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55 YEARS

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Frank Capezzera - Single Residency Occupancy housing is essential infrastructure for the health of our economy

July 28, 2011 - Spotlights

Single Residency Occupancy (SRO) housing units, known as lodging houses, are occupied by low wage individuals seeking housing accessible to employment opportunities. This type of housing constitutes essential "infrastructure" for the health of our economy since service workers are essential to every aspect of the operation of our communities.

Why is SRO housing a critical part of the economic picture? The answer is driven by the nature of economy of Greater Boston. The colleges, hospitals, hotels and commercial and retail buildings throughout the region are serviced by cleaning people, nurse's aids, taxi drivers, cooks and security guards. These low wage workers are paid "market" wage for their labor and market is low-below the poverty level. Service worker wages are insufficient to pay market rent for a small apartment in most places where these individuals work.

Low wage workers sometimes travel long distances to work, often for hours a day, and spend a disproportionate amount of disposable income for the chance to earn minimum wage.

Caritas Communities, Inc. is the leading non-profit provider of affordable housing in the SRO field in the Greater Boston Area and exists to help working poor individuals. For 26 years, Caritas Communities has acquired, preserved, improved or constructed and managed such properties, growing from its first 12 unit house in Quincy, Mass. in 1984 to 28 projects in 2011 housing more than 750 individual men and women.

Our residents include the working poor at the lowest rung of the economic ladder," says Mark Winkeller, Ph.D., executive director of Caritas Communities. "Like the rest of us, they seek a safe and pleasant place to lay their head on a pillow each night. Our housing is reliable. The healthcare worker who bathes your loved one in the hospital or who inserts the IV in your arm often lives alone and can only afford a lodging house room."

Caritas was formed in 1985 with the generosity of Leo Corcoran, who, with his brother John Corcoran, were the principals of the John M. Corcoran Co., very successful developers of apartments in Massachusetts and elsewhere. Leo Corcoran called on his friends to contribute so that working individuals might have a chance to live in the communities where they worked.

In recent years, in cooperation with the Veteran's Administration, Caritas has expanded its portfolio to include housing for formerly homeless veterans. Caritas also teams up with service providers to formerly homeless people to provide a stable living 'platform' where residents can receive help and

advice in obtaining medical care and needed social services.

Private philanthropy and individual generosity are essential for non-profit sponsors of affordable housing, like Caritas Communities, to continue to meet increasing needs for SRO housing. Caritas believes that organizations that serve the interests of the poorest among us constitute one of America's greatest assets. While charities often need and use government support they cannot function without private generosity. Charitable organizations, themselves form the infrastructure of 'community' and provide opportunity for individuals of means and local businesses dependant on service workers to support the cause of decent housing for their workers.

Caritas is a Latin word meaning 'love for all people'. Today, Caritas Communities provides decent and safe housing for people with diverse histories and backgrounds. The Caritas Communities goal is to create places where its residents can feel that 'when you open the door, you know you're home.'

Frank Capezzera is president and chairman of Caritas Communities, Inc.

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