



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Woodlawn Community and Leaders Celebrate Preservation of Affordable Housing and Honor Woman Who Fought For it

May 26, 2022 -- (Chicago, IL) –Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, Congressman Bobby Rush, and 20th Ward Alderwoman Jeanette Taylor were among those that joined with the Woodlawn community to celebrate the preservation of affordable housing by Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) and to honor the woman who fought for it—Mattie Butler.

Already a tireless advocate for equality, following a series of deadly fires in Woodlawn, Mattie Butler founded in 1980, Woodlawn East Community and Neighbors (WECAN), a nonprofit organization dedicated to meeting the changing needs of Woodlawn residents. As part of that mission and concerned the neighborhood’s expansion to the north and to the east would push out long-time residents, Mattie Butler and WECAN acquired and rehabbed a building at 6146 South Kenwood and another just a block to the east at 6230 South Dorchester to establish safe, quality affordable housing for low-income Woodlawn residents. In 2017, WECAN sold these properties to POAH with the understanding they would be improved and preserved long-term as affordable housing. Today POAH, which recently completed the property’s modernization, gathered with community members at 6146 South Kenwood to formally rename the two buildings as the Mattie Butler Apartments.

Expressing her gratitude at the celebration for Mattie Butler and her commitment to affordable housing, Mayor Lightfoot said: "I'm pleased to join the celebration as we rename the Johnson and Butler-Lindon Apartments in honor of Mattie Butler, a true community leader in Woodlawn. I look forward to continuing our collaborative, strategic efforts to ensure that all residents, especially those in our historically underserved communities, can access a safe, affordable home."

Following POAH’s acquisition, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) increased the number of project-based vouchers it provided from 34 to 52. And the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided an additional 33 units of project-based assistance. Now the property, which also includes assisted units for people with disabilities, is served by a total of 93 units of project-based assistance.

“I am extremely proud to have my name on these buildings and for my strong relationship with POAH,” said Mattie Butler during the event in her honor at 6146 South Kenwood. “With all the new development in Woodlawn, the need to preserve and expand affordable housing is more urgent than ever, and POAH continues to rise to the challenge.”

POAH modernized both buildings after receiving Low-Income Housing Tax Credits from the Illinois Housing Development Authority and financial support from the City of Chicago and the Federal Home

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Loan Bank of Chicago. And with POAH's innovative "rehab-in place" construction, it completed the work safely without having to re-locate residents or interrupt supportive services, even during the pandemic.

"Mattie's legacy seems especially important today," said Bill Eager, Senior Vice President, POAH Midwest. "As development in Woodlawn progresses and work on the Obama Presidential Center advances, what we all have done here is show that – together -- we can and will preserve and create affordable housing opportunities even in the face of rising real estate markets."

POAH's renovations to each of the buildings' apartments include new mechanical systems and updated community rooms, offices, corridors, bathrooms, and kitchens. POAH is also continuing social and behavioral services for residents of the Mattie Butler Apartments, including hiring a full-time community impact coordinator. In addition to assuming ownership, POAH installed its affiliate, POAH Communities LLC, as property manager whose goal is to ensure that its residents are successful and stable in POAH's housing over the long term.

Also joining the celebration honoring Mattie Butler and the preservation of affordable housing were the HUD Regional Administrator Diane M. Shelly, CHA CEO Tracey Scott, Illinois Housing Development Authority Executive Director Kristin Faust, Mattie's daughter Venus Scott, Butler Apartments' resident Joann Tucker, and others.

About Mattie Butler:

Mattie grew up on the north side of Chicago. Her parents were always helping someone out and constantly spoke of the importance of a collective work ethic. Mattie would often say: "I'm about working with those people who can't connect to the economic engine of this country."

At age 19, Mattie trained with the Jobs Now project, a YMCA job training program. She eventually worked in six different YMCA jobs from clerk to administrative assistant to job counselor. She worked with Chicago banks to help them to hire blacks for entry-level jobs. On call 24 hours a day, Mattie mentored 50 people, including many she continued helping until the last several years. She also met the demands of being a single mom to her daughter.

In 1980, after a series of fires broke out in Woodlawn claiming the lives of 13 children, Mattie said: "I knew those kids. I knew those families. It could've been my children. I got pissed-off and hurt." So, she investigated the origin of the fires and discovered 90% of the fires were ignited by arsonists. She then decided to create an organization to help Woodlawn residents protect themselves from such destructive exploitation. Mattie named the organization WECAN whose mission is: to address the changing needs and issues of the Woodlawn communities and its strategy is "to build from within." To WECAN, Mattie brought the collective work ethic that she learned as a child.

Mattie was also a leader and board member at a mental health center, a local business association, a rehab network, a community economic development organization, a maternal and child health center, and a black women's organization. She used these responsibilities to expand networks, as well as to influence local and national public policy initiatives. Her brother was Cook County Commissioner and recording artist Jerry Butler.

About POAH:

[POAH](#) is a mission-driven, nonprofit affordable housing developer, owner, and operator with offices in Chicago, Boston, and Washington D.C. Its mission is to preserve and steward affordable rental housing to provide stability, hope, and economic security to low-to-moderate income families. POAH owns and operates approximately 12,000 affordable homes at more than 120 properties in 11 states and the District of Columbia. Since starting work in the Chicago area in 2008, POAH has built and renovated more than 2,000 homes in mixed-income buildings and sparked the revitalization of the historic Woodlawn community. Employing new construction and renovation to create mixed-income, mixed-use communities, POAH has created new levels of community collaboration and coordinated partner-driven growth.

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