

THE MAGAZINE OF MILITARY HOUSING, LODGING & LIFESTYLES

DEFENSE COMMUNITIES

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HOUSING Mission Accomplished

**Navy families move
into newly privatized
homes throughout the
Southeast**

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Playground &
Outdoor Equipment**
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In this issue, the Navy and GMH Military Housing tell the story of their successful public/private venture that has put Navy families, like the Fults family—Fire Controlman 3rd Class Joseph Fults, his wife Nova, and their daughter Lola—shown here, in new and renovated privatized housing. The Fults family was the first to move into new homes at Naval Station Mayport in Florida. See page 28 for the full story.



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Defense Communities magazine is designed to keep those who operate and manage the whole spectrum of military housing and facilities maintenance informed on the industry's latest technology, products, and services. It provides a forum for members to share lessons learned, news and events, and training opportunities and updates.

Housing Mission Accomplished

Teamwork is central to the success of an enormous privatization project for the Navy.

By Richard Wolff and Robert Shepko



The Fults family was the first to move into newly privatized housing at Naval Station Mayport in Florida.

The transfer of military housing at 11 bases in the Southeastern United States from the Navy to the private sector needed strong leadership and the support of multiple stakeholders. Through diligence and collaboration, the Navy Region Southeast Housing Team, NAVFAC SVA, and GMH Military Housing have smoothly implemented the Navy's largest single public/private venture (PPV) agreement to date.

When the Navy awarded GMH Military Housing the Navy Region Southeast Project, which consists of 11 installations in five states, it was to be the benchmark for the transfer of military property from the public to the private sector.

The project's six-year initial development period, which includes design, renovation, and construction, has been valued at approximately \$700 million. GMH will be responsible for the management and maintenance of the project for the next 50 years.

"Many factors, including a shrinking housing budget, aging units, and maintenance backlogs have made it difficult for the Navy to provide quality housing of service members," says Richard

Wolff, Navy Region Southeast Housing Director. "This partnership makes it possible for the Navy to renovate and construct family housing quickly and affordably."

The scale of this PPV project made the stakes high. The transition needed to be seamless, and all operations had to run smoothly before, during, and after the hand-off. For the Navy Region Southeast Housing Team, comprised of region headquarters staff, installation program managers, and NAVFAC SVA, this required the successful balance of the privatization partnership with GMH and the daily management of approximately 11,000 family housing units and 32,000 bachelor housing spaces within the region.

A running start

On October 1, 2007, GMH assumed the management and maintenance of 6,968 military units at installations in South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas. The ramp-up took six months from the minute GMH Military Housing was awarded the Navy Region Southeast Project in February 2007, with all operations starting from scratch.

Initially, GMH hired four senior management members to build the teams on the ground. Community managers and facility managers were hired and in place by July 1, 2007. The new managers were provided training at other successful GMH locations, where they were each assigned a mentor to guide them through the steps of setting up a new family housing location. An additional 144 on-site staff members were then recruited, hired, and trained to provide customer service and facility services for more than 4,000 families at Navy Region Southeast installations.

To ensure a smooth transition and partnership, GMH staff shared office space with Navy housing personnel. This allowed for immediate referrals, better customer service, one-stop shopping, easier accessibility, and guaranteed prompt service. The next step was to contract essential services, such as gar-

Because many military families had never signed housing leases before, they were invited to town hall meetings where they could ask questions and walk through the process with housing managers.

bage collection, cleaning, facility maintenance, landscaping, and pest control.

The team drafted, reviewed, and approved dozens of management docu-

ments. These included operations and management, environmental, and disaster plans, as well as leases, addendums, and resident guides. The team also developed and approved budgets for 2007 and 2008.

Lease education and signing were among the final preparatory steps. Because housing is a military benefit, most residents had never signed leases. To minimize stress during the transition, GMH held town hall meetings to answer questions and conducted two to three lease signing sessions for each installation. GMH personnel handled up to 150 residents at a time at these events, explained who GMH is, addressed the residents' rights, services, and terms of the agreement of the lease, and welcomed them into the GMH family. During these events, GMH hosted barbecues with all



As part of an overall effort to create welcoming neighborhood environments, the LifeWorks@GMH program hosted a fire safety day for families at NSW Charleston in Goose Creek, SC. Shown here, Program Coordinator Cynthia Howard and a young family member enjoy the day's activities.



