



2019 BLUE RIBBON AWARD *Winner, Small CDC*

CENTENNIAL VILLAGE, COMMUNITY VENTURES

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A Good Spot to Be Ambitious

When Community Ventures and their neighborhood partner, the Parkside Association, first approached Philadelphia housing officials about redeveloping 52nd and Parkside more than a decade ago, they were pushed to go bigger and be bolder. “This was a good spot to be ambitious,” said David LaFontaine, Community Venture’s Executive Director. What started as a modest second phase of affordable homeownership turned into a \$21 million project with 51 affordable apartments and more than 7,200 square feet of commercial space, contained in 14 buildings across two city blocks. Also included were green spaces for residents and neighbors to enjoy and garden. Where once there was a nuisance bar, a gas station, blighted buildings, and vacant lots, this corner of West Parkside became a modern, vibrant community hub thanks to the creation of Centennial Village.

“This has been 11 years of blood, sweat, and tears,” said Lucinda Hudson, the Parkside Association’s Executive Director (and PACDC’s 2017 Community Leader awardee). The Parkside Association was able to move its headquarters from an old, inaccessible rowhouse into a Centennial Village storefront space, which led to more neighbors stopping by the offices than ever before! The Parkside Association now has a conference room and storage area that makes distribution of food aid to neighbors much easier. Neighbors also now have access to a day-care center located in one of the commercial spaces, and that old nuisance bar will soon be home to a restaurant.

Centennial Village opened in September 2018 and immediately had a three-year waiting list for its apartments. The units are conveniently

located within walking distance of the recently built ParkWest Town Center, which includes a grocery store. Troy Hannigan, Program Director at Community Ventures, noted how Centennial Village provided opportunities for longtime residents of the community the chance to stay and enjoy the changes happening in the neighborhood by moving into affordable, accessible units.

Community Ventures’ approach to development is illustrated by Centennial Village. The developer partnered with the neighborhood-based Parkside Association at every step of the way. They held community charrettes to hear what neighbors wanted to include in the project. Their focus on environmental sustainability led to the inclusion of green space for neighbors to enjoy and garden. And the place looks great. “People think they are moving into a luxury housing development!” said LaFontaine, noting how Community Ventures cares about good design so as not to stigmatize affordable housing.

Now that the blood, sweat, and tears are replaced with feelings of pride, Community Ventures is setting its sights on the next few projects. They’ll break ground this spring on 37 homes for grandparents raising their grandchildren. Fingers are crossed that the stars will align to create a new supportive housing project in one of the city’s most desirable, amenity-rich neighborhoods.

Congratulations to Community Ventures for winning PACDC’s 2019 Blue Ribbon Award!