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Charlesview, Inc. holds grand opening of Josephine A. Fiorentino Community Center

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In a ceremony marked by exuberance, fanfare and family fun, the new Josephine A. Fiorentino Community Center officially opened its doors. The grand opening was hosted by Charlesview, Inc., an interdenominational organization and co-developer of the new Charlesview Residences.

Located in the new residential development that faces Western Ave., the new community center is a major development for this Boston neighborhood because there are no other such facilities available to its residents.

The Josephine A. Fiorentino Community Center - named after a Charlesview, Inc. founder and long-time board member - was developed as part of the Charlesview Residences, a 340-unit mixed-income, mixed-use complex, developed by the organization and The Community Builders, Inc. (TCB), one of the nation's largest nonprofit urban developers. The co-developers last month held a ribbon-cutting celebration to mark completion of the first, 240-unit phase of the development. Charlesview Residences replaces Charlesview Apartments, a 213-unit affordable housing development that served low and moderate-income residents for more than 40 years until becoming physically obsolete. After a unique land swap with Harvard University, Charlesview and TCB teamed up to preserve and enhance the affordable housing on a parcel of land less than a half-mile away. Construction began in 2011. All the former residents of the Charlesview Apartments are moving into the new buildings. The development includes 27 new apartments for moderate-income and market rate tenants. The second and third phases will also feature 100 affordable and market rate homes for sale.

According to the developers, it took nearly ten years to plan and get this development off the ground. During that period, the one thing all parties consistently agreed on was that the housing complex should include a community center, one that would serve as a center for community activity and be available to all residents of the neighborhood.

The idea for the community center and development as a whole was inspired in great part by the late Josephine A. Fiorentino, who negotiated with Harvard and championed the idea to replace the outdated Charlesview Apartments. Fiorentino lived for many years in the community and was passionate about helping to provide housing and community facilities to area families.

The new 10,000 s/f facility, located at 123 Antwerp St., is wireless and has a computer room outfitted with 50 computers, thanks to Google, the project's largest investor; an art classroom; community meeting space; classrooms where programs for children and adults will be held; and common areas.

The grand opening, attended by 250 people, began with a short speaking program, followed by festivities including face painting, origami, tours of the center, food and an ice cream truck.

The Charlesview Residences and Community Center were designed by CBT Architects. John

Moriarty & Associates is the general contractor. The property management partner is Peabody Properties, and Housing Opportunities, Inc. is the resident relocation partner.

The \$141 million development was financed by Google (which bought \$27.6 million in low-income housing tax credits), MassHousing, HUD, AEGON USA Realty Advisors, Harvard University, The Life Initiative, Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD), The AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust and the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation (CEDAC).

The Josephine A. Fiorentino Community Center was available for special events and meetings after July 21st and will be fully operational this fall.

Father Frank Glynn, chairman of the Charlesview, Inc. board and pastor at St. Anthony's Parish, opened the ceremony by welcoming all attendees. "Today we celebrate the spirit of building community," he said. "Inspired by Josephine and the incredible patience, persistence and participation of all those involved, we are here today to launch a community center that will enrich, educate and inspire children and families through innovative programming."

Dr. Lawrence F.G. Fiorentino, son of Josephine and Charlesview, Inc. board member, evoked the spirit of his mother, saying that "Josephine's faith, family and community were very important to her. She had the vision and influencing factors to instill interest and vigor in this Charlesview development. In addition, she possessed common sense, being practical, observing and blending the skills and talents of individuals to cultivate ideas and bridge relationships to form the basis of development success."

Mayor Thomas Menino could not attend the ceremony, but sent a statement to be read. He said "The opening of the Josephine A. Fiorentino Community Center brings a much-needed resource to a very deserving neighborhood. Here, residents will have access to computers, community meeting space and classrooms for innovative programming. I want to thank Charlesview Inc., The Community Builders, and Harvard University for coming together to enrich the lives of the people of Allston-Brighton."

President and CEO of TCB Bart Mitchell also offered comments. "TCB is proud to partner with Charlesview, Inc., whose commitment to strong communities goes so far beyond housing. We are thrilled to have helped develop this community center that will provide space for the arts, technology, and neighborhood events."

Charlesview, Inc., founded 44 years ago by a consortium of religious organizations amid tensions over urban renewal, developed and managed the original Charlesview Apartments. Three of the founding congregations - St. Anthony's Catholic Church, Community United Methodist Church and Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe still actively manage Charlesview, Inc., under the leadership of an executive director and board of directors. The organization is dedicated to advancing the well being of individuals and families and promoting the diversity and vibrancy of the Allston-Brighton community. The nonprofit's mission is to provide secure and affordable homes; offer programs designed to enrich, educate and inspire; and engage in innovative philanthropy. The Josephine A. Fiorentino Community Center's mission is to promote the well being of individuals and families by providing a place to go for innovative educational, social and cultural programs.