Memories of Ms. Maybell

In May 2021, our community lost our dear friend, Ms. Maybell Fountain. She was a neighbor, an employee, an active community member, and friend to all of us at project:HOMES. To honor her and the impact she had on us, the staff decided to paint a mural in her honor on what would have been her 97th birthday. The mural faces the project:HOMES office and serves as a permanent memorial to Ms. Maybell.

“The mural is extraordinary! It’s a monumental dedication to my mom. It’s bigger than life – a forever memory,” said Cynthia Hagood, Ms. Maybell’s daughter. “We feel gifted. The whole family is overwhelmed by the overpouring amount of love from everywhere, especially project:HOMES.”

project:HOMES homebuyer, Sir James Thornhill, who purchased one of our Solar Row homes in 2019, prepared the mural for us and led the event. He and his staff also added finishing touches and painted Ms. Maybell onto the mural. He is an internationally recognized muralist, born and raised in Jackson Ward. Adding the project:HOMES mural to his portfolio, he now has 24 murals around the City of Richmond!

Our staff and Ms. Maybell’s family joined together to enjoy a day of painting, team building and reminiscing. “She cared about project:HOMES so much. You all were her everything,” said Cynthia, who was thrilled to meet the artist and be a part of the painting with her family and project:HOMES staff members.

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Vonda White couldn’t imagine living anywhere else. She adores her home on Richmond’s southside where she raised her 2 daughters and her son. “I’ve been here 30 years. This house holds many family memories, and it means a lot to me,” she said.

Vonda’s family is her top priority. She babysits her 2 grandchildren and takes care of her disabled daughter in the small, two-bedroom home. While she focused on her family’s needs the past 2 years, she couldn’t afford any home repairs. When Vonda’s oil furnace stopped working last winter, she knew her and her daughter wouldn’t be able to stay in the house and endure the cold, bitter temperatures. “It was awful,” she said. They packed their belongings and moved in with Vonda’s other daughter.

Vonda returned to her beloved house periodically. One day she found her bathroom flooded with water. Her toilet had started leaking, damaging her floor and crawl space. She knew she needed help to save her home. She called project: HOMES.

“Within days, they were here,” said Vonda. “It was amazing!” project: HOMES repaired the bathroom and crawl space, and Vonda was shocked to see the transformation in the bathroom. “The work was extensive. I never could’ve afforded that,” she said.

While inspecting her home, project: HOMES found additional problems needing immediate attention for the safety of the family. “When they told me I was getting a new roof, new doors, and a new heating and cooling system, I was shocked. I started crying,” said Vonda, who was overwhelmed knowing she was going to be able to move back home. “This new heating system will save me so much money and is safer for us,” said Vonda.

In addition to the critical repairs done by the project: HOMES Home Repair Program, project: HOMES’ Energy Conservation team also made improvements, including adding insulation to her attic, sealing air cracks, and replacing her hot water tank. These energy-saving fixes will help keep the house warm in the winter and lower her electricity bill. Vonda was thrilled the project: HOMES Volunteer Program installed railings on her porches. “I was worried one of the grandchildren would fall,” she said. “All these repairs have made a tremendous difference. It’s like I was on an extreme home makeover program.”

In addition to the portrait of Ms. Maybell, the mural also includes 4 different project: HOMES houses, including one of our manufactured homes in Bermuda Estates. “Mom would have been ecstatic about the mural! She would have brought everyone about it,” said Cynthia. “I know she sees it.”

This mural not only honors a dear friend of ours but shows how project: HOMES made investments in our Mission Advancement team, our staff culture, and our staff engagement activities. We want a creative and collaborative workspace makes our work much more fun and impactful!
In the 1950's, when the Downtown Expressway was constructed, hundreds of families were displaced and many homes destroyed or relocated to other neighborhoods, including Maymont and Randolph. This process especially isolated Black neighborhoods and removed community members from their homes.

Following their relocation to Maymont and Randolph, these brick capes were used by the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) as scattered site public housing until RRHA ended the program in 2007.

