



# Blueprints

Fall 2022

## A Legacy of Love and Investment

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*open to all*

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Learn more about our vision  
for housing justice and how  
YOU can make an impact.

RSVP to:  
Ellen Hekman at [ehekman@iccf.org](mailto:ehekman@iccf.org)  
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A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Dear ICCF Community Homes  
friends and partners,

At a recent professional development retreat, I was asked to ponder the question of what thing I would be happy to be remembered for dedicating my life to. And I am blessed to say I am doing that thing right now. Being part of the affordable housing work here at ICCF Community Homes is my calling and motivation for getting up every day. A key reason for this is that our work means much more than our present-day activities. It is laying the groundwork for equitable opportunity, affordable homes, and thriving neighborhoods for generations to come.

I've been thinking about the blessings that have been passed down to me, like housing, education, and career opportunities. What am I doing to ensure that those blessings are passed along to others now and in the future? Sharing the blessings and opportunities of home, family, work, and love with my own children is one way. Working at ICCF Community Homes is another.

In this issue of *Blueprints* you can read about Mrs. Emma Huff, who lived in the same house for 52 years before she passed away. The house was owned by a local couple who gifted it to ICCF Community Homes in 1995, and Mrs. Huff remained there the entire time, hosting lavish family holidays, tending a beautiful garden, and creating rooms full of warmth and personality. She created a legacy of family, love, and stability that will continue to inspire and fortify her kids, grandkids, and great grandkids.

You can also read about the inaugural *Homes & Hope* Legacy Luncheon we held in May. We welcomed sixty-six guests who not only support ICCF Community Homes today, but have also chosen to pass on some of their earthly blessings to affordable housing work when God calls them home.

Wherever you are this season, my hope is that God provides you both blessings and the opportunity to bless others.



Grace and peace,

Ryan VerWys  
President and CEO  
[rverwys@iccf.org](mailto:rverwys@iccf.org)

The Impact of You:  
ProjectGR  
Pan-Orthodox  
Churches

When ICCF Community Homes put out the call for help with renovating 200+ homes a few years ago, three Eastern Orthodox parishes in Grand Rapids stepped up and began planning a weeklong project to help rehab houses. Fundraising and volunteer recruitment began and ProjectGR 2020 got underway. Unfortunately, COVID-19 put a halt to the planned volunteer work, and what started as a 10-month-long effort became a 34-month-long effort, culminating this summer as ProjectGR 2022.

"The long journey was worth the reward," ProjectGR organizer Greg Storey said. "It was a wonderful experience." Over 70 volunteers from St. Nicholas and St. George Antiochian Orthodox and Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Churches spent the week participating in ProjectGR 2022, renovating two houses and painting a third house with participants from all three churches.

"It was an incredible week," said our volunteer coordinator Sheryl Baas. "I loved seeing the transformation that took place at all 3 houses as well as the joy the volunteers felt after accomplishing a task." When asked what it was that inspired people to volunteer for this project, several volunteers said that they pray for people going through difficult times, but they also want to do something more to help. "When this opportunity came up, we were ready to go," said one volunteer.

ICCF Community Homes is extremely grateful to this group of Orthodox Churches for their generosity with both financial and hands-on support. We look forward to many more volunteer opportunities in the future.

"Our parishes chose to work with ICCF Community Homes because of their mission and values," Storey said. "We also believe we exist to seek and share Christ's love and create beauty in a disfigured world. We are so grateful for ICCF Community Homes and their incredible work to enable this mission!"





## A Legacy of Love and Investment

In 1995, ICCF Community Homes was gifted a rental property with two stipulations: the current tenant would be allowed to remain for as long as she desired, and when she vacated the premises, the house would be preserved as affordable housing. Almost three decades later, we are seeing the fruits of that investment and celebrating the legacy of our long-term tenant, the late Mrs. Emma Huff.

Mrs. Huff occupied that rental home for 52 years before passing away earlier this year. She was 103 years old and left behind an adoring family. “My mother really took a lot of pride in her home,” said Mattie, one of her daughters. “The house was filled with love.” Mattie has fond memories of her mom playing gospel music while preparing family dinner in the kitchen. A devout Methodist, Mrs. Huff would start getting ready for Sunday morning a day or two early so that work was not a part of her family’s Sabbath activity. At Christmastime, their large extended family would crowd into the house to exchange gifts. “Everyone would go to my mom for advice, whether you were related to her or not,” said Mattie. “She was wise. She was friendly to everyone.”

Mrs. Huff’s previous landlord was the Huyser family, who were looking for a way to give back to their community. They decided to donate the house to ICCF in 1995 to create more opportunities for affordable housing. In an effort to protect their current tenant, the agreement stipulated that Mrs. Huff could continue to rent the property



indefinitely. With the house valued at \$32,000 at that time, it was a generous gift. Today, because of low inventory and high demand in the housing market, the value of their donation has only increased. “She was a wonderful woman,” said Barb Huyser. “Clearly it was God’s plan that she had a wonderful place to be. She fell in love with the house, and we fell in love with her.”

Before Mrs. Huff came to Grand Rapids in 1962, her family lived in Mississippi. She had grown up in the country with six siblings, lots of farm animals and gardens, and developed a respect for hard work. She never drove a car or received more than an 8th grade education. Her husband Enoch “Sam” Huff passed away in 1967, and she was left to raise their seven children on her own. Mrs. Huff was a wonderful baker, cook, quilter, and seamstress, but she didn’t shy away from rougher tasks like chopping firewood or taking care of a snake in the yard.

