In 2010, one-fifth of Washington, D.C. residents spent more than half of their income on housing. Economic growth in the D.C. area is difficult for low and moderate-income residents. The strong regional economy creates jobs, but the demand for housing drives rent and home prices out of reach. Over the last 10 years, these costs have risen much faster than incomes, and affordable housing has been replaced with more lucrative, market-rate communities. The result is a serious hardship for working families.

At the same time, the region's homeless population has risen by 15 percent since 2008, their growing ranks fueled by economic recession and rising housing costs. As chronic homelessness has increased, city agencies and nonprofit organizations struggle to meet demand.

In an effort to secure affordable housing and income diversity throughout the city, Enterprise Community Loan Fund invested $1.6 million to purchase a property in the Randle Highlands neighborhood. The property was subsequently rehabilitated and is now operated by So Others Might Eat (SOME). It now provides its residents with access to a vibrant and amenity-rich neighborhood.

SOME, an organization dedicated to providing support and care for the homeless, recognized Randle Highlands as one of the last remaining affordable neighborhoods for the city’s working class families. Enterprise and SOME seized the opportunity to transform a boarded-up apartment building into a supportive housing program for the city’s homeless.

Welcome mats and the smell of cooking now waft through the building, home to 49 formerly homeless individuals. Each apartment gleams with new floors, appliances, bathrooms and showers. On-site case workers support and develop individualized goal plans for every resident. With rent locked in at 30 percent of income, residents are able to afford safe and decent housing along with other living expenses, like groceries and transportation.
“A Piece of Heaven” Offers Respite and Support

Before moving into his new home at Gasner House, Gregory Boyd slept on his brother’s couch for five months, one of the District’s “shadow” homeless residents.

Since entering the SOME program, Boyd, a veteran of the Vietnam War, keeps his apartment nearly immaculate. The floors shine, his shoes are neatly lined in a row in his spacious closet and the drying rack next to his sink has freshly washed bowls and silverware on it. He is effusive with his praise for SOME staff and for the apartment he now calls home. “To me, this is a piece of heaven,” he says with a grin.

With the support of on-site case managers, Boyd is now working to acquire his driver’s license. He says he wants to be able to drive himself to visit friends and family. He volunteers at a nearby food pantry and soup kitchen for the homeless, giving support and aid to others who are experiencing some of the hardships he faced.

Quality of life – including proximity to public transportation and grocery shopping – is a key benefit of living at the Texas Avenue property. Boyd, however, likes the quiet, tree-lined streets surrounding his new home. “You can be calm here,” he says. After many challenges in his life, he is thankful for all of the good he enjoys in his new home.

This is the ultimate story of Enterprise – giving a home and a system of support to communities in need, one individual at a time.