

Fannie Mae, HCHA help Katrina evacuees find calm after the storm

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Fannie Mae and Harris County Housing Authority are changing the luck of many Hurricane Katrina Evacuees by assisting them in purchasing houses.

Trenell Herbert once called New Orleans her home, but after experiencing the wrath of Hurricane Katrina, she was forced to relocate.

She moved in with her mother to a Northwest Houston Apartment, where she stayed from October through November 2005.

Unemployed and down on her luck, she learned about a first-of-its-kind program which placed eligible residents - including police officers, firefighters, nurses, emergency-medical technicians and teachers - into Houston homes and condo-

miniums provided by housing finance company Fannie Mae.

The HCHA then facilitated rent payments for the evacuees based on one-year leases.

Having liked what she heard about the area, she decided on a home in Copperfield.

With the lease period expiring, program participants were given the option to purchase their homes at affordable-housing rates with the assistance of a \$15,000 Fannie Mae grant toward down payment and closing costs of the houses.

HCHA Program Manager Paula Sullivan said lessees of the homes have been asked to either buy the home or relocate. Herbert bought the home.

Herbert, now a hospital financial analyst for Memorial Hermann Hospital, closed on her

home Jan. 8, having lived there for a year as part of the program.

"It gave me a whole year rent-free and fixed my financial situation," Hebert said. "I'm very appreciative of the opportunity that was given to me."

Four of the program 48 residents have taken advantage of the homeownership offering and two are in the process of finalizing closings for their homes - most of which were 5-10 years old.

"We helped stabilize these families and the children in the families. Many of them love the school district they're in," Sullivan said. "Many program participants were living in hotels when they moved in and one family was from a shelter," Sullivan said. "We helped them get back on their feet."

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