The houses sat vacant and boarded up for over a decade. Entire blocks and cul-de-sacs, including the area near the entrance to Texas Beach, were filled with empty homes. In 2016, RRHA announced their initiative to partner with housing organizations to redevelop these homes into affordable homeownership opportunities. project:HOMES and Richmond Metropolitan Habitat for Humanity stepped forward to gut and renovate the 66 homes and turn them into new homeownership opportunities for low-to-moderate income buyers.

"project:HOMES looked at this project as a once in a lifetime opportunity to completely renovate and modernize a large concentration of starter homes for affordable homeownership in a very desirable neighborhood," said Marion Cake, project:HOMES' Vice President of Affordable Housing Development.

In total, the major revitalization effort includes 66 homes, with project:HOMES renovating 38 of them. All the homes were completely stripped down to their masonry shells and rebuilt. The project is nearly complete, with the last couple of homes being sold in the coming months.

The effort has had a huge impact on the vibrancy of the community. Families facing economic barriers to homeownership and those who might not be able to purchase a home completely on their own could purchase one of these affordable homes in a thriving neighborhood. 23 of project:HOMES’ properties were purchased by buyers through the Maggie Walker Community Land Trust (MWCLT), keeping them affordable in perpetuity.

project:HOMES and Richmond Habitat were awarded a Golden Hammer Award by the Historic Richmond Foundation and the Storefront for Community Design for the extraordinary revitalization efforts in the Maymont and Randolph neighborhoods. We also were awarded a VAGHC award in 2020 for our partnership with MWCLT.
It was another exciting year at Bermuda Estates! 200 individuals, including 72 children, call the park home. Residents come from diverse backgrounds, including countries throughout Central and South America, and Asia. As project:HOMES continues its work to improve Bermuda Estates, we’re seeing firsthand the resiliency and resourcefulness of the community, which is endlessly inspiring.

Since project:HOMES purchased the park in September 2020, we’ve focused on 3 areas of improvement: stabilization of park infrastructure and existing manufactured homes; unit replacement with new manufactured homes designed by project:HOMES and Virginia Tech; and community engagement and resource coordination.

In the first year, project:HOMES completed major infrastructure repairs and made the park safer for the 50 families living there. To-date, half of the park (25 households) have received extensive repairs to their unit. Through our community engagement work, we hosted many events at the park, including our first Christmas Party! A committee of residents along with staff helped plan the celebration. Everyone brought a dish representing their culture. Two members of the project:HOMES staff dressed as Santa and Mrs. Claus and handed out gifts for every child. We cut a cake with the community, ate together, and celebrated with the breaking of a piñata.

We also hosted our second community listening session to reveal the design of the new community center to residents. We demonstrated ways their feedback informed the design. In September, we hosted a movie night for kids to celebrate back-to-school and Hispanic Heritage Month. In October, we created a Community Council, a group of 14 residents who represent the needs and voices of the park and help project:HOMES make decisions, plan events and identify resource gaps.

“One thing I appreciate is the fact that they listen to what I have to say. The fact that we can express ourselves in our language is amazing,” said Cesia Luke, a Bermuda Estates resident. “The administration is great. They help us unite the community and the kids are more active due to the activities they create. They also bring kids and adults together through the activities they organize.”

Last summer, we established the Resource Coordination Program to connect residents to external resources, break down barriers they might face, and provide access to resources that more opportunity-rich neighborhoods have access to. From individual-based programs to large-scale classes, we connected residents with varying resources. We applied for and received rental relief for residents during the pandemic through Chesterfield County. To address stray cats in the park, we partnered with Lost Dog Foundation to neuter them. We also assisted 3 teenagers in the park with applying for college scholarships and all 3 were awarded funds by the Virginia Manufactured and Modular Housing Association.

“Your availability and openness to listen and to respond to the community has helped us gain and maintain the trust of the community,” Claudia Suarez, an executive project:HOMES Community Engagement Manager. “Our engagement approach has also been intentional in connecting the Spanish and English community, so no one feels isolated or excluded from participating in events, programs, meetings and celebrations.”

One of our biggest resource coordination projects was a month-long English as a Second Language (ESL) class to teach mothers in the park how to advocate for themselves and their children. Lessons included how to ask for an interpreter and register a child for school. With on-site childcare provided, 15 family members were able to improve their ability to communicate with teachers and school staff about their children’s education.

