

The RHA

# IN FOCUS

Newsletter 2023  
JANUARY



## RHA'S FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

Every five years RHA Leadership Team and RHA Staff create the foundation for the RHA agency for the next five years to come. The update five-year plan is for 2023-2028 and goes over RHA objectives, goals, and initiatives we hope to accomplish in the next five years.

**"Moving Forward Together."** – our shared strategic plan to create a public good for our residents and the community we serve, because of the input of the RHA Staff, community partners, and constituents, **"Moving Forward Together"** belongs to each of us.

The RHA **"Moving Forward Together"** Five-Year Strategic Plan demonstrates our commitment to embracing our role as a 21st-century public housing agency for the public good. While this plan builds off our momentum and will serve as our agency's guiding strategy, it is not defined just by goals and metrics. Our actions define it by our collective aspirations and limitless potential. It is characterized by our journey aptly named **"Moving Forward Together."**

To become the Agency, we aspire to be; we must continue to work toward being more diverse, inclusive, and enlightened. We aspire to be a resident-centered launch for the community's future. We are guided by this effort in our decision-making to remain focused on our mission. We believe that we can make a meaningful difference in our community through sustained actions while building trust. The RHA Leadership Team revisited the detailed Mission and Vision written in 2013 and was updated in 2022.

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ROCKFORD HOUSING AUTHORITY  
FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 - 2028

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# RHA’S FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN CONT.

The revised Mission and Vision Statements establishes the commitment of the Agency’s time, resources, assets, and energy to this worthy vision, working in conjunction with the Move to Work Initiative.

RHA Vision:

RHA provides pathways for people to enhance their quality of life through inclusive, affordable, and innovative housing initiatives while investing in the education, training, and personal development of our residents through strategic programming and partnerships while serving as a facilitator for neighborhood restoration by investing in our community and remaining committed to creating an atmosphere that promotes overall health, wellness, and economic growth, for a greater quality of life.

RHA Mission:

To continue to create strategic partnerships with community stakeholders, design a diverse housing portfolio, and leverage social service programming to unite and ensure residents are provided with safe and nurturing environments that lead to self-sufficiency, responsibility, and individual empowerment.

The Rockford Housing Authority’s Core Values drive our behavior and have formed the tenets of our beliefs. People in satisfying corporate relationships will often say their team shares their values. **“Moving Forward Together”** cannot be done without these foundational values, which serve the highest common good, and not only dictates how we live our lives but is a pathway to success for the Agency and the individuals we serve.

The Core Values remain the same:

- Professional
- Quality
- Caring
- Collaborative
- Respectful
- Integrity
- Resourcefulness
- Leadership
- Consistency
- Accountability

Over the next Five Years, RHA will reach new horizons by proactively focusing on our goals which include Human Services, RHA Team Leadership, quality affordable homes, and innovative WorkForce Initiatives.

RHA has identified high-impact areas aligned with the overall vision of the Plan and the RHA mission. We have set goals, and defined objectives, and create actionable plans to achieve each. Serving as a roadmap charting the course for the next Five Years, the strategic plan’s goals will guide our decisions, influence behaviors, and inspire confidence in the mission of our organization while producing results for our residents and fulfilling the needs of our community.



# National Blood Donor Month

National Blood Donor Month is observed in January every year. The observance started more than 50 years ago, on December 31st, 1969, after the president signed a proclamation designating January as Blood Donor Month. The month of January is significant because it is usually a period of critical blood shortages.

There are many different places you can donate blood in the Rockford area, such as; Rock River Valley Blood Center and the American Red Cross of Northwest Illinois. Both offer blood drives around Rockford at churches and hospitals. The Rockford Housing Authority encourages all staff and residents to donate blood this January.

National Blood Awareness Month has been recognized since 1970. According to Health Prep, there are benefits of donating blood.