Once she moved into her rental home in Grand Rapids, Mrs. Huff tended a lovely vegetable and flower garden.

Friends would bring her their struggling plants for revival. She believed in talking to her plants and playing music for them to help them grow. During harvest time, Mrs. Huff would share her fresh produce with the neighbors. Her daughter Mattie remembers that strangers would pause to compliment her mother’s beautiful garden. Later in life, when Mrs. Huff’s arthritis made it hard for her to care for her yard, friends and family came together to make sure that everything was kept up. They offered to shovel her driveway or pick up items from the store. Everyone who knew Mrs. Huff wanted to make sure she was well looked after.

Mrs. Huff took immense pride in her home, inside and out. If there was any sort of trash in the street in the morning, she would get her broom and sweep it up. Inside the home, she decorated with beautiful glassware and pictures of her seven children, and later their kids and grandkids. Guests experienced the lavender room, the red room, the yellow room, and the pink bathroom with a clawfoot tub and shag carpet. She was an impeccable housekeeper and kept all her things neat and tidy.



As a result, she had only a handful of maintenance requests in all the years she lived there. There was a hand-crank washing machine, original hardware, a tiny stove and sink, and beautiful wood trim throughout her house.

As the years passed, ICCF worked to ensure that the home continued to be affordable for Mrs. Huff, even as the housing prices began to climb. Rilla Wilson, her ICCF property manager, would visit about once a year to check in and see how things were going. Rilla saved Mrs. Huff’s house for last, knowing she’d be invited to sit out on her big porch and talk awhile. “She had a sweet soul,” said Rilla. “When speaking with her, I felt like one of her grandkids.” If Rilla commented on what hard work it must be to manage the whole house on her own, the elderly Mrs. Huff would say, “I’m not going anywhere.” Rilla agreed with a smile, “You don’t have to!”

In the last few months of her life, Mrs. Huff went to live with her daughter Mattie. At her insistence, Mattie would frequently drive her mom over to the house to make sure everything was in its proper place. “My mom had a big, big heart... but she wasn’t a pushover by any means,” said Mattie with a laugh. One of Mrs. Huff’s rules of parenting was, “If you get in trouble with the law, don’t call me. I’m not coming to get you out.” Another went, “Make me proud of you, but more importantly, make yourself proud.”

ICCF manages four other single-family homes on Mrs. Huff’s street, acquired during the Community Homes Initiative in 2017. Work is in progress to revitalize those homes, transforming that street little by

little. Jan van der Woerd, ICCF’s VP of Real Estate and Development, is helping coordinate renovations to Mrs. Huff’s home. Plans include renovating the bathroom, expanding the kitchen, redoing the wood floors, rewiring the house, installing new windows, adding new heating and cooling, and giving the walls a fresh coat of paint.

“Mrs. Huff was considered one of our best tenants since the day we took ownership,” shared Jan. “Her house will be renovated and become a home for future families in need of a house that is an affordable place to call home. The Huyser’s gift to ICCF is both deeply impactful for the Huff family but also future generations of households.”

Mrs. Huff’s family looks forward to the new memories that will be made by the next occupants of her house. “I want to let the new tenants know they are coming into more than just a building,” said Mattie. “They are coming to a place of love and warmth, and it was treated like that. A home is what you make it. The individual that lived there before you, my mom, made it a place of welcome.”







## ■ ICCF Homes & Hope Legacy Luncheon 2022

Our glass-ceilinged commons courtyard was overflowing with sunshine and joy as ICCF Community Homes hosted our first *Homes & Hope* Legacy Luncheon on May 12, 2022.

Sixty-six guests enjoyed a delightful catered meal and listened to featured remarks offered by Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss and ICCF President & CEO Ryan VerWys. After the program, guests participated in a tour of this restored building where a number of *Homes & Hope* members and luncheon guests had attended high school 50+ years ago!

John Carman, a *Homes & Hope* member and former long-term ICCF employee, described his experience in these words: “I was so blessed by the sunshine and the energy in the room. These were people who’ve given so much to ICCF over the years, and they are excited about continuing that support in the years to come.”

The annual ICCF *Homes & Hope* Legacy Luncheon is a special opportunity to express gratitude to those donors who have extended their support for ICCF’s vision by including a contribution to ICCF in their estate plans. For more event photos and information, visit [iccf.org/planned-gifts](https://iccf.org/planned-gifts) and click on the green “Legacy Luncheon 2022” tab. ■

ICCF  
***Homes & Hope***  
LEGACY SOCIETY

## Summer Soiree Volunteer & Donor Appreciation Event

We recently had a wonderful evening at Pleasant Park to celebrate some of our incredible partners. With food, music, raffle prizes, games, and the ever-popular face painting for kids, it was a great time to be together.

It’s a joy to see our community come together around a shared vision for thriving neighborhoods and affordable housing. We are grateful for the ongoing support of our many volunteers and donors. You make this critical work possible! ■



## ■ Housing Pipeline

### SIGSBEE ST. HOME

This newly built home, made possible through a partnership with BDR Custom Homes, has been completed and sold to an income-qualified buyer in the Baxter neighborhood.



### THE SOUTHGATE: A SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY

This new development is nearly complete. We’re excited about the affordable homes that will soon become available to our senior neighbors near downtown Grand Rapids.







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# A Reason to Smile

At the recent Summer Soirée, we were able to celebrate many of our incredible donors and volunteers.

## Our Mission

Equitable Opportunity. Affordable Homes. Thriving Neighborhoods.

P: (616) 336-9333 | [ICCF.org](http://ICCF.org)

