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## **The National Affordable Housing Management Association selects Lawrence's Duck Mill for a 2018 Vanguard Award**

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Shown (from left) are: Michael Johnson, NAHMA

board president; Bill McGrath, vice president of property management at FRM; and Frank Cevetello, chief operating officer at FRM.

Lawrence, MA The rehabilitation of a once abandoned mill property into new housing garnered national attention when it was one of only six properties nationwide selected to receive a national award for affordable housing. The National Affordable Housing Management Association (NAHMA) selected Duck Mill for a 2018 Vanguard Award as the nation's best example of a major rehabilitation of a historic structure into affordable housing.

Duck Mill was once a thriving manufacturing center that produced heavy canvas. Long abandoned, the property was acquired by Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW), a non-profit community development corporation committed to the ongoing revival of the former mill city along the banks of the Merrimack River. LCW began a multi-million dollar effort to convert the structure into 73 much needed affordable one, two and three-bedroom apartments and 10,000 s/f of commercial and retail space.

First Realty Management (FRM), a 65-year-old family-owned property management firm based in Boston, has managed LCW's residential property portfolio for more than 10 years. Union Crossing, a similar mill property that was converted into 60 units of affordable housing and is located across the street from Duck Mill, was also the recipient of a Vanguard Award in 2013.

These awards recognize newly developed or significantly rehabilitated affordable multifamily housing communities that showcase high-quality design and resourceful financing. The Vanguard Awards were presented at NAHMA's Fall Conference in Washington, D.C. Vanguard Award winners deliver powerful proof that affordable housing done well can transform neighborhoods as well as the lives of individual residents.

As LCW's property management firm for 11 years, in addition to handling the property's initial lease up, FRM has served as a resource to LCW throughout the entire development, planning, design and construction process to rehabilitate this important historic structure and transform it into new housing.

FRM advised LCW on design practicality and operating cost projections during the design phase while assisting LCW to navigate federal and state regulations and mandates.

FRM utilized the expertise of in-house occupancy specialists to assist the property manager in reviewing and qualifying prospective residents, and recruited bilingual staff members with technical expertise and a commitment to excellence to manage the lease-up and the property thereafter.

The lease-up was completed on time and on budget thanks to FRM's willingness to provide one-on-one orientation and in-house training as necessary.

Duck Mill is a multi-story brick building originally constructed as a manufacturing facility along the banks of the Merrimack River. It is located within Lawrence's North Canal Historic District, 30 miles north of Boston on the banks of the Merrimack River. The city of Lawrence, Mass., was once the center of New England's textile manufacturing industry, mills provided jobs to thousands of people who came to work and raise families; however, by the 1970s, the industry had dwindled, and good-paying jobs vanished, leaving the city with many vacant mill buildings.

The \$29 million rehabilitation project has resulted in 30% of the apartments being reserved for families that meet extremely low-income guidelines as determined by the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program. Duck Mill contains seven one-bedroom, 37 two-bedroom and 29 three-bedroom apartments.

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