Benefits of donating:

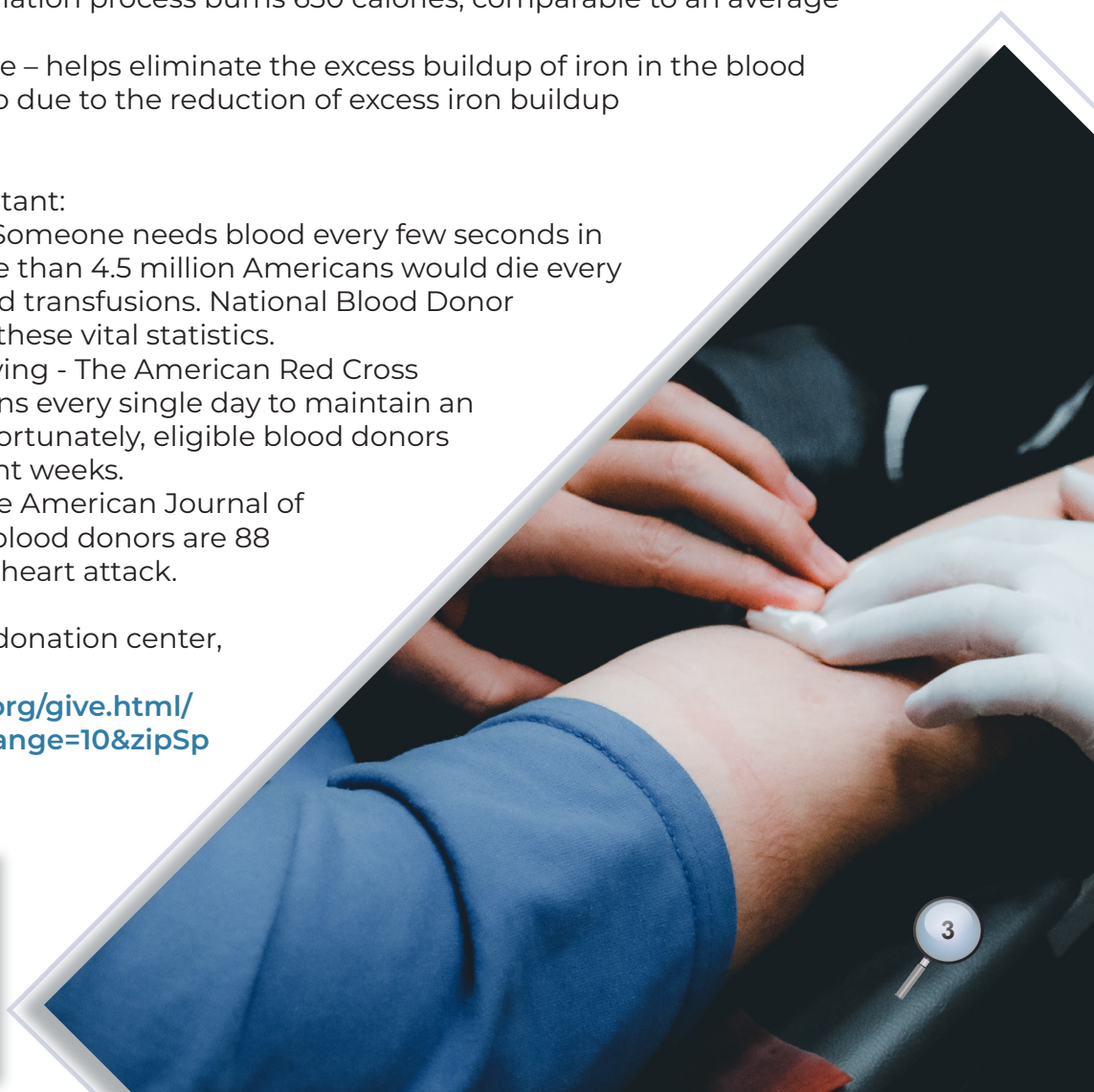
- Free blood tests – contributed blood is tested, and the donor can ask to be informed if any irregularities are found.
- Calorie burn – The blood donation process burns 650 calories, comparable to an average spin class!
- Reduced risk of heart disease – helps eliminate the excess buildup of iron in the blood
- Reduced risk of cancer – also due to the reduction of excess iron buildup in the blood