“I am even learning English through the classes they have provided,” said Cesia.

By fall of next year, the construction of the Community Center will be complete, and we will operate our Resource Coordination Program at a larger capacity. The space will be the foundation for future opportunities we hope to provide for families through partnerships with other local organizations who share our mission of setting up families in manufactured housing for future success.
Tiffany Terrell says she feels like a superstar as the homeowner of Richmond’s first 3D-printed home. Project:HOMES was a partner in this innovative project, alongside Virginia Housing, Virginia Tech, Alquist, RMT Construction and Better Housing Coalition. “I lucked out! I feel like a small-town hero,” said Tiffany. “I’m so happy with it. It has everything I wanted.”

The unique house displays an innovative solution to affordable housing building and is located across the street from the project:HOMES office. Tiffany purchased the home for her and her 14-year-old daughter, Makayla. As a first-time homeowner, Tiffany was ready to quit looking for a home in Richmond before she visited the 3D-printed home. She had a difficult time finding a quality home in her price range and was disappointed by the lack of affordable homes in the Richmond region.

Technologies like 3D-printing could provide a faster, less expensive alternative to traditional home building: “I didn’t know anything about 3D-printing. I came to see it when it was bare bones. It looked like a brand-new house,” said Tiffany. “I did my research after that and thought, ‘This is pretty cool.’”

A massive 3D modular construction printer from Denmark built the exterior walls with 150 layers of 3D printed concrete. The walls allow the house to better retain temperature, which saves on heating and cooling costs. They also resist extreme weather and cut down on maintenance. Traditional construction techniques were used to complete the concrete slab foundation, roof system and interior walls. The three-bedroom, two-bath home is all-electric and includes vinyl plank floors, a kitchen island, laundry room and a covered front porch. The home is designed to be comfortable, durable and affordable to maintain. Its energy-saving features are designed to be more energy-efficient than code.

“Get a towel for this house,” said Tiffany. “It’s a really nice house. It has all the bells and whistles.” After living in a small apartment, Tiffany is enjoying having more space, two bathrooms and a washer and dryer. Her favorite part of the house is the spacious front porch where she can relax. She says it’s the perfect place for her and her daughter to sit and talk after a long day of work and school. “The first night in the house, I couldn’t believe it was mine. I was so happy,” said Tiffany. “It feels great to own a home.”

TOTAL DOLLARS SPENT

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VOLUNTEER PROGRAM COSTS
In March 2021, Samar Lemons, a Henrico High School football player, was paralyzed by a serious collision during a football game. After the incident, the 18-year-old student was in a rehabilitation center for 4 months. He worked hard with physical therapists to be able to come back home.

He is majoring in computer engineering and taking his classes online. His goal is to continue to increase his mobility so he can spend at least 1 semester on campus. His family says he continues to maintain a positive outlook. Recently, he started swimming to help improve his independence and freedom again. “He allows Samar to sit outside and have his own space,” Dana said. “He’s so happy! I couldn’t get these repairs done,” said Karen, who dreaded another winter struggling to keep the house warm.

Karen called Samar what his future holds, he says, “I’m gonna walk. It’s gonna happen.” His story is one he hopes will inspire others. In the future, Samar wants to volunteer as a motivational speaker, hoping to encourage others who are living with a disability.
Looking Towards the Future: A New Apartment Development for Seniors

project:HOMES hopes to provide more affordable apartments for low-income seniors in the near future! In June, project:HOMES purchased a former coal storage property in the City of Richmond's Swansboro neighborhood to build around 80 units of affordable apartments. project:HOMES will preserve the property's original carriage house and build the new apartment complex surrounding it.

“This is an exciting opportunity for us,” said Matt Morgan, project:HOMES’ Director of Affordable Housing Development. “We can use our skill set in real estate development and construction to create more affordable housing in the area. Since they are apartments, we can offer new housing opportunities for lower-income individuals than we have historically served with our single-family construction.”

Working on a new construction project also gives project:HOMES the chance to strategically focus on innovative and creative housing types. After pre-development and community engagement are completed, construction will begin in fall 2023.