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# As Workforce Housing Advisors buys up distressed apartments, tenants must wait for repairs until foreclosure cases are resolved

By KERRY WILLS  
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS | MAR 22, 2013



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Workers installing windows in ground floor storefront at 935 Kelly St. (Andrew Savulich/New York Daily News)

A sunny yellow hallway, gleaming hardwood floors, new kitchens and bathrooms will greet residents of 935 Kelly St. when they return to their once decrepit apartments.

This Longwood tenement and four more on the block were among the Bronx's worst slums until Workforce Housing Advisors (WFHA) bought the mortgages, foreclosed on the properties, and renovated them.

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"There was garbage and rats," said WFHA partner John Crotty. "Now it's got a green roof and a fenced-in garden."

At a ribbon-cutting Thursday, Carolyn Waring, 62, said her stepfather Frank Potts owned the buildings until 1998.

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"Once he sold the buildings, they went completely down," said Waring, who has lived at 924 Kelly since the late 1960's.

"You took me from the slums and you put me in -- I got a beautiful apartment, y'all!"

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Renovated lobby entrance at 935 Kelly St. (Andrew Savulich/New York Daily News)

The buildings, at 916, 920, 924, 928 and 935 Kelly St., are a shining example of WFHA's mission, to rehabilitate distressed multi-family housing and keep it affordable for tenants. Kelly Street is the first of six projects the for-profit developer has begun in the Bronx. They've bought 12 neglected buildings and the mortgages for two more.

Crotty, 44, former executive vice president of the city Housing Development Corp., admits getting to the proud finished product is a challenge.

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"We started this business to change conditions, to make it better," Crotty said. "Telling people to wait a while, that's a difficult thing to do."

That's what Crotty must do at 1380 University Ave. in Highbridge, where WFHA bought the \$17.5 million mortgage and began foreclosure proceedings against the owner in June 2012.



Alex Boyko installing door in ground floor storefront at 935 Kelly St. (Andrew Savulich/New York Daily News)

The 144-unit building has 101 violations with the city department of Housing Development and Preservation. Residents have spotted mold and broken pipes and the building works among the city Building Department's Top 10 Blighted Offenders

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John Crotty of Workforce Housing Advisors on Kelly St. where his company restored several buildings. (Andrew Savulich/New York Daily News)

Williamson alleges Carlin committed sabotage.

"We have no reason to believe any such thing happened," said Carlin's attorney, Stephen Jones.

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Thus far, WFHA has support from the building's tenant organizer, Susanna Blankley of Community Action for Safe Apartments.

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Kerri White, of Urban Homesteading Assistance Board, said the situation is common. At 539-541 E. 147th St. in Mott Haven, where WFHA will soon start another gut-and-rebuild project, tenants languished for 1 1/2 years in units with collapsing ceilings, mold, and fire damage until a foreclosure deal was sealed.

"Workforce Housing is a responsible developer," White said. "Buildings like E. 147th might have been lost without them being willing to do risky and innovative things. We see them trying to do their best, but that can't happen until they own the property and can put in more money."

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