Why donating blood is important:

- Donating blood save lives - Someone needs blood every few seconds in the United States. And more than 4.5 million Americans would die every year without lifesaving blood transfusions. National Blood Donor Month helps us remember these vital statistics.
- It's the gift that keeps on giving - The American Red Cross needs 13,000 blood donations every single day to maintain an appropriate blood supply. Fortunately, eligible blood donors can donate blood every eight weeks.
- It's good for donors, too - The American Journal of Epidemiology reports that blood donors are 88 percent less likely to have a heart attack.

To find a local blood drive or donation center, please visit:

<https://www.redcrossblood.org/give.html/drive-results?order=DATE&range=10&zipSpensor=61107>





# Housing Choice Voucher Program Five Part Series

*A NOTE TO THE READER: The following is a Five Part Op-ed Series to educate, inform, understand, and empower the reader on the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV), commonly referred to as Section 8.*

*THE RHA LEADERSHIP TEAM*

## **Part One: The Importance of a Changing Community Face**

In the Greater Rockford Area, low-income individuals and families use vouchers to help pay for privately owned housing, which has historically been referenced, and commonly known as 'Section 8 Housing.' With this series, we will cover two essential areas for clarification, what a family is and the basic working principles of the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Unfortunately, today, many of us have fallen victim to erroneous information without questioning its accuracy or scrutinizing the motives and reliability of the sources. Misunderstanding, misinformation, and a slew of false or content inaccuracies have provided disinformation to people who simply want to navigate the real opportunities that the Housing Choice Voucher Program provides. The Series provided here is a humble and respectful attempt to teach and empower the community to find out what HCV is and what HCV is not, and equally important, why HCV is so critical to residents within our community.

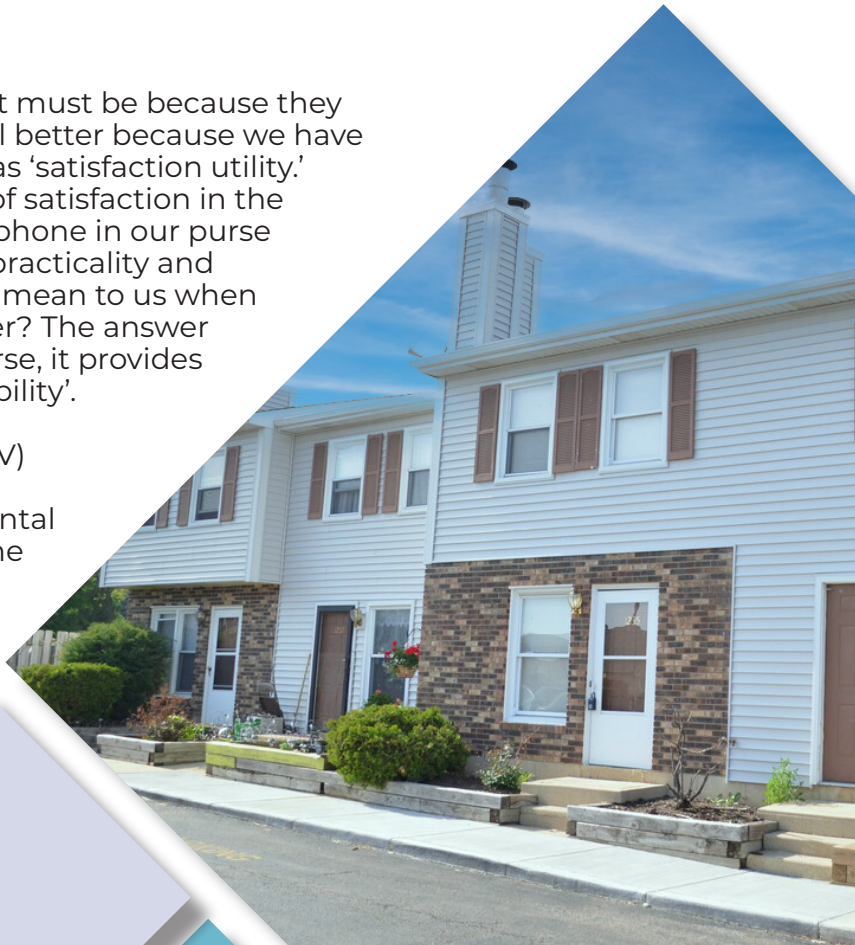
Our goal for this News Series is to inform individuals who may not understand how the Rockford Housing Authority, or for that matter any other Public Housing Authority, are funded for the HCV Program, what real restrictions are faced in funding, or how the RHA's mission aligns with that of the organization.

