

A community that works

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STAFF WRITER

NEWARK, N.J. — AT THE GATEway to this city's Central Ward stands a row of abandoned brick apartment buildings, a stark reminder of the riots that killed 23 people and devastated this neighborhood a quarter-century ago.

But just eight blocks away is an oasis of urban rebirth: a new full-service grocery store

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REED HOFFMANN Staff photographer

Success story Joann Lagares, 25, is working to make her neighborhood in northeast Rochester better. In August she and her five children helped a neighborhood group rake up trash in the block around School 8.

The roots of
POVERTY
in Rochester

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stocked with fresh produce, fish and exotic foods imported from the Caribbean and West Africa.

Next door is a gray-tiled food court that sparkles like the center of Irondequoit Mall. And on the other side is a Dunkin' Donuts, the first to open in Newark's history.

Scattered around this Pathmark shopping center are nearly 2,500 subsidized housing units, seven day care centers and a network of job training programs. The New Community Corp., a grass-roots organization that arose from the despair of the 1967 riots, has spearheaded it all.

If Rochester were looking for a model on which to rebuild its impoverished neighborhoods, the revitalization of Newark's Central Ward would be a prime example.

What distinguishes the New Community development from most urban-renewal programs is that it offers residents all the services that have abandoned poor city neighborhoods: retail stores comparable to those in the suburbs, job training, affordable and decent housing, day care and health care.

"It is definitely a comprehensive approach," said Monsignor William Linder, a feisty priest who is the founder of New Community Corp. "Housing is essential. It's probably the linchpin. But on the other hand, people need jobs. They need health care."

Similarity in statistics

Although Newark has gained a reputation as a city synonymous with urban decay, demographically it is not that much different from Rochester.

Newark's population shrank 32 percent during the past 30 years to 275,221; Rochester's population dropped 27 percent to 231,636. The percentage of residents living in poverty in Newark is 26 percent; in Rochester it is 24 percent.

One major difference is the cities' racial makeup: Newark is 29 percent white; Rochester is 61 percent white. Median family income, however, is not dissimilar: \$27,675 in Rochester vs. \$25,816 in Newark.

The key strategy New Community has used to lift people out of poverty is an often talked about but elusive goal for many cities: creation of jobs. In the Central Ward, one of the city's five wards, New Community has generated 1,266 jobs. And 97 percent of them have gone to minorities.

Anthony Beachum, a 43-year-old father of three children, is among those who found a job in the Central Ward. After commuting to work at suburban restaurants for 25 years, Beachum is now kitchen manager at the World of Foods, the food court next to the grocery store.

Comparing Rochester to Newark, N.J.

All statistics are 1990 figures.

	Rochester	Newark
Total population	231,636	275,221
White population	61.3%	28.6%
Black population	31.6	58.5%
Hispanic	8.2%	25.1%
Median family income	\$27,675	\$25,816
Persons below poverty line	23.5%	26.3%
Families below poverty line	21.1%	22.8%
Children younger than 18 below poverty line	38.0%	37.2%
Female-headed households with children below poverty line	58.3%	51.5%
Families with children that are headed by women	47.4%	46.8%
Number of births to females ages 10-19	1,097	1,229
Teen births to unmarried mothers	92.0%	89.0%
Unemployment rate	8.8%	14.7%
Households with public assistance income	16.5%	22.2%
Median gross rent	\$442	\$445
Vacant housing units	7.5%	10.7%

*Total may exceed 100% because Hispanics may be of any race.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, National Center for Health Statistics.

"This is the first job I had in the neighborhood," he said, explaining there were no restaurants to hire him before the New Community effort. "That is why it meant so much to me."

In Rochester, which Linder visited at the invitation of a local community group in June, a network of human service, nonprofit and government agencies have offered pieces of the New Community program.

What is lacking is the comprehensive approach that could provide residents in Rochester's poorest neighborhoods the array of services available through the New Community effort.

