

Press Release

December 21, 2005
For Immediate Release

Contact: Frank Borres
Telephone: 366-5033

The Bridgeport Housing Authority Honors BHA Pioneers at 65th Annual Meeting

The Bridgeport Housing Authority honored the pioneers who started the BHA at its 65th Annual Meeting recently at the University of Bridgeport's Tower Room. Honored Posthumously were Founder and original Chairman of the Board the Reverend Stephen J. Panik, Attorney Frank Habansky, who served as the Authority's First Legal Aid, and Former Mayor Jasper McLevy who championed the concept of Public Housing at the State General Assembly. "None of the hundreds of thousands of people who have lived in Bridgeport public housing would have had that opportunity had it not been for the activism of these community conscience individuals," said BHA Chairwoman, Rosa Correa.

Executive Director Nicholas Calace said in his prepared remarks, "We at the BHA honor Authority pioneers by creating a wall of fame at our headquarters with a plaque recognizing their actions."

Mr. Frank Habansky represented the BHA as its attorney in 1939. The following year, the Reverend Stephen Panik, stated at the opening of Yellow Mill Village, "In the complicated tasks of acquiring land, re-locating tenants, and executing contracts for huge amounts of money for construction and equipment, Attorney Habansky has been right every time." What more can be said of the Authority's first General Counsel. Dr. Gery Habansky, Frank Habansky's son, accepted the honor on behalf of his late father.

Bridgeport was fertile ground for public housing in part because the City's conscientious social agenda, led by Mayor Jasper McLevy. In 1936, history tells us that Mayor McLevy wielded great power in the General Assembly. In a special session, he championed the passage of the *Housing Enabling Act*. Receiving the award for the former Mayor was the present Mayor, John M. Fabrizi.

Rev. Panik knew that a public housing program was absolutely necessary for the disadvantaged who were living in substandard housing. The Reverend Stephen J. Panik of SS. Cyril and Methodius Church was tenacious in his effort and convinced Mayor McLevy and Governor Wilbur Cross to pass the *Housing Enabling Act*. An elated Father Panik stated at the ground breaking of Yellow Mill Village, "*This is one of the happiest days of my life...the beginning of a reality...fine, decent homes for about 5,000 people, at rentals that are well within their means.*" Receiving the honor on behalf of the late Reverend Panik was the Most Reverend William E. Lori, Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport.

Chairwoman Correa said, "It is truly a legacy we can be proud of. For 65 years the BHA has provided housing for families in need and we're proud of our BHA families who have been through our doors and have had positive influences on our society. It is for them that we continue to do the work that was started by Stephen J. Panik, Frank Habansky, and Mayor Jasper McLevy."