

INSPIRATION



Intunity Homes through a partnership with fellow Memphis-based nonprofit United Housing will build a home on this land at 3160 Pershing Ave. in The Heights neighborhood in Memphis. PHOTOS BY STU BOYD II/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

BUILDING ITS MISSION

Affordable housing nonprofit will begin constructing new homes

Corey Davis

Memphis Commercial Appeal
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

A Memphis-based nonprofit is continuing its mission of finding affordable rental housing for those with physical or intellectual disabilities.

Intunity Homes owns 40 single-family homes, including 26 houses in Shelby County and 14 in Madison County that serve a tenant population of 70 individuals. Intunity Homes works with agencies in Memphis and Jackson that provide residential or support services to the houses in those areas.

Earle Schwarz, executive director of Intunity Homes, said the nonprofit has homes in Shelby County areas such as Bartlett, Cordova, Raleigh and southern Memphis.

Schwarz said Intunity Homes, which was founded in 2011, rents the homes at under market rates to people with physical and intellectual challenges. He cited an example from December when the nonprofit acquired a package of four homes at reasonable pricing, which he noted is uncommon in the local market. He said coincidentally one of the homes in the acquisition had people with intellectual disabilities living there who were paying a private investor \$1,500 a month in rent.

"When we acquired the house, we immediately dropped the rent to \$885 a month, so when I say that we provide these houses at significantly below market, I'm not just blowing smoke," Schwarz said. "It's real, and it's our mission."



Earle Schwarz is the executive director of Memphis-based Intunity Homes.

According to Schwarz, Intunity Homes works with tenants whose primary or exclusive source of income is Supplemental Security Income. While the monthly amount varies based on the individual, Schwarz said it generally caps at about \$1,100 a month.

"Trying to find a house in a safe neighborhood for that kind of money is, let's just call it a challenge," Schwarz said. "So, we meet that challenge because we know the population. We know how to design homes, and we know how to modify... We're not profit driven, so we can spend money to fix a house or modify a house that a private investor won't spend."

In March 2023, Intunity Homes' board of directors

adopted a new strategic plan where the nonprofit shifted from purchasing existing homes to designing and building new homes. Intunity has engaged Memphis-based architectural firm Looney Ricks Kiss (LRK) to design an estimated \$250,000 prototype home that is energy efficient and technology rich.

Schwarz said Intunity Homes through a partnership with fellow Memphis-based nonprofit United Housing is in the process of building the 1,600- to 1,700-square-foot prototype home at 3160 Pershing Ave. in The Heights neighborhood just north of Summer Avenue. The goal is for this home to be opened sometime in the summer or fall.

The future plan is to build an additional 40 to 50 these homes, which would increase Intunity's tenant population to at least 100 people, Schwarz said.

"The provider who we have been working with has identified the tenants and they have been waiting for a while," Schwarz said. "They're really excited and they understand they're going to get their own new house."

Schwarz, who was an attorney, noted how he has been involved working with the population he helps serve at Intunity Homes for a long time. He finds inspiration in being part of providing a housing solution.

"It's gratifying in the fact that we're able to provide as close to a 'normal experience' for a very marginalized population," Schwarz said. "That gets me up in the morning."

Corey Davis is the Collierville and Germantown reporter with The Commercial Appeal. He can be reached at Corey.Davis@commercialappeal.com or 901-293-1610.