

September 2006

# Redevelopment

*Building Better Communities*



www.calredevelop.org

Stockton's Diamond Cove Apartments  
Reclaiming the Neighborhood

See page 12



California Redevelopment Association



# Reclaiming the Neighborhood

By Sharon Elizondo, City of Stockton

In the mid-1990's families living in the Carrington Circle area of Stockton feared the problems outside their doorways. For some it was easier to move away. For those who couldn't move, each day brought more small-time drug pushers, gang activities, low attendance at local schools and boarded-up rental units. Today, Carrington Circle is a well-designed and well-maintained neighborhood with a radiant entrance that tells passers-by that this is a safe, stable family neighborhood.

## Neighborhood Needs Help

The neighborhood had big problems including a high crime rate, a disproportionate number of vacant buildings, graffiti everywhere, and high unemployment and school drop-out rates. Cleaning it up and bringing quality affordable housing was a challenge. But Mayor Ed Chavez (who was Police Chief at the time), envisioned changing the aging Carrington Circle neighborhood, and—with the help of the City's Redevelopment Agency—he suggested a recovery strategy by using

Stockton's new SAFE Neighborhood Program. The SAFE Neighborhood Program designation meant forming strategies to address the causes of crime, encouraging community participation in determining solutions, and concentrating existing resources in a specific area.

Improvement began with the police applying the techniques for Community-Oriented Policing. In addition, the City's Code Enforcement Department tackled code violations in the neighborhood, and the Redevelopment Agency implemented a housing repair program which created new enthusiasm among the residents.

After nearly six years of work, the area was safer, cleaner, and school attendance improved. Yet, the improvement of housing conditions seemed to taper off. The neighborhood still needed help with its barren yards, damaged driveways, and little or no landscaping. The turn-over in the rental units remained high as families continued to move in and out of the neighborhood.

## Focus On Housing

More innovation was needed to assist with the neighborhood's inadequate housing. To address the housing needs, the Redevelopment Agency selected Asociacion Campesina Lazaro Cardenas, Inc. (ACLIC), a non-profit housing developer. Carol Ornelas, CEO of ACLIC, remembers driving into the neighborhood and seeing a big vacant lot at the entrance and thinking, "I'd sure like to build there – it could make a difference."

Initially, ACLIC purchased two of the existing apartment structures and the ACLIC staff set their goal of correcting the living conditions around the entrance of the neighborhood. The complete renovation of two older apartment buildings (Diamond Cove I) brought a startling change to the neighborhood. More importantly, the remodeled units encouraged 60 families to move into the neighborhood.

## One Plan Fits All

By 2003, ACLIC acquired another ten of the remaining 28 duplex/triplex



properties. Later, ACLC acquired that very important vacant lot at the entrance to the neighborhood. Through the out-reach efforts within the community, combined with the ideas from architects, engineers and redevelopment staff, the plans for a low-income tax credit housing project took shape. The proposed project, Diamond Cove II, would be located at the entrance of the Carrington Circle.

Architect Bill Johnston, San Joaquin Design Group, recalls walking the vacant lot after a development team meeting. Looking at the list of “must have” features, he thought to himself, “great chance to put a face on this place – corner lot; a new apartment [building] needs to say stability . . . those duplexes over there can carry-on the theme.”

At the development team meetings, Carol Ornelas repeated the goal, “not just a roof over people’s heads, the project has to meet the greater needs.” Ornelas’ list of needs had come from her community out reach work. It was short:

- ✧ near-by childcare
- ✧ easy access to family services
- ✧ homes for disabled persons
- ✧ a clean, safe neighborhood

### Set A Jewel In The Entrance

With all the usual development challenges of funding application deadlines, cost cuts, upgrades, infrastructure issues, and down-sizing, the Diamond Cove II project was finally completed at the entrance to Carrington Circle. The vacant lot was transformed into a new 20-unit apartment building with on-site parking, two play areas and

a separate building offering childcare and community meeting rooms. In addition, remodeling the ten nearby boarded-up duplexes from foundation to roof top brought another 20 units back into use. Further, by carefully selecting the façade and color scheme for the new buildings and utilizing the same scheme on the up-graded duplexes, the entrance to Carrington Circle and the surrounding units were tied together to show harmony and stability.

### Meeting The Needs

The carefully designed apartments at Diamond Cove II accommodate various family sizes, particularly large families needing three or four bedrooms. Of the 20 new affordable units, six dedicated ADA-compliant apartments are situated on the ground floor. These six units offer important features, such as easy-to-use kitchens, specially equipped bathrooms, adjustable height racks and shelving in closets, hand rails, and wide doorways for easy passage. In addition, resident and visitor parking are available on-site.

To meet children’s needs, a small out door play area can be directly accessed from the daycare center. A larger play area with climbing apparatus, open space and benches is accessible to all children. A basketball court is also on site.

Visitors and residents entering the small lobby area of the community building are greeted by a large fantasy-style wall mural of children at play. The community building accommodates the property manager, the computer learning center, the daycare facility, the specialized community services and the main community room.



### Area Reclaimed

At the recent grand opening of Diamond Cove II, Mayor Chavez welcomed the new service providers and reminded guests that, “This area has gone from a crime-ridden area of despair to a positive addition to the community. Diamond Cove II is truly an example of how an area that initially appears hopeless can be reclaimed for generations of families to enjoy and prosper.”

The success of the Carrington Circle neighborhood project lead to the overwhelming community support for the adoption of the 3800-acre North Stockton redevelopment project area in July 2004. Since then, this redevelopment project area has generated enough tax increment to fund a \$30 million bond issue.

A new community center, street lighting, street repairs and street widening improvements, park upgrades, safety improvements, and affordable housing will be funded from the proceeds of the bond issue. Without the successful track record established by the Carrington Circle neighborhood project, none of these improvements would have been possible.