"In this instance we're terribly fragmented and isolated in individual areas," said Thomas Ferraro, who visited the Central Ward last year. Ferraro is executive director of Foodlink Inc., a Rochester agency that distributes food to the needy.

"We might do housing well, but we only do housing," he said.

Rochester has spent millions of dollars rehabilitating housing in its neighborhoods, but much of the city's effort in job creation has been focused on downtown, the hub of the city's employment base.

During the 20-year administration of Mayor Thomas P. Ryan Jr., the city also initiated several flagship projects downtown — such as the Hyatt Regency Rochester, the luxury hotel that opened in 1992 — while many surrounding neighborhoods declined.

Despite the city's focus on revitalizing downtown, the Ryan administration has actually invested more money in the neighborhoods, primarily in rehabilitating housing. In Ryan's previous term, from 1985 to 1989, for example, the city spent \$92.5 million on neighborhood development, compared with \$49.2 million on downtown, according to a city budget analysis.

Whether the money spent on housing in the neighborhoods paid off, or whether the funding would have been better invested in attracting businesses to provide jobs is debatable.

"The key to neighborhood revitalization is the commercial strips," said Ferraro, a community activist who has spent his career working in anti-poverty programs. "Sometimes we seem to be doing this a little bit backwards. We try to make houses safe and secure before we get the neighborhood commercial strips done."

"I would bet dollars to doughnuts that there are houses that have been rehabilitated several times and we keep going back. It's easier to do housing."

In Newark, city officials also have built multimillion-dollar projects downtown — such as a performing arts center and high-rise office buildings for law firms — which have had little effect on helping people in city neighborhoods, according to Linder.

"I think most cities in the United States really are not interested in their neighborhoods," said Linder, who has a doctorate in sociology. "They're interested in downtown development, and Newark is no exception."

Building projects downtown is not going to turn around a city, Linder said.

"I'm not saying that you shouldn't have aquariums or whatever," he said. "But the point of fact is that's not really what's going to bring it about. It's really in your neighborhoods and it's brick by brick."

New Community is born

The Central Ward riots that triggered the creation of New Community were touched off by the arrest of a black cab driver and his subsequent beating by police officers at the neighborhood's Fourth Police Precinct house in the summer of 1967.

The incident ignited five days of violence, leaving 1,020 people wounded and \$15 million worth of property destroyed.

At the time, Linder was a young parish priest at Queen of Angels Church in the heart of the Central Ward. A year after the riots, he and six others involved in the civil rights movement formed the New Community Corp. They made a 20-year commitment to see the project

through to completion.

Over the next 25 years, the community development group built 10 housing projects that are home to 6,000 people. Each housing complex is clean, graffiti-free and run by a resident board, which sets the rules for the tenants.

Cynthia Washington, a never-married mother of a 6-year-old boy and 12-year-old girl, is vice president of the tenant association at Commons Families, a 150-unit town house-style apartment complex a few blocks away from the Pathmark shopping center.

"New Community is a corporation for the people," said Washington, 33, who is also raising her sister's three children in her four-bedroom apartment. "It's working with the people — not against the people."

Funds from all over

Initially, funding for rebuilding the Central Ward came from an unlikely source: the wealthy suburban communities surrounding Newark in northern New Jersey. These communities — through churches, synagogues and civic groups — held fund drives to sell \$5 shares in the New Community Corp.

"People did all kinds of things," Linder recalled. "For example, the Girl Scouts baked and the Boy Scouts ran a car wash."

From that seed money of \$100,000, Linder single-handedly secured millions to rebuild the Central Ward through public and private grants and loans.

Linder also persuaded executives of Supermarkets General Corp., the Woodbridge, N.J.-based parent firm of Pathmark, to build a grocery store in the Central Ward. Pathmark had wanted to expand into the inner city but a nearby property owner had blocked attempts in court for several years.

More than anything else, the supermarket — two-thirds of which is owned by New Community Corp. — has provided hope for the neighborhood.

