

Homes of Hope helps neighborhoods bounce back

Program also aids those recovering from addiction

By Lark Reynolds
Contributing writer

Urban renewal and revitalization are words that get tossed around a lot by city and county governments, but sometimes the concept itself can seem like a pipe dream. But Don Oglesby, executive director of Homes of Hope, has seen it happen here in Greenville.

Homes of Hope is a local nonprofit with a two-pronged focus on creating affordable housing options for low-income families and individuals, and providing job training and mentoring for men overcoming drug and alcohol addictions.

The initial focus when the agency started in 1998 was on housing, and some of the most visible successes — at least to the public eye — are in that sector. Homes of Hope started working on acquiring and rebuilding homes in the West Greenville community in 2004, when the area was known mostly for high levels of crime and gang activity.

"Things like a dead-end street in a low-income neighborhood are an invitation for crime activities or maybe gang activities," Oglesby said. "What was a real eye-opener when we first started doing all this was how close our low-income neighborhoods were to everything else, but you never knew they were there."



GEORGE GARDNER / Staff

Don Oglesby, executive director of Homes for Hope, says the agency began acquiring houses for rebuilding in 2004.

They were, as Oglesby put it, a good golf swing from Greenville's West End and minor league ball park. As Homes of Hope began building new homes and streets and opening up cul-de-sacs, other things began to happen that spurred the neighborhood revitalization. For one thing, existing homeowners in the areas began to improve their own houses.

"People start fixing their houses up who have never had any incentive to, so the neighborhood starts beautifying by itself," Oglesby said.

Another result has been an influx of more tradition-

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al builders, who see an opportunity to market newly revitalized neighborhoods to middle-income homebuyers. Although most Homes of Hope houses are rentals, the ones that aren't are also attracting those middle-income families, Oglesby said.

"It's healthy for the neighborhood to have a mix of incomes, a mix of ethnic backgrounds, a mix of cultures," Oglesby said.

And although the West Greenville revitalization is a success that's easy to point to, there are many others. Another aspect of Homes for Hope's housing program is rebuilding donated mobile homes — in a huge workshop attached to their offices — and then selling them to homeless families for \$100 a month.

The men who do the rebuilding are borrowed from the Greenville Rescue Mission and Miracle Hill Ministries, and they do the work as part of their program at those ministries for overcoming addiction. Upon completion of those programs,

many join up with Homes of Hope's yearlong job training program.

"Our program piggybacks what's already been started in a Christ-centered program, where a man's already made a commitment" to overcome his addiction, Oglesby said.

Men in the Homes of Hope program spend a year learning housing-related job skills and putting them into practice at Homes of Hope properties. They also take part in classes on understanding the Bible and mentoring in that area, if they are so inclined. They are given a stipend each week, and

their housing and board and much of their clothing expenses are covered by Homes of Hope.

"We're giving them a little bit of freedom, and some responsibility, and letting them see how they do with it," Oglesby said.

Since the agency's start, Homes of Hope has worked with 264 men in the job training program, and as an added indicator of the program's success, every male employee at Homes of Hope except Oglesby is a program grad.

"Now they're the ones who are giving back to these men and teaching them," Oglesby said.