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Archdiocese of Washington

Thursday, June 16, 2011

Nonprofit developers recognize two Catholic housing efforts

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What started out as a brown bag lunch gathering of half a dozen housing professionals and providers in 1991 has become the Housing Association of Nonprofit Developers (HAND), which celebrated its 20th anniversary with a large awards luncheon on May 26 attended by more than 1,000 people.

Among those receiving 2011 HAND Housing Achievement Awards were Archdiocese of Washington priest Msgr. Ralph J. Kuehner and The Summit at St. Martin's Apartments.

Msgr. Kuehner received the Virginia Peters Nonprofit Friend of the Year Award. He is the founder of the archdiocese's housing development arm, Victory Housing, as well as, So Others Might Eat, a nonprofit providing services to the poor and homeless, the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, and Rosaria House, a group home for those with developmental disabilities.

The Summit at St. Martin's, a mixed-income housing complex that opened last fall through the initiative of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington and Victory Housing, received a "Best Large Affordable Housing Project" award.

John Spencer, the founder of HAND, and the current senior vice president of Victory Housing, was also recognized at the lunch.

Mayor Vincent Gray gave opening remarks at the lunch, held in the Omni Shoreham Hotel's ballroom, and political strategist and analyst Donna Brazile gave the keynote address. Brazile, who is Catholic, commended the members of HAND for their efforts to provide affordable housing in the Virginia, Maryland, and D.C. area, saying, "You employ God's hands ... to make his work on earth your own."

"It's time to make affordable housing come back into our vocabularies," she said. "In this toxic, political, partisan environment, your story is still relevant."

HAND's annual housing expo was also held on May 26.

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