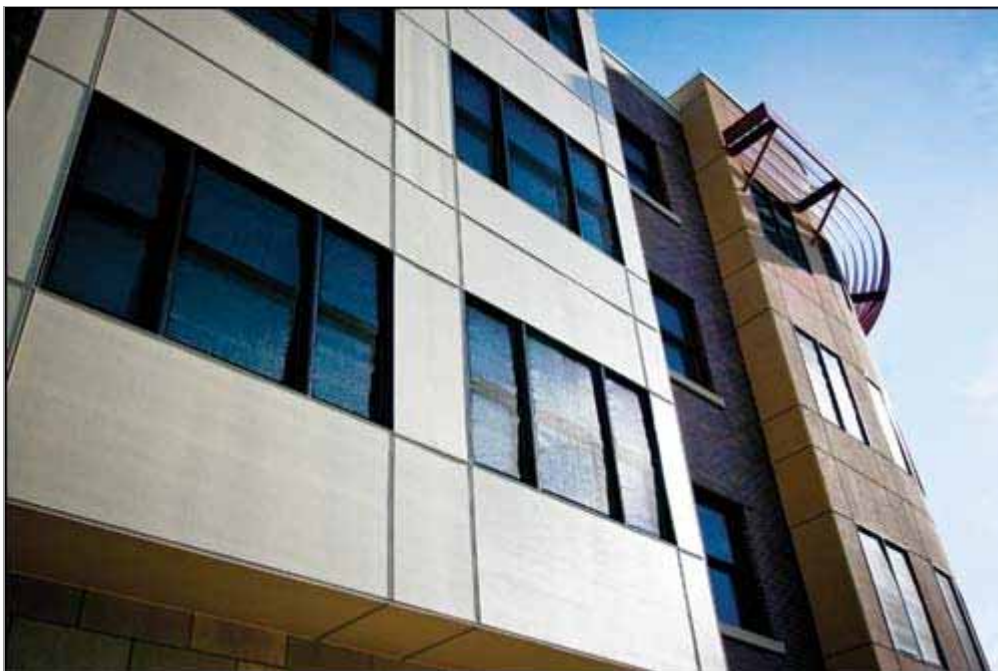
The influx of affordable three-bedroom units has been a welcome addition to the community, Thompson said. One mother was so overjoyed, she said when she first walked into her new apartment she started crying, Thompson said.

In addition to providing quality housing, the project supplied construction jobs to about 30 area residents. Major subcontractors were required to hire at least one person from the surrounding zip codes.

Thompson said general

contractor T.L. Reese Co., Milwaukee, was “vigilant” in ensuring people from the neighborhood were trained so when the project was over they could continue working in construction.

Washington Park Apartments was built as an addition to UMCS’ building at 3940 W. Lisbon Ave., where the group already operated 18 transitional living units, said John Fatica, project manager at Engberg Anderson Inc., Milwaukee.



The project expanded UMCS’ first-floor offices, where residents can access services ranging from drug abuse treatment to job training, he said. New community spaces, including a fitness room, were opened to neighborhood residents.

The displaced food pantry that started it all has a new space in the first-floor Family Resource Center.

“It was very important,” Fatica said, “for them to make this bridge to the larger neighborhood.”

PROJECT
ESSENTIALS

Washington Park Apartments

Location: Milwaukee

Submitting company: Engberg Anderson Inc., Milwaukee

General Contractor: A joint venture of T.L. Reese Co., Milwaukee, and Horizon Construction LLC, Waupun

Architect: Engberg Anderson Inc.

Engineers: Key Engineering Group Ltd., Milwaukee (civil); Pierce Engineers Inc., Milwaukee (structural)

Owner: United Methodist Children’s Services of Wisconsin Inc., Milwaukee

Project size: 51,653 square feet

Project cost: \$5.3 million

Start date: February 2009

Completion date: December 2009