

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2011

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Charles Patricelli pulls double duty as executive director of two public-housing authorities. Through his a hands-on approach, he's created beautiful, efficient developments.

Interview by Lisa Ryan



Located just north of Albany, the small New York towns of Cohoes and Watervliet have a unique similarity: their public housing—**Cohoes Housing Authority** and **Watervliet Housing Authority**—falls under the same management. **Charles Patricelli** serves as executive director of both organizations, overseeing all aspects of the organizations, from personally interviewing and selecting each of the residents to ensuring that both the exteriors and interiors of the buildings have a respectable appearance. He and his team assist more than 2,000 underprivileged people at any given time, not only by providing housing but also by sponsoring a variety of community programs. *American Builders Quarterly* spoke with Patricelli to hear his story.

At a Glance

Locations:

Cohoes and Watervliet, NY

Founded:

1952 (Cohoes) and 1959 (Watervliet)

Employees:

16 in Cohoes; 9 in Watervliet

Specialty:

Public housing

Units Managed:

308 in Cohoes; more than 400 in Watervliet

Why were the Cohoes and Watervliet housing authorities created?

Charles Patricelli: The mission of public housing is to provide local residents with safe, decent, affordable housing. Cohoes was created in 1952 while Watervliet came slightly after in 1959.

What was your background prior to serving as executive director of both housing authorities?

CP: I worked for the City of Watervliet for a while in their community-development office as deputy general manager. In August of 1982, I assumed the role of director of the Watervliet Housing Authority. Three years

ago I was approached to help fill in after Cohoes' director retired. It was supposed to be a temporary position. After a year on the job, both boards agreed that I would assume shared management of the two authorities.

What impact do the housing authorities have on their communities?

CP: The impact is enormous. Primarily, we are the largest landlords in both cities. The boards of commissioners of both housing authorities are [made up] of local residents who have a great sense of [the] community which [all] our residents are a large part of. They are persistent in their

Right: Charles Patricelli is working to make sure each of the homes in Cohoes and Watervliet now comes with energy-efficient features such as a new boiler, new insulation, and a new refrigerator.



mission to work with local organizations to enhance our residents' quality of life and to provide safe, affordable, and quality housing to those in need.

Aside from the housing itself, what sorts of programs do your authorities offer?

CP: We run some programs in Watervliet that we have not yet expanded to Cohoes. Some of the programs I feel strongly about are in the area of technology. We run our own local public-access TV system. We use it for public service announcements as well as announcements about birthdays, graduations, or, for instance, community fundraisers like spaghetti dinners. We also have a program called PC for Families. We receive donated computers, refurbish them, and pass them out to our residents to use free of charge. Every resident gets a free computer and free Internet with their apartment. In addition, we also give laptops to our high school seniors who are going off to college. All we ask is that they complete one full year of college.

What other ways are you utilizing technology with the housing authorities?

CP: We're constantly looking for easier and more efficient ways for getting the job done. For instance, our maintenance guys are using BlackBerrys to receive their work orders. We actually designed our own housing software as well. It helps us track work orders and inventory more efficiently.

What steps are you taking to make the units energy efficient?

CP: Our focus for the last three years has

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CHARLES PATRICELLI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

been energy efficiency. We've stretched our dollars by using local grants, stimulus money, and energy grants to make the buildings tighter and more energy-efficient. We've installed new boilers, new insulation, and new refrigerators. We also have a new energy-management system in one of our developments where we can check every apartment's temperature and change it by computer. By using the program, we reduced our energy by 20 percent in that development just by preventing the overheating problem we typically have. We're also installing solar panels and investigating ways to increase our solar capacity.

Can you tell us about the Van Rensselaer Village Redevelopment Project?

CP: Back in 1998, we seized the opportunity to manage a complex that was owned by another party. It was in a state of disrepair and needed a lot of work. At the time, only 38 of the 100 units were rented. It was drug infested and had numerous other problems, and we turned that all around. In 2010, through a developing firm, we applied for tax credits and purchased the property. We completely redid it to modern-day standards and reduced the number of units to 81. It's now one of the nicest places in the Watervliet community. **ABQ**

A Message from Hiscock & Barclay, LLP

Hiscock & Barclay, LLP is honored to have served the Watervliet Housing Authority as special counsel/bond counsel in connection with the redevelopment of Van Rensselaer Village, the issuance of tax-exempt bonds to finance a senior housing project, and the financing of energy improvements through an energy performance contract. It is always a pleasure working with Charles Patricelli and his staff.