## **Part Two: The Value of Portability**

Why do we buy the goods and services we do? It must be because they provide all of us with satisfaction. We indeed feel better because we have purchased them. Economists have termed this as 'satisfaction utility.' We all have come to recognize the importance of satisfaction in the 'utility concept of portability.' From that mobile phone in our purse to the compact umbrella in our car, we see the practicality and satisfaction of Portability. However, what does it mean to us when it is documentation on an intrinsic piece of paper? The answer for some folks is that it is invaluable. And, of course, it provides excellent satisfaction through its' utility of portability'.

"Portability" in the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program refers to the process through which an individual or family can transfer or "port" your rental subsidy when they move to a location outside the jurisdiction of the Rockford Housing Authority.

*Article Continues on Pg. 5*



In this example, we are the public housing agency (PHA) that first issued the voucher when the participant was selected for the program (the initial PHA). This process, likewise, holds true for all agencies in the US.

### **Part Three: Unraveling and Demystifying the Common Myths of the HCV Landlord Program**

So far, we have highlighted the essential areas of the HCV Program, what constitutes a family, the basic working principles of the Housing Choice Voucher Program, and the model of HCV portability. Our HCV Program's success is based upon regular communication with our clients, Landlords, and program partners and a commitment to following through on our promises.

In the Greater Rockford Area, low-income individuals and families use vouchers to help pay for privately owned housing, commonly known as 'Section 8 Housing.' Our continuous goal is to educate and inform, the reader, and the following HCV subject matter will cover the aspects of our community strategic partners, Our Landlords.

We had stated in an earlier Op-Ed, and it bears repeating here, 'That the "" "choice" ""' in the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program's name refers to the opportunity tenants have to choose where they want to live.

However, this choice heavily depends on landlords willing to accept vouchers. Therefore, landlords are critical to the success of the HCV Program.' With this article, we desire to reverse some of the stigmatism the program has encountered over the years.

### **Part Four: The Value of Homeownership**

A sense of belonging and a feeling of pride comes with being a homeowner alongside others in the Rockford community. While being a homeowner is not for everyone due to life situations, timing, or other family obligations, homeownership, nonetheless, can provide excellent opportunities for you and your family. Investing and building equity, improving your credit, greater privacy, and control over your living space, are just a few of the outcomes that come with the longer-term stability of owning your own home. Buying a home also means you are also developing your family's prosperity over time. For our RHA residents, The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) homeownership program allows you and your family assistance, under the HCV program to use your voucher to buy a home and receive monthly assistance in meeting homeownership expenses.

As part of your journey, The RHA Human Services Team in partnership with HOMESTART will provide you with pre-housing assistance counseling. They will present insight into owning a home and what it means to incur more expenses than renting. Homeownership expenses are considered when determining the amount of housing assistance. These include such expenses as your principal and interest payments, mortgage insurance, property taxes, homeowner's insurance, and monthly utilities.