At NAS Whiting Field in Milton, FL, privatization partner GMH Military Housing hosted an early morning event called "Breakfast on the Go" to meet and greet residents. GMH employees served up coffee and pastries as residents began the work day.

the fixings, family games, and giveaways to make the entire family feel welcome.

"This dramatic improvement in housing conditions for service members and their families is already increasing their quality of life, readiness, morale, and retention," Wolff says.

An effective game plan

Every mission has challenges, and the Navy Region Southeast Project was no exception. For the Navy Region Southeast Housing Team, these challenges included the incorporation of landlord/tenant laws for five different states and the requirement to include housing for civilians working onboard NAS Key West, which is self-sustaining and kept separate from the military housing in the PPV agreement. GMH faced three challenges in particular: coordinating stakeholders, managing expectations, and opening lines of communication. The company drew on its experience of operating 26 other military housing privatization locations to address them.

With 11 bases in five states to oversee, GMH had to juggle a wide berth of stakeholder interests and inputs. Partners included the Navy, lending institutions, architects Niles Bolton Associates, engineers Woolpert, Inc., and contractor Balfour Beatty Construction.

GMH and the Navy organized the stakeholders into six core teams, and assigned

a lead to each. Roles included documentation, transition planning, design review, site planning, and environmental oversight. When possible, GMH communicated with team members in person. Otherwise, they met via conference calls or Web conferencing. In all cases, GMH, NAVFAC SVA, and Navy housing staffs reviewed the teams' plans and progress, most often through formal design and site reviews. These regular updates kept the project moving forward, flagged problems, and kept everyone accountable for their actions and responsibilities.

Managing expectations

In a PPV of this magnitude, expectations ran high. The GMH/Navy leaders had to set realistic goals, and consistently communicated these goals to partners, staff, and residents. It was critical that objectives remained aligned.

The partnership set schedules with timelines for completion of documents, lease signings, and move-in dates. GMH conducted calls and progress reviews with Navy headquarters and region staff, commanding officers, housing officers, and support staff at each location. The bases' commanding and housing officers then helped GMH relay program details to service members and their families. GMH, in cooperation with the Navy, held at least two town hall meetings at each base to update residents on the site's progress, and field questions.

Maintaining communication among team leaders and stakeholders was essential to the project's success. Each team had to remain aware of timelines and understand how delays would slow the transition process. All participants had to agree on how to align processes within the financial constraints, and balance the needs of all 11 installations. Here, the core team conducted discussions and obtained approvals, which were then carried out by their employees.

Flyers, newsletters, base-specific Web sites, and town hall meetings facilitated fast and efficient communications with all on-site stakeholders and residents. The result was a unified approach to

the project, with all management levels seamlessly working together.

Lessons learned

In the end, several strategies resulted in success for the Navy Region Southeast Project:

- Comprehensive collaboration;
- Building consensus in response to challenges; and
- Maintaining a big-picture focus.

GMH Military Housing and the Navy earned each other's trust and commitment by making teamwork and communication a top priority. They also laid the groundwork for the overall project, and kept everyone focused on upcoming objectives. For their distinguished commitment to the PPV agreement and their professionalism in all aspects of military housing and lodging management, the Navy Region Southeast Housing program received the PHMA 2008 Group Award.

"As a former Regional Commander in Hawaii, I have been involved in public/private venture housing projects first hand, and know the significant quality-of-life benefits they afford our service members and their families," says RADM M.C. Vitale, Commander, Navy Region Southeast. "As partners, the Navy and GMH are committed to making the Southeast Region's PPV successful for every resident."

By staying focused on the ultimate goal of providing the best housing possible for Navy families and deliver programs such as LifeWorks@GMH to our residents, GMH Military Housing, NAVFAC SVA, and the Navy Region Southeast Housing Team accomplished the mission, and proved that careful planning and thoughtful management can make even the most daunting projects doable and make for smooth sailing for years to come! ■

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