

NEWS RELEASE

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‘Columbus School’ Apartments Open in South Clifton Park Next Fall

*Project showcases strength of developers’ partnership with the community,
expands revitalization effort along North Avenue corridor*

The 122 year-old building that once housed Columbus School #99 and represents the best of Romanesque Revival architecture in Baltimore, is undergoing a \$13 million conversion to provide 50 brand new, modern workforce housing units for Baltimore families.. Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake kicked off the Columbus School Renovation Project at a groundbreaking ceremony today in South Clifton Park.



“We are fortunate to have many grand buildings that add to the character of nearly every community in Baltimore,” said Mayor Rawlings-Blake. “Soon, the historic Columbus School building will be buzzing with the sound of children and families taking advantage of new opportunities in a growing city.”

The Mayor was joined by City Council President Bernard C. “Jack” Young, City Comptroller Joan M. Pratt, Delegate Talmadge Branch, Councilman Carl Stokes, Patricia Sylvester, executive director of Multifamily Housing, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, the New South Clifton Park Community Association, Housing Services Alliance, Inc. (HSA), The Woda Group, Inc. (Woda) and community stakeholders.

The Columbus School Renovation Project is the first for the non-profit HSA since opening offices in Baltimore last year and the latest in a series of new housing projects by Woda, a leading developer in affordable housing, targeting the North Avenue corridor. The historic building will open as the *Columbus School Apartments* this fall to families with incomes at 60% or less of the Baltimore City Area Median Income. Located on the northeast corner of the 2000 block of E. North Ave. at Washington St., the *Columbus School Apartments* will yield 68,000 square feet of renovated space and offer one and two bedroom apartments with modern amenities. The historic building will boast a new entrance, multi-story lobby and elevator core, community room, computer lab, and education center. The project will utilize high efficiency mechanical systems throughout, with Energy Star lighting and appliances, meet Baltimore City Green Building standards and achieve Leadership in Energy Environmental Design (LEED) Silver designation.

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“We are excited about our work with the New South Clifton Park Community Association and our community partners to preserve an incredible piece of architecture,” said Michael Barland, executive director of Urban Development for HSA. “The opportunity to meet a critical need for affordable housing in this community underscores the core mission of our organization. Additionally, The Woda Group’s development and construction expertise are the right fit for bringing forward HSA’s planned positive impacts in Baltimore City.”

Woda’s development experience in Baltimore includes the Penn Square Apartments on Pennsylvania Avenue north of North Avenue and fully occupied since opening in 2010, the North Avenue Gateway complex currently under construction at North and Rosedale Street, as well as two more projects in Baltimore City to start construction in early 2014: Mary Harvin Senior Apartments, and Fulton-Gethsemane Family Apartments for HSA. Collectively, these projects contain almost 300 new additional affordable housing units for Baltimore City.

“Our vision for a revitalized North Avenue corridor that boasts quality affordable housing is becoming a reality,” said Kevin Bell, senior vice president for Woda. “The historical significance of North Avenue as a major east-west corridor that once represented the northern boundary of Baltimore City can no longer be overlooked. North Avenue’s cornerstones - Coppin University, MICA, March Funeral Home, National Great Blacks in Wax Museum, faith based organizations, and other historical landmarks - underscore the need to move forward *now* with a comprehensive plan for revitalizing the North Avenue corridor from Hilton to Milton Avenues. The availability of decent, affordable housing in a recovering economy is fundamental to our success as a partner in the community. As important, is the opportunity this project presents to help boost Baltimore’s economy by advancing our commitment to employ local residents during construction.” HSA and Woda have partnered with the Center for Urban Families and the Laborer’s Union of North America to screen and refer Baltimore City residents for job training and hiring during construction.

“Under the leadership of Governor Martin O’Malley and Lt. Governor Anthony Brown, we have helped finance the production of desirable, energy efficient affordable rental housing units such as the Columbus School Renovation Project all over Maryland,” said Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development Secretary Raymond Skinner. “These are projects that create jobs, strengthen communities and provide first-class places to live for families, senior citizens and disabled individuals.”

Financing for the *Columbus School Apartments* is provided by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, Bank of America , Capital One and Hudson Housing Capital. The project is in collaboration with architects Cho Benn Holback + Associates and the engineering firm of Gower Thompson. The project is also supported by Edgewood Management Corporation, Mincin, Patel & Milano, Inc., MIN Engineering and Doo Consulting.

The historic Columbus School building formerly housed a public school for elementary students in the south Clifton Park community. The school was constructed in 1891 and expanded from 14 to 33 classrooms between 1905 and 1912. Believed to be one of the highest performing schools in Baltimore City at the time, the school closed its doors in the early 1970s and students were reassigned to the then brand new Harford Heights Elementary School #37. Columbus School was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

Housing Services Alliance, Inc., a 501c (3) nonprofit housing corporation, was founded in 2003. HSA specializes in developing and preserving housing and coordinating tenant services for very low and moderate income households, seniors and special needs populations. HSA's mission is to increase the availability of quality housing and services for low and moderate income households in attractive and stable neighborhoods and communities. HSA's focus is to develop or partner with developers to build and maintain affordable housing along with coordinating services for residents to enhance and improve quality of life.

HSA was established by civic leaders with varied backgrounds and a common understanding of the housing and service needs of the economically disadvantaged, physically and mentally impaired and elderly citizens. HSA currently develops and preserves affordable rental housing and affordable housing for sale to low and moderate income households in a seven state area from Michigan to Maryland. HSA maintains executive offices in Washington Court House, Ohio and Baltimore City, Maryland.

The Woda Group, LLC and its affiliates are experienced developers, general contractors and property managers specializing in the development, construction and management of affordable multi-family apartments, senior communities and single family homes. Considered leading experts in the affordable housing industry, the Woda team is known for producing and maintaining high quality affordable housing. The Woda Group has developed and currently manages over 6,000 units in the Midwest, Northeast and the Southern portions of the United States. The Woda Group is active in eleven states and has offices in Westerville, Ohio, Crofton, Maryland, Savannah, Georgia and Louisville, Kentucky. *Affordable Housing Finance Magazine* ranked The Woda Group number 5 nationally among Affordable Housing Developers and number 34 among Affordable Housing Owners in their April/May 2011 issue. *Builder*, the magazine of the National Association of Home Builders, ranked Woda Construction, Inc. number 43 nationally among the 2011 Top 50 Multifamily Builders.

For information about residency requirements for the *Columbus School Apartments*, call 410-703-9066. Applications for employment may be completed in person at the Center for Urban Families, 2201 N. Monroe Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21217.