

C.J. DURKIN APARTMENTS TURN 40

\$500G THE ICING ON THE CAKE FOR FHA



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Patty Durkin, granddaughter of the late Clarence Durkin, cuts a 40th anniversary cake at the apartments named for him. The Fitchburg Housing Authority held a celebration to mark the four decades of housing as well as a \$500,000 state grant for improvements at the complex.

Some units to be remodeled, made more accessible

By Daniel Monahan

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FITCHBURG » It's been 40 years since the C.J. Durkin Apartments, located at 50 Day St., first opened its doors in 1979 as an affordable elderly housing community in the city.

Though the building's name-sake, Clarence J. Durkin, died the same year it opened, city of-

ficials and residents gathered Wednesday to celebrate his life, the 40th anniversary of the building, and a major funding award to go along with it.

Fitchburg Housing Authority Executive Director Douglas Bushman asked the crowd to picture the year the building was unveiled — a time when disco music was popular, pet rocks were in and he had long hair.

“It was an innovative building that would provide affordable housing for seniors and veterans to congregate care. It was something new and it had four ADA units,” he said. “It was

innovative at the time.”

To continue innovating and providing for residents, the Fitchburg Housing Authority looked outward for a boost in funding and was recently awarded over \$500,000 in funding from the Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development.

The Accessible Unit Initiative grant will remodel some of the units at the Durkin Apartments to make them more accessible for those with physical limitations. Bushman said there will soon be a total of nine ADA units.

In addition, it will provide

funding to remove common hallway and door barriers.

Fitchburg Disability Commission Chair Basil Tolos said the money will help provide a much needed service and upgrade to the community.

“We are always looking to remove physical barriers, large or small, that hinder or block those with disabilities from enjoying the same benefits that everyone else has,” said Tolos. “We are excited and delighted to support this grant.”

Montachusett Home Care Corporation CEO Lori Richardson said the Durkin Apart-

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ments were innovative when they first opened because it laid the groundwork for other congregate living facilities to open.

"We reduced the social isolation and we also provided housing," she said. "Isn't that what we want? We want to empower people."

"Old buildings such as Durkin and others are always in need of repair and updating, this costs money," said FHA Chairwoman Linda Byrne. "We've been approved for several grants, totaling over \$2 million in the past year, including the \$500,000 for Durkin Apartments."

President of the Tenant Association David Rousseau marveled at all the changes the building has undergone since it first opened. He pointed out the recently installed tile flooring, an expanded community room and other major renovations.

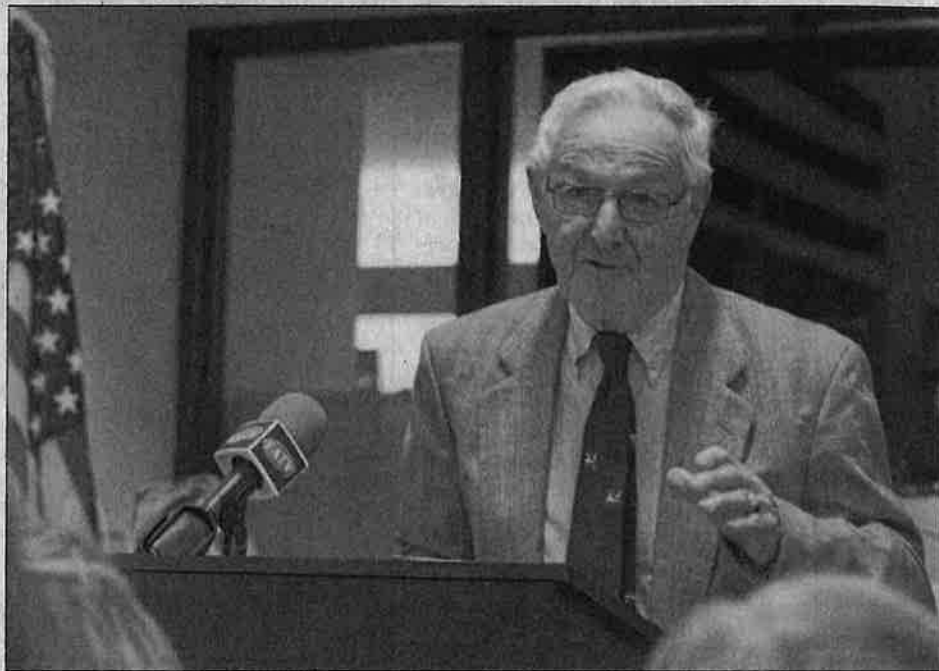
"A lot of money has been put into this building," said Rousseau. "There has been a lot of progress made with this and we hope that the grant that the Authority just got will make some more improvements."

Former FHA Board of Commissioners member Nancy Maynard said it was an honor to be a part of the process that helped erect the apartment complex.

"It was a positive to the city back then and it's a positive to the city this day," Maynard said.

Clarence J. Durkin was born in 1896 and was involved in a plethora of organizations for many years.

After enlisting in the Volunteer Militia in 1913 and later serving in World War 1, Durkin married Katherine Shea and had six



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Thomas H. Durkin, one of Clarence Durkin's sons, addresses the crowd at the celebration.

children.

Durkin served as a commissioner and as chairman of the Fitchburg Housing Authority from 1948 to 1978. As the labor representative, he was instrumental in establishing that the FHA was to serve veterans and their families, the elderly and the disabled of Fitchburg.

He assisted with organizing the Fitchburg Civic Days and its Parade Com-

mittee, for which he served as Chief of Staff and Grand Marshal, and was named Fitchburg Citizen of the Year in 1970.

Thomas H. Durkin, Durkin's son, said his father was both a proud and humble man who never stopped caring about others.

He recalled a winter day when he was 10 years old and his father took him to help a neighbor. After fixing the neighbor's wood

furnace, and on the way home, his father told him about the importance of helping people who are in need.

"This dedication to family, community and country was a hallmark of his entire career," he said.

Honorable Judge Thomas Durkin, C.J. Durkin's grandson, said his grandfather was a leader to his family and to the world. He said there was always a lesson to be learned when you were with him.

"He had found out there was some benefit program for widows of veterans ... and it had just fallen by the wayside," he said. "He took it upon himself, rather than find someone to do it, to track down the amounts of certain individuals and get those check written and then write personal letters apologizing for the delay."

Mayor Stephen DiNatale also addressed the crowd, proclaiming that the C.J. Durkin Apartments will keep its name in perpetuity.



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The Honorable Judge Thomas Durkin, grandson of Clarence Durkin, speaks about his grandfather at the event.