GREENWICH

SEPTEMBER 2020 | $5.95

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WHERE IS SHE?
Deep inside the
Jennifer Dulos
investigation

THEY'VE GOT THIS

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215
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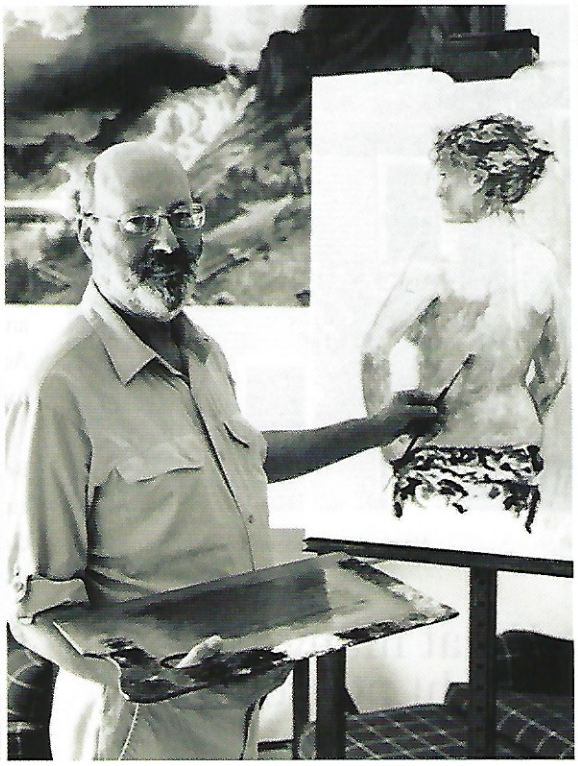
BY VALERIE FOS



Angelica Arenas with her daughter, Juliana, son, John and their dog, Milo • Jeffrey Damberg • Simone Sherman with her daughter, Tatiana

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

YES, GREENWICH IS KNOWN FOR ITS SPRAWLING HOUSES AND GATED ESTATES, BUT WE ALSO HAVE **AFFORDABLE HOUSING THAT IS UNDERGOING SOME AMAZING UPGRADES**

VENERA ALEXANDROVA

Angelica Arenas speaks about her Greenwich neighborhood with pride, using phrases like "wonderful community…great family support system…a place where everyone knows everyone else's kids and keeps an eye out for them—or anything that doesn't look right." She is talking about her home in Riverside where she is raising her two children, ages thirteen and fourteen, as a single mom. She's talking about Adams Gardens, a family development, owned and operated by Greenwich Communities: Our Neighborhood Partnerships.

Wondering what that is? It's the rebranded name of the Town of Greenwich Housing Authority, which recently changed its name to reflect the safe communities it oversees. According to Anthony L. Johnson, its executive director, they chose this kinder, gentler name because it is more reflective of what the department does—create neighborhoods where people of all ages are proud to live and thrive. To spearhead this rebranding, new name and logo, they turned to two well-known Greenwich residents and marketing professionals, Bobbi Eggers and Sue Moretti Bodson.

"Unfortunately, housing authorities throughout the country have created the impression of terrible management and inferior properties," Johnson says. "We wanted to get away from that representation, because it is not us."

Greenwich Communities owns and manages thirteen residential complexes of 837 apartments, as well as the Parsonage Cottage, a forty-bed facility for the aged. There are no vacancies; in fact, there is a waiting list, which

Newly renovated units at Armstrong Court

Johnson attributes to the quality of Greenwich Communities' properties and the town's low crime rate, extraordinary public education system and the peace of mind that comes with tenants knowing their children are safe.

Terry Mardula, deputy director and COO, adds that there is a preference for town residents and workers to fill the apartments, and says that because the rent is based on income, if residents lose jobs, they know their rent will be adjusted accordingly. "It gives people a protection they would never have if they rented from a landlord," he says.

The ages in these complexes range from infants to seniors, and the backgrounds and occupations are as varied as the ages. Consider Jeffrey Damberg, whose family bought a home on Milbank Avenue in 1952 for $18,000. Now in his sixties, he and his wife Joanne once again call his old neighborhood home, this time at Agnes Morley Heights. Damberg, who is an artist, explains that when the 2008 crash hit, all his business dried up. "Moving here was a wonderful opportunity for us. We feel safe. We walk to town. Joanne walks to church. We can walk to the train. It is home and the value of the apartment is enormous, because as we all know, Greenwich is extremely expensive."

