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Chestnut Hill Realty celebrates four decades of environmentally friendly policy on Earth Day

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As more than 175 nations worldwide geared up to celebrate Earth Day on April 22nd, Chestnut Hill Realty (CHR) is celebrating its own contributions to environmentally friendly policy, which span four decades.

CHR's green initiatives include conservation of energy spent on heating, hot water and lighting, water conservation, recycling, and education of residents and staff at its 27 apartment communities. The company's green policies are geared toward cutting fuel consumption and saving natural resources while improving the comfort and quality of life of their residents.

CHR took its first steps toward implementing environmentally sound practices 40 years ago, when the 1973 oil crisis increased America's awareness of the need for energy conservation. The company became a pioneer in its efforts to heat its communities more efficiently and cost-effectively. CHR was a leader in the multifamily field in the 1980s as an early adopter of energy-efficient strategies such as separating domestic hot water from heat production by using smaller boilers in the summer for hot water when heating is not required. They also created separate zones in buildings to better distribute steam heat (by reducing energy expended to heat warmer rooms with southern exposures while adequately heating cooler rooms with northern exposures).

In the 1990s, the company began converting from oil heating to natural gas, which burns more cleanly, at many of its properties.

At one Brookline, Mass., property alone, the company estimates that move has saved 5,500 tons of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere over the past 15 years. The company's efforts to conserve energy used in heating and hot water ramped up even further in 2005 when CHR began adding programmable thermostats to units at the communities it owns and manages, as well as adding additional insulation, air sealing and weather stripping for doors and windows, and new computer controls for building boilers.

Earlier this year, with the help of a \$435,000 Energy Efficiency Incentive Program grant from utility company National Grid, CHR completed a \$2.2 million project to remove and replace 89 older boilers at Hancock Village, which reduced energy consumption by 20% and will save 130,000 cubic feet of natural gas per year while producing hot water more efficiently.

CHR also has made important strides in reducing its use of electricity for lighting. Starting in 2000, CHR began replacing incandescent light bulbs with CFL (compact fluorescent lamp) lighting in the common areas at many of its communities, saving 100,000 kilowatt hours of electricity annually since then via the move. Starting last year, the company, with the help of incentive grants from utility company NSTAR, embarked on a campaign to install even more efficient LED (light-emitting diode) lamps in appropriate spots at its properties such as parking lots. The LED lighting uses only about 20 percent of the energy of similar CFL lighting and 5% of an incandescent bulb.

On the water conservation front, CHR began installing low-flow toilets at its apartment communities in the 1990s. Since then, CHR has installed thousands of low-flow toilets and showerheads and added aerators to faucets to further reduce water consumption by about 40%. More recently, the company began installing Stealth toilets, manufactured by Niagara Conservation Corp., at its apartment communities. The ultra-high efficiency toilets use only .8 gallons of water per flush while also reducing noise. Ed Zuker, CHR's founder and chief executive officer, notes that all of the energy-efficient fixtures selected by the company are extensively field-tested, including at the homes of company employees, before being installed at CHR's apartment communities.

In 2007, CHR launched its Live Green program, which set ambitious goals for conservation and added an education component to the company's energy conservation efforts, resulting in a significant reduction in the company's carbon footprint. Since 2006, CHR has shaved a total of 2.125 metric tons from its carbon footprint, achieving its goal of an 11% reduction in BTUs. Over 425,000 therms of energy have been conserved by replacing older, inefficient equipment, installing new controls, tightening building envelopes and changing resident behaviors. And in just about all cases, the company is realizing a return of greater than 25% on its capital investment.

The educational programs, resident contests and events offered to the more than 10,000 residents of CHR's apartment communities have placed a special emphasis on awareness of recycling and conservation. CHR couples the educational component of the program with practical steps to make recycling easier for its apartment residents and incentives to make it more fun and rewarding.

Whether through better heating, ventilation and air-conditioning equipment and controls, better attention to insulating and sealing the building environment, energy-efficient apartment fixtures, use of environmentally friendly and recycled materials, or education about recycling and conservation, CHR has identified and continues to pursue environmentally friendly policies and practices on multiple fronts.

"Our efforts to conserve energy and resources are a continuing process and do not begin or end with Earth Day," said Bobby Zuker, chief operating officer of CHR, "But the event is a good time to take stock of our efforts. CHR's Live Green and other conservation programs have clearly made a difference in terms of the environment and resident comfort. And the rewards of green investing are plentiful, including benefits to the bottom line and in how both residents and employees feel about our company."