
Groups honored for urban renewal

By LeeAnn Richardson

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Groups honored for urban renewal Organizations work to upgrade sites in the city

SAN ANGELO, Texas — “Just a few years ago, there were people living in San Angelo who could read the weather by looking through the hole in their roof,” said Deborah Michalewicz, a West Texas Organizing Strategy leader from St. Therese Catholic Church in Carlsbad.

Thanks to a collaboration of many people and organizations throughout San Angelo, that no longer is the case. The San Angelo Development Corporation hosted an event Thursday that celebrated the efforts of the many organizations, the city of San Angelo and the private sector coming together to revitalize multiple communities throughout the city.

The West Texas Organizing Strategy, a coalition of interdenominational churches which seeks to do justice through education and advocacy, sponsored the lunch.

The event, held at the Northside Boys and Girls Club, “celebrated all the efforts taking place throughout the city,” said Angelica Pena, program coordinator for the city’s Family Support Division.

“It’s not just the spirit of cooperation, but determination,” said Fredd Adams, City Council member for Single Member District 4.

Home renovations and community enhancement projects spurred by the half-cent sales tax have been taking place for about the past four years. Adams said what is happening in San Angelo is unique and reflects the spirit of the city and its citizens.

“Other cities would love to have the community cooperation that we have here,” Adams said.

As the communities become developed, Adams said, the city is hoping to lure businesses into the renewed areas.

“In order to have true success, we have to have gentrification,” he said.

Adams said once businesses enter the communities, the communities can continue to grow.

“What has occurred in San Angelo in the past four to five years is remarkable,” said Craig Meyers, a retired pastor and coordinator for WTOS.

“No single entity can handle revitalization of several neighborhoods,” Meyers said. “Several partners are working together for a common goal. They have been a transforming force that has totally changed the nature of neighborhoods.”

The neighborhoods, which include Blackshear, Rio Vista, Reagan and Fort Concho, are seeing benefits from the coalition.

Meyers said that more than 1,000 residences have been upgraded in the past four years and thousands more are listed for renovation. The coalition is approaching all areas of several neighborhoods simultaneously.

In addition to the home renovations, projects include park facelifts, sidewalk additions and property clean-ups.

Meyers said Jerry Sea, the director for WTOS, had been looking forward to attending the celebration on Thursday but was laid up in the hospital.

“He walked these neighborhoods many, many times,” Meyers said. “He would have a tear in his eye.”

After the luncheon and presentation, attendees were invited on a bus tour to view the communities and the improvements made. The 45-minute tour went through each of the four revitalized areas and pointed out the changes that have been made.

LeeAnn Richardson, interim director for the San Angelo Development Corporation, said the event was held to be sure that the departments, programs and organizations involved could be recognized.

“Because we are joined together, we are able to accomplish a lot more,” Richardson said.

“The police department has helped to eliminate some of the crime (in the areas), and the city Fire Marshal has demolished structures that are not up to code and cannot be repaired,” she said. “Everyone has done their part to get it to the next step.”

Helping hand

Organizations Involved in community revitalizations:

* City of San Angelo Development Services Departments

* San Angelo Development Corporation

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- * Rebuilding Together (formerly Christmas in April)
 - * Habitat for Humanity
 - * West Texas Organizing Strategy
 - * Galilee Community Development Corporation
 - * Public Housing Authority
 - * San Angelo Health Foundation

The community development projects

Projects achieved by community development work in San Angelo this year:

- * 17th Street sidewalk, from Lillie to Bryant Boulevard
- * 814 W. 18th St., first HUD-funded Platinum LEED home in the nation
- * 2200 block of Lillie Street, future sites for the Blackshear Homes tax credit project, 20-home rent-to-own development
- * 2401 Lillie Street, Nueva Vista apartments, renovated complex
- * Wooden fence installed by Hirschfeld Steel as a sound barrier to buffer noise from the plant into the Blackshear neighborhood
- * 618 W. 25th St. and 2409, 2413 and 2418 Weaver St., four new homes built by Galilee CDC in conjunction with the City's affordable housing program
- * Brown Street sidewalk, starting at the Blackshear Head Start and going to 14th Street
- * 624 W. 19th St., building site for a house the city's Family Support Division is building for a low-income single mother with two children
- * Neighborhood Blitz, during which 12 houses were painted and approximately 100 tons of trash was hauled off to the city dump
- * Renovated City Park
- * River Place Apartments by Granger McDonald at Irene Street and Concho Drive, a development for low-income senior citizens
- * 123 E. Avenue I, the first house in San Angelo built using structural insulated panels, known as SIPs
- * Rio Vista Park will soon be undergoing construction, including a new bathroom, new picnic tables and playground equipment
- * Cleanup of the Red Arroyo