



# LSGMI Strives to Preserve Affordable Housing

## Successful Affordable Housing Condominium Conversion



With help from LSGMI, Town Park Village, a limited equity cooperative development in Overtown which has been on the verge of collapse for more than 30 years, will be transformed into a viable affordable living community. Built in 1970 in an effort to increase affordable housing,



the 151 unit apartment complex eventually fell on hard times, was unable to operate, and was threatened with foreclosure by HUD.

Committed to the preservation of affordable housing, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and the Turkel Foundation convinced HUD to forbear on their mortgage, and developed a plan to convert the ailing cooperative into an affordable condominium. Shahrzad Emami and John Little, lawyers in LSGMI's Community Economic Development Unit, were asked to serve as corporate legal counsel to the Town Park Board of Directors and handle the condominium conversion process, services which would have cost at least \$100,000 in private legal fees.

With LSGMI's assistance, the residents recently voted in favor of the condominium conversion which will give each resident a fee simple ownership interest in their unit which will each be rehabilitated. To ensure that the property remains affordable for the residents of Town Park, the units will be encumbered by affordability restrictions.

At the end of the day, the residents of Town Park Village will be able to keep their homes and own a valuable piece of real estate that can continue to operate for generations as a safe affordable housing community. This conversion is very rare and is truly a success story which will likely serve as a case study for these types of forgotten HUD insured properties.

*For more information about this project, or about any other affordable housing or community development advocacy, please contact [SEmami@lsgmi.org](mailto:SEmami@lsgmi.org) or [JLittle@lsgmi.org](mailto:JLittle@lsgmi.org).*

## Settlement with MDHA and HUD Benefits Low-Income Tenants



In August 2007, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development took control of the Miami-Dade Housing Agency (MDHA) due to financial and operational mismanagement. After HUD's takeover, the Section 8 voucher program became completely dysfunctional. Housing assistance was terminated without fair hearings,

paperwork needed to move was not provided in a timely manner, and the office was often closed without notice, creating financial and emotional turmoil for many Section 8 participants and, in the worst cases, resulting in homelessness.

Despite numerous demands, MDHA and HUD failed to correct these significant problems. In July 2008 LSGMI and Florida Legal Services filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of three single mothers who were improperly terminated from the Section 8 voucher program. The lawsuit asked the Court to order MDHA to restore the women's rental assistance, make permanent changes to Section 8 program operations, and award money for our clients' economic and emotional damages.

Immediately after the lawsuit was filed, MDHA agreed to restore our clients' rental assistance. After an early mediation, the parties reached a settlement awarding \$60,000 for our clients and making systemic changes to the program's operation: specific timeframes to process paperwork allowing participants to move and to approve new housing, and administrative safeguards to ensure due process before housing subsidies are terminated. This settlement ensures that Section 8 participants will be treated fairly and can continue to benefit from this valuable government housing program

*For more information about this case, please contact LSGMI Senior Attorney Jeffrey Hearne at [JHearne@lsgmi.org](mailto:JHearne@lsgmi.org).*

## Training and Mentoring Update

On January 30, attorneys from Carlton Fields participated in a pilot training on private landlord tenant law for pro bono attorneys who want to help LSGMI prevent homelessness. Matthew Elish, Merrick Gross and Charles Rosenberg learned from REAL Project Director Ilenia Sanchez-Bryson how they can help the REAL Project by giving advice to tenants facing eviction. The REAL Project is a telephone hotline funded by the Miami Coalition for the Homeless and Camillus House.



*Matthew Elish, Merrick Gross,  
Charles Rosenberg, Ilenia Sanchez-Bryson*

On February 6, LSGMI staff attorneys and Board members met for a fun-filled lunch to kick off a new Group Mentoring Program. The program involves creating mentoring circles of staff attorneys and Board members who meet to discuss issues and develop strategies to enhance the professional development, reputation and network of LSGMI's staff attorneys. The Program will be jointly administered by Beth Papir Haspel, LSGMI Staff Attorney, and Tiffani Lee, Board/Staff Relations Committee Chair. The Committee appreciates Board members Olanike Adebayo, Garrett Biondo, Jeff Crockett, Manny Dobrinsky, Lance Harke, Gary Palmer, Darrell Payne and Cristina Rodriguez who have generously agreed to participate as mentors.



*Tiffani Lee*

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## Your Support Helps People Like Olga



Olga is separated from her husband and works full time to support her two minor children with no financial help from her husband. She came to LSGMI for help because her tax refund of \$3,920 for 2004 was frozen, and the IRS claimed she owed \$5,716 for 2005 plus continuing interest and penalties. LSGMI filed a Petition in Tax Court and an audit reconsideration to support Olga's claims for the Earned Income Credit, dependency exemption and child tax credit for both years. Counsel for the IRS conceded that Olga was entitled to the claims on her returns, and she received her 2004 refund and the IRS erased the debt for 2005.

*If you or your firm want to donate time to LSGMI or have questions about how you can support us, please call Marcia K. Cypen at 305-438-2501.*

## Donor Spotlight

The Community Economic Development Project assists nonprofit community development corporations seeking to develop affordable housing and revitalize distressed neighborhoods. This Project is made possible because of generous contributions **In Memory of Frances and Louis M. Jepeway.**

Louis M. Jepeway, Sr., a well-respected attorney, practiced law with his son, Louis M. Jepeway, Jr. at their firm Jepeway & Jepeway in Miami.

Jepeway, Jr., who is an LSGMI Board member, carries on his parents' legacy and lends his support to those who need it most. "My father was a strong supporter of equal justice and he instilled that passion in me throughout my career," said Jepeway, Jr. "I am proud to contribute to LSGMI in memory of my parents."

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### *Board Member Feature*

*Lance A. Harke, Esq.*  
*Harke & Clasby LLP*

Lance A. Harke, a founding partner and trial lawyer at Harke & Clasby LLP, has dedicated himself to Equal Justice as an LSGMI Board Member since 2007. With a longstanding interest in pro bono work and making the justice system fairer for disadvantaged and financially struggling individuals and families, Harke says “LSGMI was a perfect fit for me given the great work they do across so many areas in which people are so desperately in need.”

A University of Miami School of Law Cum Laude graduate and successful trial attorney, Harke’s practice concentrates in multi-state consumer class action litigation, insurance litigation, employment matters, professional malpractice, products liability defense, and general and complex commercial litigation. Harke finds it rewarding to represent consumers who have been victimized by unfair or illegal business practices, put an end to those practices and obtain compensation for those who have been victimized.

A frequent lecturer and author on discovery, trial techniques and the rules of civil procedure, Harke recently shared his trial expertise by serving as a faculty member for a NITA trial program for LSGMI staff attorneys. He is also participating in LSGMI’s new staff attorney mentoring program.

As a member of LSGMI’s Fundraising Committee, Harke says he plans to work in 2009 to raise LSGMI’s visibility in the South Florida legal community “so there is an understanding of what it is that makes us so unique, and so that potential donors understand why it is so important that we receive adequate funds to continue helping those we serve, especially through these dire economic times.”

“Our program has been enriched by Lance’s passion for our vision of equal justice,” says LSGMI Executive Director, Marcia K. Cypen. “His energy and commitment are a tremendous asset to our Board of Directors and our staff.”