

BE OUR GUEST

Pols give up, others pitch in

While the Neros in Albany fiddle as the state burns, New York City continues to work.

There is clear evidence of this undaunted work ethic in East Brooklyn, at Spring Creek, where 100 new homeowners recently moved into the latest affordable homes built by Nehemiah Housing.

Those 100 new homeowners will soon be joined by the next 100 owners, and 200 additional homes are in various stages of construction. These first 400 units are the leading edge of a large plan that will deliver more than 2,000 affordable homes and apartments to the hardworking residents of this great city.

The houses that are creating the new East New York neighborhood are assembled daily at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in a factory as big as a football field. Each 2,300-square-foot prefab home takes about 12 days to complete, and the entire Nehemiah neighborhood has to date created 1,400 permanent jobs, 7,000 construction jobs as well as new schools and senior housing.

A neighborhood that was once a vast wasteland of drug dens and empty lots can now serve as a model for the city and the rest of the nation.

In 20 years, 3,000 homes have been bought and sold, with a foreclosure rate lower than most high-end suburbs. And the Spring Creek development will have more than 4,500 homes when it is completed in 2013.

The Nehemiah neighborhood has been a collaboration of hard work from the very beginning.

Former city Housing Commissioner Shaun Donovan and his successor Rafael Cestero have made sure things keep moving. The many agencies coordinated by the Housing, Preservation and Development Department and Deputy Mayor Robert Lieber kept working — planning ahead, doing site preparation, arranging subsidies that reduce the cost of the typical Spring Creek single-family homes from \$204,000 to

approximately \$150,000 to the buyer. Community Preservation Corp. kept providing essential financial and technical assistance.

And the State of New York Mortgage Agency kept providing mortgages at reduced rates.

The Nehemiah team also kept working. They screened buyers. They made sure that every purchaser had a secure job and a down payment. They refined the design of the new homes so that they graced the dunes of Spring Creek with color and variation. The combination of affordable prices, high lending standards and strict screening has meant that foreclosure rates among past Nehemiah homebuyers remain remarkably low.

A city more known for its celebrities and excesses, for Broadway and Wall Street, for Madoff and A-Rod, has demonstrated an old-fashioned and unwavering commitment to the goal of producing housing for working-class and middle-class citizens.

Our Nehemiah effort, along with the Community Preservation Corp.'s initiative in Washington Heights and Inwood in the late 1970s, were two of the earliest efforts to rebuild the city from the desperate days of three decades ago.

Today, almost every neighborhood, no matter how devastated or abandoned it once was, has seen significant rebuilding. Nearly 200,000 units have been built

new or rehabbed in the city in the past 30 years. These new or rehabbed units house many of the more than 1 million people who have repopulated the city since its low ebb in the early 1980s.

That's the fruit of much labor.

There's much more to do, so many will continue to work. The revival of the New York City Housing Authority, now led by an energetic new chairman named

John Rhea, has still not started. But we are confident that it will, because New York City has proven, beyond a doubt, that it knows how to work and that it will continue working, no matter what happens in Albany.

Our future depends on it.

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**By the Rev.
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BRAMHALL'S WORLD

