

## **Marvin Plakut, CEO, Episcopal Homes**

Interviewed by Peter Myers at Frogtown Square, Feb. 2011

Q How did this idea first develop?

A I was invited to attend a meeting about 2 ½ years ago by NEDU, which is NE Dale and University. NEDU consists of a group of neighborhood organizations that came together about 15 or 20 years ago to start to work on redeveloping this particular intersection. They knew they needed a housing developer and I knew that this would be an excellent site to provide affordable housing for seniors. The demand is so strong. So when they approached me and said are you interested in partnering I said, yes indeed. We'd like to see what we can do.

Q Why did you think this particular location would be good for senior housing?

A We saw this particular site as ideal for affordable housing for low income seniors because of its access to transportation, access to shopping, access to downtown St. Paul, and of course with light rail coming access to downtown Minneapolis. Access to anywhere that the light rail goes. But of course the Number 16 bus line is right on here, so at this intersection of Dale and University it's just a key intersection for transportation. So the churches, the neighborhood, the transportation – it all comes together here and of course it is a neighborhood that does have a substantial percent of lower income residents. So we knew the demand was very high for affordable housing for seniors.

Q What kind of response have you had?

A This is how popular this site was for affordable housing for seniors: when we announced to the neighborhood, to the community that we are now open for receiving applications, we filled up in 24 hours! Not 24 days; in 24 hours.

Q What do you think this will do for University Avenue and Frogtown?

A I see Frogtown Square as just at the cusp of the changes that are going to occur as a result of light rail. So we feel very fortunate to be at that beginning stage because over the next five, ten, fifteen years I see substantial change along the lines of what Frogtown Square has brought, but even more density and more impressive developments.

Q Talk about your facility at University and Fairview.

A At Episcopal Homes at Fairview and University, we are full all the time with very long waiting lists. So when we did our expansion at that intersection, it was just what the market needed. It was just what our neighborhood needed. We have had just tremendous support from everyone, from all of our neighbors and we knew we would do very good works for those we serve on our campus. What we didn't know is the transformational effect we would have on the broader neighborhood, the broader community, up and down University Avenue. Because when we added Seabury, which is the building right at the intersection of Fairview and University, we'd been told that that was the first housing to be brought back to University Avenue in 50 years. The interesting story there is that as the residents started to choose their units as to which

unit they would like to take – either the University side or the quiet, inner-campus side – the first units to go were the University side because that’s where the action is, that’s where the life is. So that campus – Episcopal Homes at Fairview and University – has been tremendously successfully and we’re pleased that we’ve had such a positive affect up and down University Avenue.