

McKinnon wraps up 43 years helping low-income find housing

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



Executive director of Christopher Homes of Arkansas, Jimmy McKinnon, retired July 11 after seven years, and a career of 43 years in housing.

“I feel very comfortable leaving now after seven years. Christopher Homes should be in good shape for years to come. I’m leaving it in good hands today. There are no audit problems and I’m proud of the staff we have.”

The recent blessing and opening of Christopher Homes of Little Rock June 28 was his “swan song.” of sorts. Christopher Homes of Arkansas, with 24 complexes around the state, is the diocesan housing ministry.

“A lot of people don’t know about Christopher Homes and I would like to see knowledge of it grow in the public, especially the Catholic population. I’m very proud of Christopher Homes and the work we do. I want the focus to be on our mission to help low-income elderly with housing,” he said.

He wanted to see the project to completion, and when he cut the ribbon for the complex, along with Bishop Anthony B. Taylor and board president Tom Harding, McKinnon was proud of the results.

“Its significance is what it does for the elderly. Here they have decent, safe, sanitary housing that they can afford and surrounding environment,” he said.

He’s dedicated his life’s work to making housing affordable and available to low-income Arkansans.

He was born in Gurdon and graduated from Henderson State University in 1967 with a business degree. He served in the Army before joining Little Rock Housing and Urban Development for seven years. He moved to Jonesboro in 1974 to work for the Jonesboro Urban Renewal and Housing Authority for 22 years. He later worked for the city of Jonesboro as grants coordinator and community development director for seven more years.

Things fell into place for a job with Christopher Homes, as he was looking to move back to the Little Rock area to be closer to his children. He became executive director of Christopher Homes of Arkansas in February 2005.

"I've been in the same caliber of jobs for 43 years, assisting low-income people. I've been involved in community development and public housing or housing for the elderly for that number of years. I enjoyed it."

He plans to take some time to travel with his wife Evelyn, as well as golf and fish. He also wants to spend more time with his grandchildren.

Bishop Taylor thanked McKinnon for his service before he blessed the new Little Rock Christopher Homes that will house 20 elderly residents. He also joked McKinnon that he was just taking a sabbatical and there would always be a place for him at the diocese.

While he doesn't have any plans to volunteer at this time, he will continue helping others as he can. He has signed on to the finance committee for Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in North Little Rock (Marche).

"I have a lot to be thankful for," he said. "One of the most important aspects from my faith is that that God gave us the ability to help low-income people. I'm blessed that God gave me the ability to help all my life and that's something I feel fortunate about."

He knows the mission to provide housing for elderly will continue with a capable staff that he will miss working with. Liz Lopez has been named the director.

"I'm excited. I have mixed feelings. The job is very demanding and stressful," he said. "When you love something, it is hard to separate from that even though I'm excited about retiring. I'm sad that I'm leaving people I know and respect, who I worked for and who worked for me."