

FACES OF HOME

Meeting a Need in the Community

Kris Fehr of AK Investments doesn't shy away from helping her community of Dickinson, North Dakota. She serves as an assisting minister and sings in the choir at St. John's Lutheran church; she is director of the Best Friends Mentoring Program; she's involved with Boy Scouts, is an active Rotarian, and serves as President of the school board. So when an opportunity came to further help residents of Dickinson, Fehr jumped right in.

Dickinson has become a hub for the oil and gas industry and many people have moved into the area for the economic opportunities. The current housing stock that is affordable for low- to moderate-income households has become limited with the high growth rates.

In 2011, Fehr read about the Housing Incentive Fund (HIF), administered by the North Dakota Housing Finance Agency. It was created during the legislative session that year to provide developers of affordable rental units with low cost financing.

"I was hearing heartbreaking stories," said Fehr. "Rents were increasing and some residents couldn't afford to stay here. I felt like we could make a difference and help address our community's affordable housing shortage."

Fehr put an application together and it was accepted in an early 2012 funding round. HIF was the perfect tool for Kris



and her husband, Alan, to convert 161 S Main, a 100-year-old property, into 10 units of affordable housing.

While the couple had acquired and owned rental property for many years, this would be the first project that they would be developing. Despite the challenges of finding a contractor, working through a myriad of details, coordinating city inspections, utilities, water, additional financing and dealing with a couple minor setbacks, the apartments were completed in September 2013.

"We didn't set out to be developers; we enjoyed meeting a need in the community," said Fehr. "HIF did what it was intended to do. Our units were nearly all rented in two months and our tenants are new residents of Dickinson – all ages and all ethnicities."

Through the process, Fehr developed a new admiration for developers.

"There is really so much involved and so much can go wrong, you really have to work as a team and depend on others to complete the project," said Fehr. "It was my goal to be open, honest and straightforward with what I'm doing

and to communicate. In the end it was really satisfying to know we could help others."

Since 2011, developers like Fehr have made more than 1,500 units in 57 developments in communities across the state possible by utilizing HIF.

Housing Incentive Fund (HIF)

Administered by North Dakota Housing Finance Agency (NDHFA), HIF supports the development of affordable units for low- and moderate-income households.

The program was created during the 2011 Legislative Session. It was reauthorized and expanded during the 2013 session.

Since HIF's inception, NDHFA has allocated over \$49 million to projects, leveraging more than \$240 million in construction financing.

Those projects provide much-needed housing for families, essential service workers and disabled and elderly households.

"These units are for people who are not making the big money, yet they are working as ambulance drivers, firefighters, grocery store clerks, mechanics, office

managers, dental hygienists. They are part of what makes our town great, progressive and productive. If we don't find ways to support them, they will leave," said Fehr. "Everyone deserves quality housing."

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