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### **Part 5: Demand Goes up, Supply Goes Down**

The number of renters in America saw a boost in rates all across the nation. From suburbs to cities, to our own community. Today, in the Rockford community, the landlord real estate sector has an array of free-standing homes, duplexes, mobile homes, and apartments. Private market rate rental housing, accounts, for the vast majority of housing options in the Rockford community.

Rightly so, community Landlords price the value market rate for their rental housing stock, at the current fair market rate.

For some voucher recipients, there are distinct advantages to finding your own apartment or separate rental home or duplex in the community. As contained in the last Op-ed, fourth in this series, "Home Ownership" can also be part of the program decision mix as well. With this final article, we will investigate and examine the challenges for the working poor and very low-income residents in our community that need housing and how the Housing Choice Voucher program addresses the issue of quality affordable housing.

We encourage you the reader to learn more about the HCV Program. Over the five Op-ed articles we were able to highlight some of the salient points of the program. For your convenience we have included link to resources that will provide you with additional insight.

The Rockford Housing Authority's ongoing mission is that a quality home life provides hope and the pathway to goals. Responsible and respectful people deserve the opportunity to contribute to attaining a comfortable quality home and a neighborhood all can have pride in—a place to call home.

Learn more about the HCV Program and to read all of the News Stories, head over to the RHA News Page here:

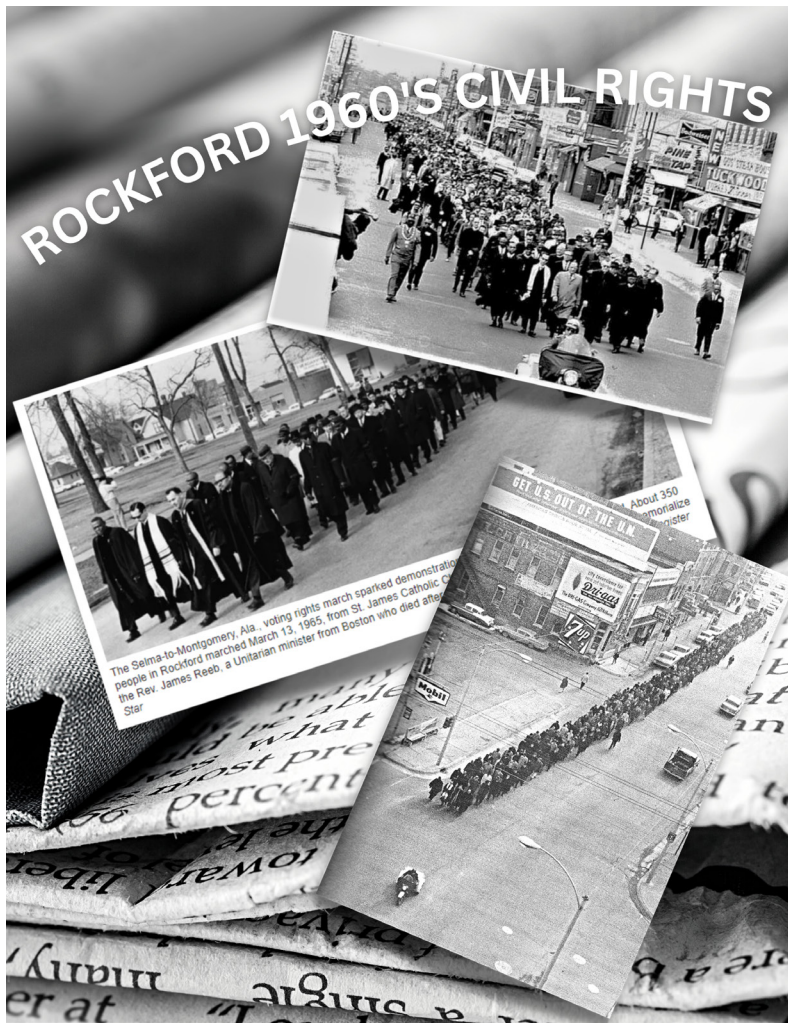
<https://rockfordha.org/calendar/rha-news/>

# Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2023

*"Ensuring the voices of those we serve are heard in the democratic process, by observing Martin Luther King Jr. Day"*

The Civil Rights Movement sought to win the American promise of liberty and equality during the twentieth century and Martin Luther King, Jr. was a catalyst for this change, here in our community and the country as a whole. The last major Civil Rights Act was known as the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Including the Fair Housing Act as Title VIII, the act was intended as a follow-up to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and it explicitly prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, and sex.

*"Our democracy is built on checks and balances. The Martin Luther King, Jr., Day which is observed annually on the third Monday in January is good time for us together, to use our united voice to safeguard the future for students, our families, our residents and constituents in our community,"* states Laura Snyder, RHA, CEO.



## Civil Rights Movement

Perhaps, now is the time to contemplate the historical sacrifices of the Civil Rights Movement, women's suffrage, and the basic freedoms weaved into our Constitution. If this is what you believe, it is time to consider how delicate our Republic truly is and also perhaps value the role of a healthy two-party system that offers an effervescent independent alternative.

The civil rights movement was a struggle for social justice that took place mainly during the 1950s and 1960s for Black Americans to gain equal rights under the law in the United States. Here in Rockford as well, Civil Rights marchers, demonstrated on April 7, 1968, on West State Street.

Reflecting, Ms. Snyder states, "At Rockford Housing Authority, diversity and inclusion have always been the bedrock of our core values which help ensure that everyone sees themselves represented and included. It is a crucial part of who we are. If you want to hold accountable those who would speak for you and all of us, then there has never been a better time for social justice, through your vote, to protect your civil rights."



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM INFOCUS 2022

The following highlights of the InFocus Newsletter are a recap of milestones and accomplishments that RHA has achieved this past year through the hard work of our employees. From winning the NARHO Award to HUD designation of a Move to Work agency, RHA has made great strides to serve our residents and the community.

## **Rockford Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency Program Receives Federal Grant January 4, 2022**

Representative Cheri Bustos announced in a statement to the media December 22, 2021 that the Rockford Housing Authority was one of seven 17th District agencies to receive a Federal Housing Grant. RHA is set to receive a grant of \$180,000 dollars from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Family Self-Sufficiency Program.



The grant will fund services such as childcare, transportation, education, job training, employment counseling, financial literacy, and homeownership counseling to improve upward mobility for local families, as part of Rockford Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency Program.

## **Jobs Plus Initiative Launch January 2022**



The Rockford Housing Authority was granted the Jobs Plus Initiative Grant in April 2021. Since then, the Jobs Plus team in conjunction with community partners and HUD has been hard at work preparing for the program's launch. The program comprises three steps; employment-related services, where the jobs plus team will work with partners to get you a job that fits. The next part of the program is the rental incentive, meaning that once in the program, your rent will not increase with your earned income for the four years you are with jobs plus. The final component is the community supports for work aiming to create a culture of work within the RHA developments with the help of on-site residents spreading the word of the program.

The Jobs Plus team held a community launch in January for residents, media, and others in the community to learn about the program, the benefits to RHA residents and how the Jobs Plus Program will positively affect the community over the next four years.

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## **HUD designation of a moving to work agency** **February 2022**

A Milestone for The Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) and the Rockford Community has been achieved. "The RHA leadership Team is pleased for the approval from HUD, that RHA has been designated as a Move to Work (MTW) Agency. This important program designation will serve the residents and the community in a new way. With this new MTW business model we are able to provide incentives for our landlords to encourage them to participate in the HCV program thereby giving our resident's greater access to areas of higher opportunities," states Laura Snyder, RHA CEO.