"It changed so much," said Joe Chaneyfield, 62, who used to take a bus to shop at suburban supermarkets. "The people talk about it. They have something. They talk about the Pathmark."

"They see Dunkin Donuts," he said. "They hadn't been in Newark. They didn't want no part of Newark."

Strategies diverge

In Rochester, residents in poor neighborhoods also talk about grocery stores: They want to know why they lack one. With eight major supermarkets having closed in Rochester in the last decade, the city's poorest residents have had to shop at high-price convenience or mom-and-pop shops — unless they have transportation to get to the larger chain stores.

While Rochester has failed to attract a full-service supermarket to the city, it has had success with housing. But there is a major difference between Rochester and New Community's housing strategy.

All of the housing units built by New Community are subsidized rental apartments because, Linder says, the incomes of the people are too low to allow people to buy a home.

In Rochester, officials have long emphasized home ownership as the city's strategy toward stabilizing neighborhoods. Yet, as Rochester's growing poverty rate attests, owning a home is beyond the reach of an increasing number of city residents.

"Real low-income people do not have much of a choice at this point in terms of being a homeowner," agreed Thomas R. Argust, Rochester's commissioner of community development.

The city is now rehabilitating or rebuilding more than 300 vacant houses across Rochester. In announcing that project, city officials promised to develop a plan for rental housing as well, but that hasn't happened yet.

Meanwhile, the city has also embarked on another effort to improve housing in one of Rochester's poorest neighborhoods through a project called First Place, a 49-unit proposed development in the city's northeast, off Central Park. The \$4 million development, which will be primarily

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owner-occupied housing, is being financed by First Federal Savings & Loan Association of Rochester.

Neighborhood and city leaders have praised the project, but it lacks a crucial ingredient: jobs. Sometime in the future, the development will include a 5,000-square-foot commercial building that will provide jobs but no definitive plans have been made.

Comprehensive attempt

In Buffalo, city and community leaders are working on a similar project in a high-poverty neighborhood near downtown. Among the goals of the Towne Gardens Plaza Project is strengthening the existing neighborhood economy to create more jobs.

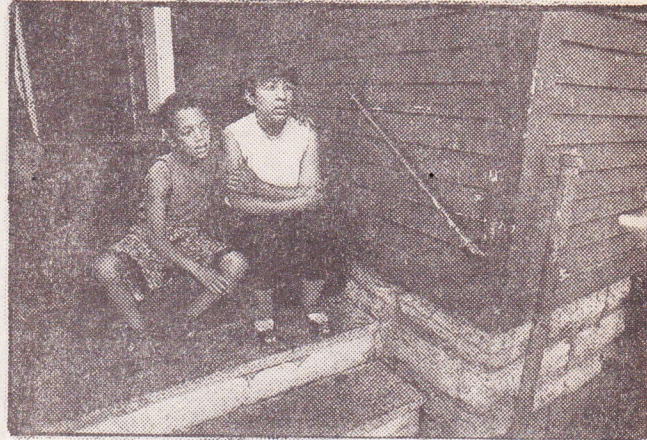
"It starts with really trying to see what the opportunities are that are there," said Henry Louis Taylor Jr., director of the Center for Applied Public Affairs Studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo, who is heading the project's planning team.

"What kinds of businesses and industries are already located in that space? What kind of people do they employ? What do they need to expand their operations? Then we can see what types of innovative projects that we can do to strengthen the operation," he said.

In Rochester, one project that is providing a comprehensive approach toward reversing the effects of poverty is Wilson Commencement Park, a town house complex on Joseph Avenue for single parents with children. Residents can stay in the program for two years and must develop a plan for reaching financial independence.

Esperanza Morales and her three sons left Miller Street in October for a new home on Helena Street. That makes 10 moves for the family in 20 months.

"That was a horrible house on Miller Street," Morales said. "But I think this one may be worse."



