



2013 Blue Ribbon Winner-Small CDC

Nicotown Community Development Corporation
Nicetown Court I and II
Majeedah Rashid, Chief Operating Officer

Housing Demand Exceeds Supply When Corridor Puts "Nice" Back in the Neighborhood

If you build it, they will come.
Truer words were never spoken when it comes to the Nicetown of today.
Earlier in its history, Nicetown was a thriving neighborhood of neat, modest row homes alongside once-giant manufacturers including the Bodd Company, Midvale Steel, Tastykake Baking and the Brown Instrument Company.
But as "rust belt" industries departed for cheaper locations, Nicetown and the entire city – like others around the country – faced multiple challenges as the housing stock declined and commercial corridors struggled.
The story is very familiar, but what happened next may surprise you.
When the Nicetown Community Development Corporation announced a new, \$10 million mixed-use development with 37

affordable apartments and two commercial spaces in December, 2012, a standing-room-only crowd signed up on the spot for Nicetown Court I.
"We were so surprised with the reaction, we didn't know what to do," said Nicetown CDC's Executive Director Majeedah Rashid. "We had hundreds of people sign their names on notepads. We'll never do that again!"
"Nicetown Court I immediately changed the landscape of our commercial corridor, and leveraged Nicetown Court II, a \$20 million development across the street from the Wayne Junction train station," Rashid said. "And we were happy to partner with Universal Companies on both of these projects."
"When we announced the first project, more than 400 people lined up down the block and around the corner to sign up for one of the 50 townhomes. We learned our lesson: This time for Nicetown Court II, we signed up folks online," she laughed.



Thrilled with the response, Nicetown Court II attracted about "60% of people from the neighborhood and 40% from all over, including as far away as Norristown, Montgomery County. We knew we had another winner," she added.

Teed up next is a proposed \$1.5 million, mixed use development with space for the Nicetown CDC Business and Cultural Center with two apartments above. All this within the context of a neighborhood economic development strategy – a 10-year, resident-driven, transit-oriented plan to improve the local economy, homes and social programming in Nicetown.

As Rashid works to "put the Nice Back in Nicetown," she shares some lessons learned: Identify a mentor such as Universal, collaborate, have a passion about your community, and build capacity. "And, take advantage of others who can help you, like PACDC." ■