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Hundreds of property owners attend 15th annual Owner Symposium that helps them understand benefits of becoming owner in voucher program

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Hundreds of property owners and industry professionals representing thousands of rental units throughout Chicago's 77 community areas attended the 15th annual Chicago Housing Authority Owner Symposium last month at the Hyatt Regency Chicago, while hundreds more watched online via Webex Events.

The Owner Symposium is an education and networking event designed to equip property owners, managers, realtors, brokers, investors and residential rental housing professionals with the timely tools and knowledge they need to strengthen communities and grow their business.

The purpose is to help property owners understand the benefits of becoming a participant owner in the HCV program, which guarantees rent, low turnover and incentive payments for new property owners leasing in Mobility Areas. As a result of the 2024 Symposium, 45 owners signed up to participate in the Housing Choice Partners Mobility Program that assists HCV families with moving into Mobility Areas within the City of Chicago.

"The Owner Symposium is important because CHA wants to help owners understand the benefits of working with our program while also providing access to valuable trainers and training," said Cheryl Burns, CHA's Chief of the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) department.

The Owner Symposium was open to all current or potential rental housing providers working in the City of Chicago (including property owners, managers, maintenance staff, realtors, brokers, investors and advocates), regardless of their experience level or whether they currently have CHA voucher holders in their units or not.

"The Owner Symposium works to support owners so you can deliver decent, safe, affordable housing to the 102,000 people that participate in the HCV program," said CHA Board Chairperson Angela Hurlock in her address to the Symposium attendees. "We know that good landlords mean good buildings which means good neighborhoods."

One of the attendees was Karen J. Forté, an HCV property owner whose business, Forté Property Management, has flourished with the help of the Owner Symposium. She started attending in 2009 and has found it to be an invaluable resource.

“I built a lot of relationships just by going to those workshops,” she said. “By year two, I had built a relationship with the staff and had learned so much on how to deal with tenants and inspections and once I developed those relationships it made it less scary.”

Forté said it’s been great partnership with CHA, developing relationships and being able to provide great living spaces for HCV participants.

“I love giving people - seniors and veterans - a nice, safe home for an affordable price,” she said.

Burns said it was another successful day that helps property owners in many different ways.

“Housing providers can meet vendors that are available for hire - everything from locksmiths to firms that lay concrete and driveways - and learn about new tax laws that are beneficial to owners. If it’s good for owners, we are looking at ways to get them access to it. In the end, the Owner Symposium benefits low-income families by improving the housing and management of affordable housing in Chicago.”

The in-person Owner Symposium included educational sessions, including eight “back to basics” topics to choose from throughout the day as well as a networking lunch, dedicated time with vendors in the exhibit area and an afternoon snack. The sessions can be seen at www.chaownersymposium.org/sessions