ANNETTE LEIN Staff photographer

The program, however, can only serve 50 families. In Rochester, there are 8,461 female-headed families living below the poverty line, according to the 1990 census.

About 125 single women with children call the park each month looking for shelter, said Jean Howard, executive director of the Wilson Commencement complex.

"I think there are many more that we can be serving in the community," Howard said.

Target: Teen pregnancy

Besides providing housing for single women with children, New Community is also tackling one of the root causes of the growing number of female-headed households — teen pregnancy.

New Community has three teen pregnancy programs that serve 120 adolescent mothers. One of the newest programs helps very young teen mothers and provides services to the mothers and their family members.

"One of the problems with our social service system is we deal with people separately, one-on-one," Linder says. "If everybody is helped, there's more of a chance for success."

In Rochester, social service and government agencies have spent millions of dollars on teen pregnancy programs. Yet the city's teen pregnancy rate has climbed from 157 pregnancies for every 1,000 15-to-19-year-olds in 1981 to 202 pregnancies for every 1,000 teens in that age group in 1991.

Behind the scenes

Work on this series on the growth of poverty in Rochester began in March and was reported by staff writers Sherrie Negrea and Michael Wentzel. The photographers were Annette Lein and Reed Hoffmann.

The reporters started the project by analyzing computer census data on Rochester and nine other cities. They then spent three months interviewing families in two of Rochester's poorest census tracts.

They also interviewed nearly 200 community leaders, social service agency directors and local and national experts on poverty and urban social problems.

The last stage of the project was visiting Newark, N.J., to assess the New Community project in the city's Central Ward and see whether it offered any ideas that could be used in Rochester.

In the time it took to produce this series, life changed only slightly for some of the people interviewed.



Negrea



Wentzel



Lein



Hoffmann

Last year, Monroe County Executive Robert L. King proposed the latest tactic in reducing the city's spiraling teen pregnancy rate: an abstinence campaign aimed at 9-to-14-year-olds.

Although the bulk of teen pregnancies occurs among older adolescents, King believes that preventing sexual behavior at younger ages will pay off in the long run. The program, scheduled to begin next year, will include a media campaign on television, radio, billboards and in schools.

"I think we need to be talking to kids more forcefully about abstinence and sending them one single, clear, understandable message," King said. "I think there are some other things we could consider doing but this is certainly the central part of it. We just don't say this loud enough and we don't say it consistently."

The county's abstinence program is modeled after a successful program in Maryland, where births among teen-agers have declined since 1986. Promoting abstinence, though, is just one part of Maryland's comprehensive approach, which has included setting up family planning services for teen-agers in high schools and opening a health clinic in a shopping mall.

"I think we need school-based health clinics in Rochester, whether those would be for the availability of family planning, sexually transmitted disease screening and treatment, or cancer screening," said Gregory J. Soehner, executive director of Planned Parenthood of Rochester & the Genesee Valley.

"You're never going to be able to prevent someone

from having sex until they're in their mid-20s. I don't think that would be a good idea. Sexuality is part of our definition of being in a relationship."

Most community agencies in Rochester have approached the teen pregnancy problem by providing services for the adolescent after she gives birth. One new program, Consortium of Northeast Community Teen Services, begun last year, is attempting to prevent pregnancy among youths in northeast Rochester who are considered at risk of becoming teen parents.

Yet what may stop the cycle of teen pregnancy altogether is the growing reality that AIDS is starting to spread through the teen-age population, some community leaders say.

"What's going to happen is we're going to go through this recession — not an economic recession but a human recession," said J. Roberto Burgos, executive director of the Puerto Rican Youth Development and Resource Center Inc., the lead agency of the CONECTS program.

"People that we know and love will die," he said. "Something drastic has got to happen."

A different approach

Instead of revitalizing decaying urban neighborhoods — as New Community has done — another strategy toward eliminating poverty proposes the exact opposite.

