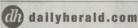
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DISHESS

One-man crew builds up South Side neighborhood

BY CHARLES O'TOOLE

Medill News Service

neighborhood on Chicago's tion made the difference. South Side.

ing in Chicago," he jokes. "No told me he was impressed." rent; I pay maybe \$300 a month the sewage pumped out."

and everything else for Greenline Development Inc., a company focused on building way to balance two seemingly high-quality affordable housing incompatible impulses: to help in Woodlawn.

arrangement, adopted a few check. years ago under the financial strain of his first development ing "was a way that I could and a concurrent divorce.

ton, D.C., native says he intends socially responsible and a posito stay in Woodlawn as a developer and as a resident. He has set aside a unit for himself in one of starting to appear. his projects on the 6600 block of

South Maryland Avenue.

living building condominiums, a major downtown law firm, sales. Benjamin Van Horne has a truly Tinsley bought in a project on humble home: a trailer on a South Kimbark Avenue in May.

"My inspector was a very "That's real affordable hous- picky person," she said, "but he

Van Horne's personal commit- Horne. for running water and to have ment is unusual, especially in a Van Horne is president, CEO, the corner from poverty and crime to stability and prosperity.

The trailer is a temporary while earning a healthy pay-

Developing affordable houspotentially make money, but But the 31-year-old Washing- still do something that was tive force," he says.

netted \$90,000 in 2005, mostly One of his customers, Linda on sales of land. For this year he Tinsley, is delighted with her estimates profits of at least For a man who makes his Greenline unit. An employee at \$213,000, mostly from housing

Greenline has finished three condo projects comprising 26 vacant lot in the Woodlawn She says the quality of construc- units in Woodlawn. Including the South Maryland project, three more are under construction with another nine in the pipeline, according to Van

> Several of the projects were neighborhood still trying to turn helped by Chicago's "City Lots for City Living" program, which sells city-owned vacant lots to For him, though, it's just a developers for as little as \$1. In return, the developer pledges to reserve units built on the land more than 120 percent of the city's median income, or \$90,500 for a family of four.

condo to \$429,900 for custom- priced out of hotter areas. built single-family houses.

After a few years, the money is the units' prices are steep for vision for the neighborhood. many Woodlawn families, but



CHARLES O'TOOLE/MEDILL NEWS SERVICE

build healthy communities for home buyers earning no Developer Benjamin Van Horne, 31, of Greenline Development Inc., stands outside the trailer in Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood where he is living while working on affordable housing projects.

> His prices range from police, firefighters and other "It fills in vacant lots with new \$179,000 for a two-bedroom middle-class home buyers quality housing. It takes away

That's in line with 5th Ward Van Horne acknowledges that Alderman Leslie Hairston's

"We're trying to attract mixed Van Horne says the company says he hopes they will attract income development," she said.

from blight."

The signs of that effort are visible in Woodlawn, most clearly in the new housing sprouting

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Builder: Woodlawn increases economic diversity

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north of Oakwood Cemetery.

challenges.

As of October, the police district covering Woodlawn apartment complex. reported 32 homicides in 2006, tied for the city's third-highest district total. Vacant lots are common. Some developments focusing on abandoned prophave stalled or been abandoned before completion. There is a lack of good grocery stores.

revitalizing the area.

a mixed-income, majorityblack D.C. neighborhood and had his first project. attended majority-black schools, Van Horne speaks with guiet intensity about the need ipated. for integrated neighborhoods.

sity of social backgrounds, building and rent at affordable visionary in terms of what he socially, as well as racially."

income and ages that he says prices and make ends meet." help make a strong community.

But there remain persistent temping at a consulting firm, and almost from the beginning planned to renovate an old

crazy," he admits.

He looked at buildings, erties saddled with back taxes.

He eventually found one on Van Horne says other area seized by the city because of developers are working on unpaid taxes. Using credit attracting a supermarket, cards, he put down a \$35,000 something he says is key to deposit, letting him claim ownership if the original owner did A white man who grew up in not come forward. The owner the small Chicago building firm never showed, and Van Horne

But the project proved more complicated than he had antic-

"Usually when people hear lower-cost rentals, but it's very 'integration,' they just think hard to meet that market," he racially," he says, but he is says. "Without government like this on the North Side," integrated neighborhood equally interested in the diver- subsidies, you can't gut-rehab a Blacknard says. "Ben's really a economically, generationally,

Public agencies and charities He started Greenline while were reluctant to take a risk on Horne decided instead to convert the property to would become "The Baltimore."

That project made a strong

impression on Hairston.

South Maryland that had been dated, abandoned building and when they replace vacant lots turned it into beautiful condos," she said. "Where other developers wouldn't ment is a double-edged sword. touch it. he staved the course."

MPI Construction Inc., has overseen construction on several Greenline developments. He says Van Horne's dedication vitality brought by condos and to high-quality materials sets new residents will improve "There's a huge market for him apart from other afford- more lives than it will displace. able-housing developers.

wants to do."

Van Horne acknowledges that being a white developer in a first-time developer, so Van a predominately black neighborhood creates the need to build trust. "Every new block I condominiums. Construction move into, it's about overcom-"It was probably a little was soon under way on what ing the skepticism of the neighbors about what I'm doing."

> He says homeowners are generally welcoming of the "Benjamin took a dilapi- new developments, especially or abandoned buildings.

> > Still, he knows that develop-

"It's an imperfect process," Andre Blacknard, a partner in he says, "and it may mean - it probably will mean - many people renting in Woodlawn will lose their apartments."

His hope is that the new

Maybe, he says, Woodlawn "Usually we do something "can become and remain an