The Frye Hotel Lives On!

An enthusiastic crowd of Frye Hotel residents, funders, supporters and Pioneer Square neighbors attended the November 12th Open House to celebrate the renovation of the historic Frye Hotel. Over $17 million was raised to acquire and complete the renovation of 234 units of low-income housing in Pioneer Square. “This celebration today is to thank the many people who participated in the successful preservation of one of the largest Section 8 buildings in the entire state. The Frye Hotel will remain as affordable housing for low-income seniors, families and disabled people for the next 50 to 75 years,” stated Sharon Lee, Executive Director of the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), the owner of the building.

Low income families and individuals will be able to pay 30% of their income for rent, and Section 8 rental assistance from HUD will make up the difference to pay for on-going maintenance. LIHI was able to secure additional financing from HUD under the McKinney SRO Moderate Rehabilitation Program. 48 of the 234 units are now set aside for homeless people transitioning off the streets or out of shelters.

The success story of the Frye Hotel did not come easily. The building was close to being converted to market rate housing. The former owners, after twenty years, wanted to get out of the Section 8 program and prepay their HUD mortgage. If LIHI had not raised the funds in time to purchase the Frye Hotel, the owners were ready to sell it to a for-profit developer who had made a back-up offer to buy the building. David Label, one of the former owners of the building, told the audience that he was directed by the other owners to start emptying the fully occupied building if LIHI did not come up with funds to buy it in 1997.

Congressman Jim McDermott was on hand to recount his childhood experience of getting his hair cut in the barbershop at the Frye Hotel. Councilmember Jan Drago spoke on the history of the Frye, which predated the Smith Tower and was the largest hotel north of San Francisco when it was built in 1908.
Deputy Mayor Tom Byers thanked the citizens of Seattle for voting to approve the Housing Levy, which helped by providing $3 million to save the Frye Hotel. Busse Nutley of the State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development congratulated folks — the Housing Trust Fund had provided $2 million in funding. Many other funders and supporters were honored and presented with awards from LIHI, including: HUD, Enterprise Social Investment Corporation, Pioneer Square Community Council, Key Bank, US Bank, Federal Home Loan Bank, Washington Housing Finance Commission and Washington Community Development Loan Fund.

Bill Hallerman of the Archdiocesan Housing Authority (AHA), which manages the building, expressed appreciation to the many residents of the Frye Hotel who patiently put up with the construction. Hayden Brooks and Peggy Toutaint, two residents, spoke eloquently about their experience living at the Frye. Hayden, who was once homeless, has lived at the Frye for over 6 years. He credited the housing for keeping him clean and sober during the entire 6 years. Peggy, who is disabled, expressed her pleasure at getting a newly renovated handicapped accessible unit where she can now get into the shower without having to trip over the bathtub.

The Frye's $5.4 million purchase price and $7 million renovation was funded by the City of Seattle, Washington State’s Housing Trust Fund, Key Bank, Enterprise Social Investment Corporation, US Bank, Federal Home Loan Bank, Washington State Housing Finance Commission, Washington Community Development Loan Fund. Rental assistance through the Section 8 program is provided by HUD and the Seattle Housing Authority. The architect for the project is Tonkin/Hoyne/Lokan of Pioneer Square, and the contractor is W.G. Clark Construction Company.