



Ebenezer Land

By DWIGHT HOBBS

“Affordable housing...is a misnomer of sorts: affordability implies the ability to pay for something given your budget”, think tank Cato Institute noted in a 2016 blog. Anyone of modest means looking for someplace to live who has run into what’s being marketed as “affordable” can tell you just what a misnomer that is. It begs the cynical retort, affordable to whom? On top of which, rents and income have gone in opposite directions for some time and the contagion certainly didn’t help, putting people out of work left and right.

Enter Ebenezer Park Apts., which doesn’t solve that problem for everyone, but does give the elderly and disabled, including deaf tenants, a sorely needed break. Starting with the wallet, but, importantly, not ending there. Paramount, it goes without saying, is the difference between



Ebenezer Park Apartments

dispiritedly perusing ads for places priced out of your range and being asked one-third of your income – whatever that happens to be. Plus, there’s no application fee. It defies reason as how companies and organizations whose selling card is affordability charge, non-refundable, at least \$35 with a straight face just to fill out an application. Claiming it’s to cover the background check is just so much bilge water. Ebenezer can find out whether you got booked for loitering and doesn’t pocket a dime in the process.

We’re not talking public housing, which generally, how little you pay, is no bargain. Shelterforce.org documents, “Public housing [has led], to a cycle of government neglect and under-funding which, in turn, led to poor construction design, inadequate maintenance, racial segregation, stigmatization, and further concentration of the very poor.” In parts of Minneapolis, it also fosters veritable drug and prostitution franchises.

Conversely, Ebenezer is a comparative oasis. Maintenance, something no apartment dweller takes for granted, is reliable. Importantly, building security is sound with a simple but strict entrance policy in effect 24/7. All said, with these basics a

given, tenants also enjoy quality-of-life support. A mini-laundromat is available around the clock, except an hour a day for cleaning. A daily lunch comes courtesy of the kitchen. The on-site store provides prescription delivery and over the counter meds. In the downstairs lounge (each floor has one), there are recreation treadmills, a place to play cards or dominoes and a huge flat-screen television fit for feature film viewing. For that matter, satellite service is dirt cheap, available at an incredible price. In short, the very living conditions are positive reinforcement at an opportune time in life. Trista Garceau, Leasing & Certification Director, states, “Ebenezer is driven to [sustain] longer, healthier, meaningful lives. We all have a passion for providing services that make everyday life easier. We’re more than a landlord in this setting. Ebenezer, which means ‘stone of help’, has over 100 years of experience serving [individuals] and their families.” Established in 1917 to provide community-centered care for homeless older adults and others, Ebenezer is now Minnesota’s largest senior housing operator. Ebenezer Park Apartments has been in South Minneapolis at 2700 Park Ave. since 1980, one of ten apartment complexes statewide (in the immediate area, humorously dubbed “Ebenezer Land”, are Ebenezer Tower Apartments, Ebenezer Loren On Park - assisted living and Ebenezer Care Center - nursing home).

Residential Services Director Danette Billups, seeing to 200 units, reflects, “I’m a people person and like to keep [tenants] happy.” Calling it multi-tasking understates the case. She adds with a smile, “It’s like having a

big target on my back.” During 2018’s all-hands-on-deck renovation, she filled in as “the cat whisperer”. She recalls, “They had different [apartments] they worked on each week. And people had pets. Cats, parakeets, whatever. I helped get them in a carrier or the cage, move them to the different apartments left vacant for that purpose. Like a hotel room where [owners] spent the day. Cable tv, refreshments.” The idea was to make tenants comfortable during the inconvenience. She grins, “Sometimes a cat didn’t want to go back. So, I’d have to chase them around.” It worked out so well there are t-shirts to commemorate the occasion.

Not all that long ago, senior housing amounted to warehousing – sticking gramps or granny in a corner with some oatmeal and Jell-O. Ebenezer Park Apartments, it goes without saying, does no such thing. To sum things up in one tenant’s words, “It’s a state-of-the-art old folk’s home. There need to be more just like it.”