



**Providence**

**Developer wins award for affirmative action**

01:00 AM EST on Wednesday, January 3, 2007

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PROVIDENCE — When the West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation rebuilt a blighted, contaminated mill into the Westfield Lofts, they garnered kudos for taking on the project.

Now, they are receiving more goodwill, for the way they did it: with a hefty percentage of the work done by local women and minority workers and companies.

The West Elmwood group has received Rhode Island Housing’s 2006 Affirmative Action Award, given to the entity that does the best job recruiting women and minorities on construction projects financed by the state agency over the course of the year.

The Westfield Lofts project converted the former Rau Fastener complex, off Dexter Street, into 69 loft apartments, 22 of them affordable housing.

Women and minority-owned companies did 14.2 percent of the work on the \$9.8-million loft conversion.

“We have an unconditional commitment to affirmative action. Women- and minority-owned businesses must earn a fair share of the millions of dollars we spend building apartments every year,” said Richard Godfrey, Rhode Island Housing’s executive director.

The apartments were only the first phase of the \$15-million project; all told, it will eventually include 20,000 square feet of commercial and retail space, 24 townhouses and 24 houses for first-time homeowners.

“Every apartment we create is a chance to create community, too. We hire and buy locally and we are proud of our outreach to the neighborhood and to Providence residents and businesses,” said Sharon Conard Wells, executive director of the West Elmwood housing corporation.

The Westfield Lofts were rebuilt under the federal Brownfields program, which works to identify and clean up contaminated former industrial sites. The project was the first not-for-profit initiative to receive assessment financing from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Historic tax credits also played a role in the construction.

The architect on the project was Providence’s Durkee Brown Viveiros & Werenfels, and the general contractor was East Providence’s Case Construction.

This is the 17th year that Rhode Island Housing has presented Affirmative Action awards, recognizing a total of 22 organizations statewide.