

## Housing Authority's new center to help break 'cycle of poverty'

The City of Aiken Housing Authority opened the doors to its new Center for Excellence Thursday morning.

Located in the headquarters of the Housing Authority, the center offers residents training and assistance in resume writing, developing keyboarding skills, Internet competency and more. The center is filled with Dell computers, a fax and copy machine, and includes a Smart Board interactive whiteboard for residents to use.

"Congratulations on a job well done, in fighting for and bringing to our community this Center for Excellence that's going to give our young people, our adults an opportunity to achieve things educationally that they would not have been able to do without this," said City Councilman Don Wells, acting as mayor pro-tem.

The City's Housing Authority Chief Executive Officer Ivory Mathews, along with her staff, worked hard for more than nine months to make the center a reality. The center offers the people who utilize the Housing Authority's services the opportunity to garner skills that will help them find jobs or go back to school.

Mathews said it's beneficial to all ages, from teaching a young child basic computer skills to allowing the elderly Internet access to connect with family members who may live far away.

"We're very excited," Mathews said. "We feel at the Housing Authority that our Center for Excellence is an opportunity to create a center that does not have any boundaries for our residents."

Mathews said the Aiken Housing Authority serves more than 2,000 families in the area, and many of their residents stay for around four and a half years. Mathews said this center will continue to make the City's Housing Authority a stepping stone to success for those residents.

"So, that means that we are not the typical housing authority. We are not creating a generational cycle of poverty, but we are improving people's lives and that's what we want to continue to do," Mathews said. "We want people to see our facility as a short-term stay, a short-term opportunity, a launching pad for them to go on to the next level and do better."

Gladys Wright, president of Stoney-Gallman Townhomes, said when speaking with residents about their needs, many expressed wanting more time to have access to computers to accomplish their goals of going back to school or finding work. She said this new facility will give them that access to learn about computer programs used in today's classrooms and workplaces.

"I think it's going to be a very, very good opportunity for the residents," Wright said.

Mathews thanked the City, which had several officials present at the ceremony, for its support over the years. City Councilwoman Lessie Price was at the event, who was recognized by Mathews as a sort of mentor who helped her develop a relationship with the community and understand its needs. Price said she felt blessed to be part of the ribbon cutting ceremony, and praised the hard work of the Housing Authority and its partners for their success in creating the center.

"This center is designed for all of us. It is designed to help improve lives and certainly, in improving one's life, not much can be done without skills," said Price. "So this center is here to equip people with all the tools to succeed."

City Manager Richard Pearce said he understood the importance the center holds for the community, as he had mentors help him reach goals throughout his youth and career.

"This Center for Excellence is no different than those folks who mentored me and put an interest in what I was trying to do with my work here in Aiken," Pearce said. "So I hope the center will prove to be very helpful to you."

The Housing Authority has partnered with several groups around the community working on the center; these groups include Aiken Technical College, the Lower Savannah Council of Governments, Head Start and North Aiken Elementary, along with several area businesses.

The center is open Monday through Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and is located in the Aiken Housing Authority main office at 100 Rogers Terrace N.W.

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