Local nonprofit lands $7.5M state grant

BY TIMOTHY O'HARA
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BIG PINE KEY — The Florida Keys Community Land Trust had plenty to celebrate during its annual Holiday Affordapalooza fundraiser to celebrate completion of the first phase of homes and raise funds to construct additional storm-resilient, single-family rentals on Big Pine Key.

The trust, a nonprofit organization building hurricane-resilient houses for working families in the Florida Keys, has been approved for a $7.5 million federal Community Block Development grant through Florida Housing Finance Corporation.

The approval kicked off the 2020 capital campaign and Holiday Affordapalooza fundraiser to celebrate completion of the first phase of homes and raise funds to construct additional storm-resilient, single-family rentals on Big Pine Key.

The heads have been approved for funding, trust Executive Director Lindsey Anderson said.

With the $7.5 million grant, the trust and Rural Neighborhoods have partnered to create the Seahorse Cottages Community in Big Pine to rebuild Seahorse RV Park with 17 storm-resilient, single-family rental homes for families earning 70% of their income in Monroe County, Anderson said. The homes will be built high above projected storm surge and sea level rise.

The project takes place near the Sands Subdivision on Big Pine Key, where nearly 50% of the homes were destroyed by Hurricane Irma, including the entire Seahorse RV Park.

"If I'd known how challenging, complex and costly it is to build hurricane-resilient workforce homes in the Florida Keys, I might have reconsidered," trust founder Maggie Whiteman said. "Now though, we have families in permanent homes, and I am enormously grateful for the opportunity to serve our hardworking locals."

The first homes completed by the Florida Keys Community Land Trust were made possible by grants by the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys, Ocean Reef Community Foundation, Center for Disaster Philanthropy, United Way of the Florida Keys and the Florida Keys Hurricane Recovery Foundation. The trust has also partnered with Habitat for Humanity of the Lower Keys to help process applications.

Just over half of workers in the Florida Keys' workforce are employed by the tourism industry.

Financial support for the trust's capital campaign is still needed.

For more information, email Anderson at lindsey@affordablekeys.org or call 917-941-4633. Information on the group can be found at affordablekeys.org.

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