RHA is committed to actively exploring and aggressively seizing opportunities that move the agency forward in the fulfillment of its mission and strategic goals in ways that are reflective of local housing needs, while implementing activities designed to meet one or more of the MTW statutory objectives. The MTW designation, creates and accesses opportunities that continue to be key in meeting these milestones, whether it be implementing increased program efficiencies, leveraging resources to preserve increase affordable housing or encouraging the improved well-being of the individuals and families that we serve.

## **Women of Influence Event 2022 Recap** **March 2022**

The Annual Women of Influence Event hosted by the Rockford Housing Authority and community leaders, is a day of education, empowerment, and conversation. The event is held in March 2022 during Women's History Month, highlighting all the women leaders in the Rockford Community. The panelists this year included; Alderman Gabrielle Torina, City of Rockford 5th Ward Alderman, Dr. Sandra Martell, Public Health Administrator Winnebago County Health Department, Chief Carla Redd, City of Rockford Chief of Police, Commissioner Sandra Sigala, President Local 607 Journeyman, Ms. Jennifer Williams, Real Estate Regional Operations Manager, and Commissioner NeAngela Dixon, Attorney General Counsel.

The day was surrounded with powerful conversations about women in leadership roles, and the trials and tribulations of getting to those positions. Panelist Gabrielle Torina stated "Thank you Rockford Housing Authority for hosting the "Women of Influence" panel discussion and job fair today. It means a lot to tell my story in hopes of empowering other women to dream big. I feel so blessed to have been a part of this." Another attendee said "Great event. Great speakers."

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## **Brewington Oaks Deconstruction Complete** **July 2022**



In April of 2022, RHA commissioners received HUD approval to begin the deconstruction of the vacant Brewington Oaks Development. Approximately 90 of the 418 apartments were declared uninhabitable in 2018, and RHA determined that the units were beyond cost-effective repair. Brewington is now fully deconstructed.



## **NARHO Award of Excellence winner, RHA** **July 2022**

The National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) recently awarded 18 prestigious Awards of Excellence to 14 housing and community development organizations for creating innovative programs that improve their communities. The 18 award-winning programs were selected by regional juries from a pool of Awards of Merit recipients. The winning programs must improve resident outcomes, resolve problems, and be replicable by organizations of similar size. They must also produce tangible results such as cost savings, enhanced productivity, improved client services, and better service coordination. "These awards put a spotlight on the vital work that NAHRO members do nationwide, and show how creativity and collaboration can lead to success," NAHRO Interim CEO Mike Gerber said. "Congratulations to this year's winners! You've set the bar high." The Rockford Housing Authority is proud to announce the winning of the Award of Excellence in the Resident and Client Services category for their Section 3 Promotion and Resident Awareness.



