

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Since 1994, Duke University and Self-Help have worked together to revitalize Durham's urban neighborhoods with a focus on homeownership and affordable housing. The partnership began in Walltown when Duke provided a \$2 million loan to allow Self-Help, with support from Habitat for Humanity of Durham and community residents, to build and sell dozens of high-quality, affordable homes. Along with other neighborhood and Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership (DDNP) efforts, the homes have helped to return community cohesiveness, local homeownership and low crime rates to the historic neighborhood.

In 2004, building on the success in Walltown, Duke doubled

its loan commitment to \$4 million. The new funds allowed Self-Help and Habitat, along with Builders of Hope and Durham Community Land Trustees, to expand their work to Southwest Central Durham. The non-profit housing organizations worked through the Southwest Central Durham Quality of Life Project (QOL), a coalition of community members, facilitated by DDNP staff, that advocates on behalf of the housing and economic development interests of the neighborhoods.

With the Duke loan and in partnership with DDNP and Self-Help staff, QOL formed a land bank that has become a model among community-based housing initiatives. The land bank

# WITH SELF-HELP

allows non-profit developers to buy and hold a neighborhood's vacant, blighted properties. Those properties are then developed according to a vision created by the community, and only with the approval of community members.

For the first 17 years, the partnership between Duke and Self-Help was focused primarily within the DDNP neighborhoods. When the Office of Durham and Regional Affairs (DARA) renegotiated the Self-Help loan in 2011, it committed to maintain that support for Walltown and Southwest Central Durham, and it took the agreement a step further.

In 2011 Duke again doubled its loan commitment to Self-Help, with the extra \$4 million supporting the projects featured here.

## West Chapel Hill Street Commercial Corridor

The West Chapel Hill Street commercial corridor, which connects Duke University to downtown Durham, has the potential to be a vibrant community and retail center for Southwest Central Durham residents. For about a decade, the QOL Economic Development committee has sponsored market studies and charrettes to identify feasible development projects and to solicit feedback from neighbors. Through the studies and planning sessions, QOL collected a wealth of information about the kinds of stores and offices residents would like to see along West Chapel Hill Street; how trees, sidewalks and other beautification measures could best be incorporated; and which properties could be re-purposed to make it all happen.

Slowly progress has been made. Self-Help and QOL rehabilitated a house on the strip that had become known for illegal activities, renovating it and renting it to the Duke Chapel Pathways program. They worked with the city to implement small sidewalk and landscaping projects, and a bike path to improve accessibility.

In 2011, when Duke doubled its loan commitment and set aside \$1 million for the West Chapel Hill Street commercial

corridor, Self-Help had the knowledge and buy-in to put the significant new funding to good use.

Self-Help has acquired 2.3 acres of properties on the south side of West Chapel Hill Street, starting at a city-owned parking lot and wrapping around the corner of Kent Street, with plans to build a street-front retail and office development with a parking lot in back. Staff continue to collect community input as they develop architectural plans and seek office and retail tenants, expected to be announced in early 2013.

## Southside

Revitalization of the Southside neighborhood, just south of the American Tobacco Campus, has become a priority for the City of Durham, Self-Help and other non-profit developers. To support the collaborative effort from the beginning, Duke and the City of Durham organized door-to-door surveys and neighborhood retreats to solicit input from Southside residents about the future of their neighborhood. That work helped to produce a blueprint for re-development, even as Self-Help was working to develop a land bank of properties strategically located within the neighborhood.

The newly expanded Duke loan commitment will allow Self-Help and a coalition of non-profit housing developers to replicate the successful land bank model as they re-develop those properties at the direction of Southside residents and their vision for their neighborhood.

And to guarantee a stable homeowner base as the neighborhood's vacant properties are re-developed, DARA is organizing an affordable housing initiative, including a unique forgivable mortgage loan program for low- to middle-income university and health system employees. When it begins this year, the Housing Incentive Program will provide forgivable five-year loans of \$10,000 for eligible Duke employees.