What many might not realize is the NEED IN GREENWICH FOR SUBSIDIZED HOUSING.

What many might not realize is the need in Greenwich for subsidized housing. Last school year, 19.8 percent or 1,794 of Greenwich Public School students qualified for free or reduced lunch benefits, a statistic Greenwich Communities understands well.

"Our communities are very diverse, in terms of ethnicity, religion, age groups and mental and physical capabilities. Our residents come from all over—the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Hispanic countries and, of course, right here in Greenwich. We have a responsibility to our tenants that we continue to not only maintain our housing but also improve it," Johnson says.

Here's a look at the major projects either ongoing or planned by Greenwich Communities.

Wilbur Peck Court is a 110-unit complex of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom homes built in 1951. It also includes a health center with a dental clinic, run by Family Centers and funded through Husky Health insurance. According to Johnson, this was the first federally funded health center in public housing.

Simone Sherman recently moved here from Bridgeport with her five-year-old daughter, cutting her daily commute to her job with Greenwich Home Care by hours. She was also the first resident to move into a totally renovated two-bedroom apartment.

Over the past few years, exterior improvements at Wilbur Peck have included upgrading the underground heating systems, installing new roofs and windows and replacing the HVAC system. Each bathroom in the complex was gutted and replaced, and each unit has new floors and paint. Currently, all the kitchens are being upgraded with stainless steel appliances, new cabinets and granite countertops.

"This is a big change for us, but a good change," Sherman says. "Everything is so convenient for me. Shopping, the train station, park, museums, my job, my daughter's childcare—we are just so thankful. I feel so safe here, and I am just so lucky."

Armstrong Court is a 144-unit complex that includes a community garden and two day-care centers, run by Family Centers. Come this spring it will have 150 renovated units.

Phase one recently opened with eighteen new townhouses next door to Bimbo Bakery. There are six two-bedroom and twelve three-bedroom units, some with basements, and all with two bathrooms. Residents from the existing Armstrong Court were given preference.

THE SECOND PHASE OF ARMSTRONG COURT

- The present emergency access points on each building will be enclosed to make them look like communal terraces but cannot be used for personal use. This space will become more square footage in each refurbished apartment.
- The entire exterior will get a facelift, including changing the flat roof for a pitched roof and updating the look.
- Twelve current one-bedroom apartments will be joined with two-bedroom units, creating twelve three-bedroom units with two bathrooms each.
- Kitchen renovations will include stainless-steel appliances, new windows and bathrooms, fresh paint and upgraded insulation.

Though the timeline has not been established, phases three and four will include the larger buildings.

McKinney Terrace currently includes twenty-one units of family townhouses and a fifty-one-unit senior housing building that was the former Byram School. Greenwich Communities has been approved to build a new fifty-one-unit building for seniors on the town-owned property that has been leased to them for ninety-nine years. That will bring the number of senior residences in this complex to 102.

Quarry Knoll is now a small development of fifty mostly studio units that houses disabled seniors aged sixty-two and older. Johnson calls it a "Smurf Village" that has outlived its viability. "There are many positives to Quarry Knoll, but the buildings are old, the apartments are small, and the need for more public housing is great," he says.

The plan is to demolish the buildings, move the residents to the new project at McKinney Terrace (with the option of moving back once complete), and develop the seven acres of land into between 175 and 225 mixed-income housing units, a combination of senior housing and family housing and for-sale homes that will pay for the project.

Johnson stresses that although there will be homes for sale in the new project, they are not in the business of building market-rate homes, nor is this something they want to do. "To accomplish this project, it is something that we must do," he says. "Now, if someone wants to write us a check to build low-income homes, we will gladly accept it and build more public housing."

Ribbon cutting at Armstrong Court

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>
> — SIMONE SHERMAN

Armstrong Court senior housing is a new concept for Greenwich Communities and will feature what Johnson calls "around" market value rents. The exact monthly rent has not been determined but will be high enough to cover operating expenses and pay for itself.

The project has been approved and will consist of fifty-one one- and possibly two-bedroom units for adults fifty-five and older.

When asked why people of all ages want to call Greenwich home, Johnson is quick with an answer. "Diversity in town is one of the reasons that makes Greenwich a wonderful place to live," he says. "Senior center programs, programs for youths, the libraries, the beach—there is just so much for residents to take advantage of here. But most important, Greenwich is safe, it has wonderful schools, and people feel protected. Low-income people want the same things for their kids as high-income people, and Greenwich provides it all."