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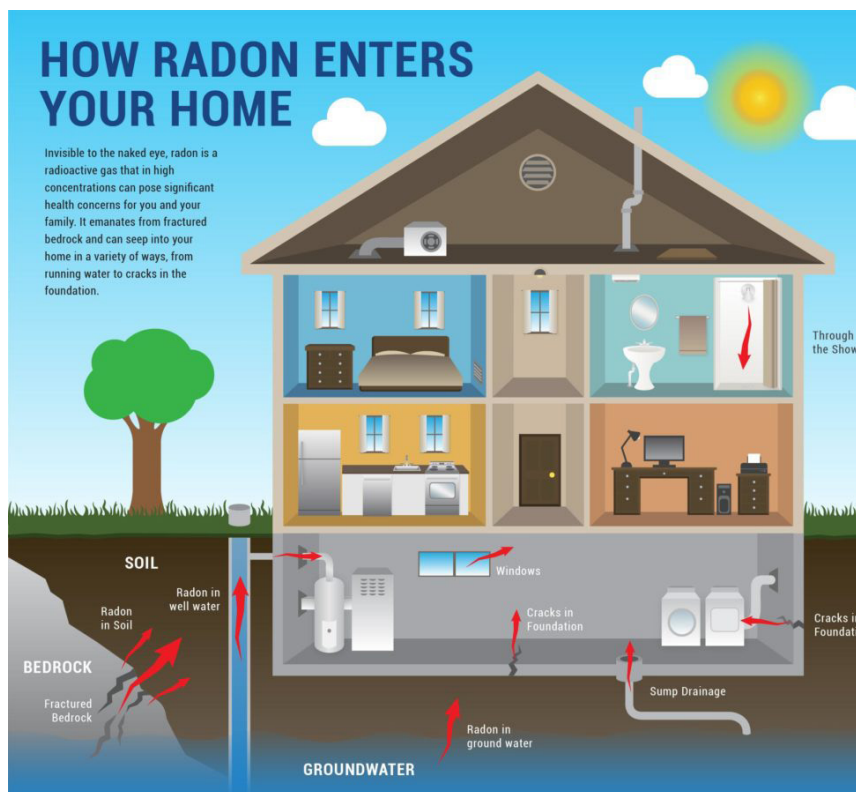
## HUD Awards More Than \$220,000 to Rockford Housing Authority for Radon Testing and Mitigation July 2022

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded \$220,126 to Rockford Housing Authority to protect low-income families in public housing properties from radon. Rockford Housing Authority will use the funds to mitigate 36 residential units throughout two developments already tested and shown to have actionable levels of radon. It will also conduct additional radon hazard testing on the remaining 450 units to help guide future planning for radon mitigation.

The award is part of \$4 million awarded to nine public housing agencies (PHAs) throughout the country through HUD's new Radon Testing and Mitigation Demonstration Program. PHAs will use the funds in public housing properties where low-income families reside to conduct testing and, when needed, mitigate radon in public housing units they manage.

## Strong Families Initiative August 16, 2022

Folks came full of energy and dressed in some of the best summer outfits, with positive vibes to win cash and door prizes at the event held on August 12th. Hosted as part of The HUD Strong Families Initiative, by The Rockford Housing Authority, the day also included, a Job Resource Fair hosted by the RHA Leadership Team and the Human Services Specialists. "Behind every child who is confident, self-assured, and resilient is a parent who believed and encouraged them first," states, Carandus Brown, RHA Human Services Manager. Our continued mission is to strengthen, empower and improve the quality of life of families living in HUD assisted housing communities by providing access to a variety of services through a strategic collaborative approach in the areas of health, education, and economic empowerment.







Rockford Housing Authority  
223 S Winnebago Street  
Rockford, IL 61102

## Did You Know?

### Rockford Housing Authority is closed for Martin Luther King Jr. Day, January 16th, 2022

#### The Journey of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

On the third Monday in January, each year we pause as a nation to remember a civil rights hero, Martin Luther King Jr. MLK Day was designed to honor the activist and minister whose accomplishments in the civil rights movement continues to inspire generations of American people.

**Did you know** that it took 15 years of fighting for MLK Day to be declared a national holiday?

King was the first modern citizen to be honored with a federal holiday and with his nonviolent leadership throughout the civil rights movement, it made sense to celebrate him. The first innovative to honor King took place only four days after his passing. John Conyers, a then Democratic Congressman from Michigan, took to Congress to insist on a federal holiday in King's honor. However, the request was silenced. When his first bill failed, Conyers was unconcerned. "Conyers would persist year after year, Congress after Congress, in introducing the same bill again and again, gathering co-sponsors along the way, until his persistence finally paid off," writes historian Don Wolfensberger. Every single attempt for 15 years failed. Then in 1983, as civil rights movement veterans gathered in Washington to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the March on Washington, King's seminal "I Have a Dream" speech, and the 15th anniversary of his murder, something shook loose. The bill passed with ease the following day as President Ronald Reagan immediately signed the legislation. It wasn't until 2000 that every state in the Union finally observed Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

