

Tampa Housing Authority Leads the Way to Resident Empowerment

As if an old friend walked into the room, J. Keith Swiney was greeted by Resident Association President Ms. Claudia (pictured below) with a big hug and a warm Florida smile. The August 7th activity was a continuation of a yearlong program providing affected residents of a demolished Hope VI site nutrition for the body and soul. The first Thursday of every month is earmarked as an evening of dining and motivation for the Tampa Housing Authority (THA) residents as part of a comprehensive self-sufficiency program in preparation for their transition to The Oaks at River View, a Hope VI mixed income community.



One need only look around the room at the many smiling faces to see the positive affect such gatherings have had on the residents of the once blighted and obsolete public housing property. However, thanks to a Hope VI grant and the leadership of Mr. Jerome D. Ryans, President/CEO and his talented and forward thinking Community and Supportive Services Director Ms. Stephanie Brown, this target group

of THA residents is receiving more than just an occasional telephone call or referral. The residents at this dinner are fortunate to participate in a first of its kind program for Florida, if not the country. The monthly Residents Motivational Series is designed to impact the residents by exposing them to areas outside of their communities while featuring great inspirational messages of hope and achievement from grass roots motivators and industry professionals like Swiney.

J. Keith Swiney will facilitate several such events though out the fall of 2003 conveying multiple messages with a single theme, 'Every New Day Presents an Opportunity to Achieve.' Swiney's opening message of *"I am of you, with you and support you"* was well received by great audience participation, laughter and applause. His approach differed from the past speakers in that he solicited suggestions from the residents of what they wanted to learn from the presentations. Swiney commented, "I can only be affective and offer worthwhile information if I am speaking on something that the audience feels is important to them." The opening presentation was truly a success based on the feedback from the participants including THA's Senior Vice President/ Chief Development Officer, Mr. Leroy Moore. Moore wrote, *"..the residents and staff really enjoyed the first session and all are looking forward to the next session"*.

In an interview with Swiney following the event he commented, *"Hope VI residents have a unique opportunity to start fresh in life. It has been proven that environment can influence ones life and I have personally experienced that change. A new home environment should have a profound affect on these and other public housing residents. I only hope I can add something positive to that experience and offer them something useful to take into their new lives."*