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NEW HOMES

Arriving for Seniors Impacted by Hurricane Ian

Several seniors living in Moorhead Manor on Bayshore Drive in Naples will soon be celebrating the arrival of their new homes. In a collaborative partnership between the Collier Community Foundation (CCF) and the Baker Senior Center Naples (BSCN), an innovative program to replace the homes of five year-round homeowners will provide relief from the months of frustration and uncertainty of being displaced from their homes. The Moorhead Manor neighborhood of manufactured homes is located in a low-lying area and was hit especially hard by Hurricane Ian's surge and flood waters. In addition to receiving the 2-bedroom, 2-bath units, each homeowner will receive furniture and appliances as part of the funding provided through CCF's Collier Comes Together Hurricane Ian Fund. "I am so excited," said Marie Powell, one of the Moorhead Manor residents receiving a new home. "I had a place to go. I stayed with my daughter, who doesn't live far away. Not all of my neighbors were as fortunate." Tearfully, she continued, "Just after the hurricane, we were all in survival mode. We tried salvaging what we could. I had lived there for 24 years. It was so emotional—so devastating—for me and for my grandchildren." Julie Fox and Charles Jacob found housing in Cape Coral when displaced from their 'unlivable' 49-year-old home. "We're 80 years old and just can't do the cleanup work like we did following

hurricanes Wilma and Irma,” said Fox. “Our friends still live in Moorhead. We miss being there and want to stay connected.” They had two feet of sewage water inside their home and could only salvage a few upper cabinets. “You watch the news and see floods in other parts of the country,” said Jacob. “When it happens to you, your perspective really changes.” Powell said Penny Taylor, BSCN Disaster Response Coordinator, contacted her regarding the home replacement program. She said everything happened so quickly. She and others in the neighborhood met with Taylor, Dr. Jaclynn Faffer, BSCN President, and Eileen ConnollyKeesler, CCF President/CEO. Taylor’s position as a case manager for the home replacement project was funded with a grant from the CCF to the Baker Senior Center. Taylor’s public service experiences give her tools to help remove roadblocks and keep the project moving forward. “I appreciate the opportunity to develop this program to bring new homes to these individuals. My heart goes out to them. Some are terribly alone. We have U.S. Veterans, single women, couples, men and women still working and others retired. At first, all they could do was panic. It is such a natural reaction. Now, we are able to bring some stability—some hope.” Fox and Jacob belong to BSCN, where they learned about and applied for the home replacement program. After Taylor talked to them and several of their neighbors at Moorhead Manor, they completed the application and were thrilled to be selected to participate. “Our family suggested we simply get out of here and move to Indiana to be near them,” said Fox. “We made it clear that we had no interest in permanently moving from our Naples home and friends. This program is making it all

possible for us to soon return to our community.” Taylor, Connolly-Keesler, and Faffer have been in constant communication, with many moving parts and decisions to be made and many unforeseen challenges emerging. “A clear process and documentation of each step is critical to the success of this initiative and serves as a guide for future programs,” said Taylor. “Fairness and integrity are critical. With donated money, it only heightens the importance of accountability.” Eligible residents completed applications for the home replacement program, and selections were announced quickly. Each resident was required to purchase flood and home insurance. For some, FEMA has been funding some of those expenses for several years. The damaged homes have been removed from the lots, and each site was scraped and prepared for new utilities, including electrical and water. To ensure that the properties will be above the flood level to minimize future storm

damage, cinder blocks or stilts will be used to raise each home at least 5 feet, depending on the zone. Furniture and appliances have been selected and purchased and now sit in storage, waiting for delivery of the units being built (manufactured) by LeeCorp in Fort Myers. Fox and Jacob say they are in good spirits while awaiting delivery date updates about their new home. “In Cape Coral, we still see people suffering.... but we are very blessed. Very thankful,” said Fox. “First, we lived with the heartbreak, then the unknown, then the stressful replacement process, but there is such relief in knowing that we will be able to live here again,” said Powell. “They have been so helpful. They are there for us. Penny has been so upfront, transparent, keeping us informed. We can’t express our thanks enough.” As the first few families settle into their new homes, CCF will seek additional funding to help other families. “We know there are many more neighborhoods and homes that received significant damage, or are located in low areas susceptible to dangerous flooding,” said Connolly-Keesler. “We will continue our work to make our community more resilient, whether storms, floods or pandemics.”



TOP: Marie Powell is interviewed in her severely damaged home after Hurricane Ian.

BOTTOM: The kitchen in one of the new homes that a CCF grant is providing through a collaboration with Baker Senior Center.