Moving people from poor city neighborhoods to the suburbs for both housing and jobs is a strategy that is gaining popularity across the country.

Mayor Ryan, who will retire in January after 20 years in office, is a proponent of the belief that the suburbs need to provide their fair share of low-income housing. Ryan often points out that the city occupies 5 percent of the county's land mass, but is home to 73 percent of the county's poor.

"People are not poor because they live in the city," Ryan said. "They live in the city because they're poor. There's a difference."

Suburban communities in Monroe County, however, have resisted building low-income housing. In 1988, for example, the Rochester Housing Authority lost a \$1.4 million federal grant to build a public housing project because no suburban town would agree to provide land for the complex. The government would not allow the project to be built in the city.

Other metropolitan areas, however, have succeeded in overcoming such opposition.

In Chicago, for example, the Gautreaux Program has successfully subsidized the relocation of about 5,000 minority families to either the suburbs or other city neighborhoods in the past 17 years. The program was named after a black woman who sued the city over racial discrimination in housing.

Comparison studies of female-headed families who had moved to Chicago's suburbs and to city neighborhoods under the program found that more of the mothers who relocated to the suburbs found jobs and their children had lower dropout rates and were also more likely to attend college.

"There can be no solution to poverty while the segregated neighborhoods are maintained intact," said Douglas Massey, an expert on urban poverty and a sociology professor at the University of Chicago. "It's hard to improve the life of a family when families tend to be overwhelmed by the conditions in the neighborhood."

"Other groups that moved up on the social ladder moved up on the residential ladder. If you don't have access to housing markets, you don't have access to the other markets, like jobs."

No easy answers

Even if Monroe County's suburbs eventually agree to racial and socio-economic integration, that does not mean the problems bred by poverty in Rochester's neighborhoods can be ignored.

In Monsignor Linder's view, the comprehensive solution that New Community has developed can only succeed if the movement behind it is religion-based. He said religious people are more likely to make the long-term commitments needed to rebuild poor communities.

"I think that you have to make some decisions that are based on human development and not on business decisions," Linder said.

"Some things may not make sense from a busi-

ness viewpoint. They may make a great deal of sense from a human development viewpoint."

There is no single solution to poverty in Rochester, or in any other city. As the New Community model has shown, it takes a multifaceted approach.

More than anything, though, it takes concerted energy and action — not only from government but also from the private sector. In a community where more attention has been focused on a new baseball stadium for the Red Wings than the social problems Rochester faces, the priorities have to be shifted back to the basic needs of people, according to city and neighborhood leaders.

"There is no one thing that you can do to break the cycle of poverty," said Carolyn Micklem, director of the Webster Avenue Family Resource Center. "It has to be comprehensive. It has to be systematic. It has to be a 10-year plan, not a one-year plan."

What may also be needed is for conditions in Rochester to hit rock bottom for people to realize that the needs of the poor must be addressed before poverty spreads even further.

"We're all caught up in being Rochesterians," said Foodlink's Ferraro. "We're in paralysis. We study things too much. We analyze things too much. I hope we don't have to hit bottom before we move ahead." □

About this series

This is the last installment in a four-part series about the growth of poverty in Rochester and its effect on the community.

Day One: Analyzed a city where a generation has been lost to poverty — where poverty has doubled in 20 years, where the roots of poverty may harken back to George Eastman and where poverty threatens the spirit of its people.

Day Two: Examined dramatic shifts in the city — the decline of the white population, the loss of manufacturing jobs and the deterioration of neighborhoods — that set the stage for the expansion of poverty.

Day Three: Portrayed the struggles of three families faced with poverty. The three, like the vast majority of Rochester's poor families, are headed by women, an outgrowth of high teen-pregnancy rates, out-of-wedlock births and divorce.

Today: Describes the revitalization of central Newark, N.J., by New Community Corp., a nonprofit group that has been able to do what Rochester has not: Provide a comprehensive network of services, including day care, job training and affordable housing to the poor.