

**Norristown's, Arbor Heights, Receives 2015 Urban Land Institute Williard G. "Bill" Rouse III Award for Excellence.**

**Follow-up community two blocks away is sequel to this multi-award winning community.**

Norristown, PA –July 7 – The Philadelphia chapter of the prestigious Urban Land Institute (ULI) granted one of its highest honors to the Arbor Heights project in Norristown, PA. The Willard G. "Bill" Rouse III Award for Excellence, a program instituted last year, recognizes the "best real estate projects completed within the last five years in Eastern and Central Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey, and Delaware".

Nearly 30 submissions were reviewed by an esteemed panel of ULI members from across the country and narrowed to a field of 15 finalists. The winning projects – representing a variety of urban mixed-use, historic preservation, adaptive reuse, multipurpose entertainment, residential and institutional projects were scored on quality planning and design, elements that build healthy places, environmental sustainability and energy reduction; use of best practices, economic success and market acceptance.

"This year's winners and finalists represent some of the most innovative real estate developments in the region," said Christopher M. Hager, P.E., Chair of ULI Philadelphia. "The winners both this year and last year demonstrate how responsible land use has the ability to transform the built environment into something that revitalizes and reshapes our communities."

Arbor Heights , located at 1000 DeKalb Street in Norristown and developed by Progressive Housing Ventures – is a small project making a large impact. Twelve stacked townhomes are grouped into two buildings from

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## COMMUNICATION

(ULI Award TO Arbor Heights in Norristown, add one)

previously vacant and disintegrating structures. The new construction blends seamlessly with century old adjacent structures in this transitioning neighborhood. Grants from the state, county and federal government were used to reduce the cost of construction in order to make the homes affordably priced from the \$120,000's while creative mortgage financing and closing cost subsidies made it possible for first time homebuyers to qualify for financing.

Arbor Heights, and now its sequel Arbor Mews, are credited with being a catalytic force in this section of historic upper DeKalb Street that was once home to Norristown's scions of business and industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Over the years, most of these beautiful mansions were converted to tenement apartments or used by non-profit organizations for County social services. As the surrounding areas suburbanized after World War II and with the advent of regional malls and super highways, Norristown has struggled with declining rates of homeownership and the problems associated with that. In the early 2000's, the municipality decided to focus on this critical area of Dekalb Street with a strategy of encouraging affordable home ownership as a tool for revitalization.

Sarah Peck, President of Progressive Housing Ventures, said she was honored that this project, which was a collaborative effort with the Municipality of Norristown, Montgomery County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was recognized by ULI. " My company was contacted by the Municipality of Norristown and the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority to redevelop the blighted property that is now Arbor Heights based on the success of our first in-fill urban project, Green Street Mews in Downingtown. The successful infusion of the 12 new homes occupied by first-time homebuyers has stimulated confidence in the neighborhood as well as in Norristown as a whole. The product tapped into a latent market demand by buyers of all ages for walkable, urban lifestyle in new energy-efficient homes at an affordable price point.

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The Arbor Heights project has, in fact, spurred improvements by other property owners in the neighborhood. its success led Peck to undertake a second project just 2 blocks away. Arbor Mews is a new construction community of 24 innovatively designed multiplex townhomes with garages and is already 50% sold out. Many of the homebuyers at Arbor Mews are coming from Chester and Delaware County – further evidence that the location is experiencing a renaissance. “Many pundits say that one and two family households would prefer to rent than buy these days. I’m not finding this to be true”, said Peck. “My sense is that they simply can’t find housing they can afford which is near public transportation and the kind of entertainment and activities they enjoy. We are focused on providing that kind of housing and appreciate ULI for recognizing our mission.”

Arbor Mews is located at 1202 DeKalb Street in Norristown. A furnished model home is open Friday through Monday from noon to 6PM or by appointment. Call 484 – 401-6200 or visit <http://www.arbormews.com/> for photos, virtual tours and additional information.