

Bon Jovi, Newark Mayor Booker unveil \$10.4M affordable housing project

By David Giambusso/The Star-Ledger
December 08, 2009, 7:09PM

NEWARK -- Who says you can't go home? Thanks to Jersey-born rock star Jon Bon Jovi, HIV/AIDS patients in Newark finally can.

Bon Jovi today officially opened HELP Genesis JBJ Soul Homes -- 51 units of affordable housing in Newark's North Ward, with 15 units dedicated solely for HIV/AIDS patients, making it the first ever project of its kind in New Jersey.

Jon Bon Jovi helps open HELP Genesis JBJ Soul Homes in Newark

"Today I believe the sun is shining brighter in Newark," Bon Jovi said to a packed lobby in the new building. "Today a dream has been realized."

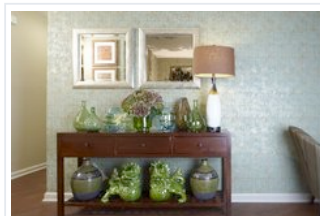
Almost a year and a half ago, Bon Jovi and HELP USA chairwoman Maria Cuomo Cole approached Newark Mayor Cory Booker with the idea to provide affordable housing that featured community services as well as state of the art design and construction. Despite a flagging economy, Cole and Bon Jovi, with Booker's political backing, were able to fund the \$10.4 million project with philanthropic donations and tax abatements.

"A lot of philanthropy came together to create the nicest affordable housing in New Jersey," Booker said after the event.

HELP USA, the project's developer, was founded in 1986. The group has built roughly 30 housing projects throughout the country with 2400 units. This is their first project in New Jersey and Cole credited Bon Jovi with bringing together figures from the music, fashion and political world to bring the project to fruition.

"Jon always credits the importance of 'we,'" Cole said today. "This has been one of HELP's most productive private/public partnerships in 20 years."

Cole's husband, Kenneth Cole, worked with Bon Jovi to create a line of jackets and a fragrance that generated revenue for the building and Bon Jovi's group, the JBJ Soul Foundation donated \$1 million to the project.



Courtesy of Elle Decor

Design shots of the designer-appointed model unit in the HELP USA Genesis JBJ Soul Homes. The 51 units in Newark are open to low-income families and special-needs individuals living with HIV/AIDS.

The building, which is LEED certified, features one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments with Energy Star appliances, coriander counter tops and hardwood cabinets. The building has two "homework labs" with computers, for residents' children, as well as a job counseling lab and an art studio fully stocked with easels and a dozen brand new Mac's for residents and community members.

The 15 apartments dedicated to HIV/AIDS patients come furnished with a bed, a dresser, tables and chairs, as well as modified sinks and "grab bars" to accommodate handicapped residents. With the help

of the Broadway House -- a long-term care facility for adults living with HIV/AIDS -- residents will receive help managing their medication, linkage to outside services and addiction counseling.

According to officials at the Hyacinth AIDS foundation, one of the first AIDS advocacy groups in New Jersey, the project is as unique as it is crucial.

"It's much needed," said Kim Hunter, correctional services manager at Hyacinth. "I think that there is an absence of these types of projects in our area."

Hunter said aside from health care, housing is the single most important issue affecting HIV patients.

"I work specifically with the HIV-positive male and female offender population," Hunter said. "There's always a barrier in trying to identify stable housing."

The Newark Housing Authority is providing vouchers for the 15 HIV-positive

The Newark Housing Authority is providing vouchers for the 13 HIV-positive residents as well as eight others, all taken off of their waiting list for affordable housing.

The rest of the residents were chosen in a lottery of 500 income-eligible Newarkers. The units are priced for families earning below 50 percent of the area median income and rents range from \$551 for a one-bedroom to \$773 for a three-bedroom.

The building's first official resident, Reuben Napper, 37, was on hand to thank the groups that brought the project to fruition.

"I am so excited to be transitioning to my own apartment and working toward moving on with my life," he said. Napper is an HIV patient who lost his job in the trucking industry when he became ill. "This is a dream come true."



Jerry McCrea/The Star-Ledger

Joan and George Hornig, who donated a community art and design center to the facility, Jon Bon Jovi, musician and founder of the JBJ Soul Foundation, and Newark Mayor Cory Booker tour the design center during the ribbon-cutting event for the opening of the HELP USA JBJ Soul Homes in the North Ward.

Related coverage

- [Newark group commences affordable housing project for homeless with mental health issues](#)
- [N.J. appeals court rules towns can alter zoning laws to allow affordable housing after meeting quota](#)
- [N.J. areas ranked least affordable for housing](#)