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Home sweet home — finally



PHOTOS BY HILDA M. PEREZ/ORLANDO SENTINEL

Evelyn Fields is overjoyed as she shows off her house to friends and Orlando officials Thursday. For more than 30 years, Fields, 74, lived in public housing. Assistance from the city and the builder made the purchase possible.

A housewarming in Parramore

Orlando leaders hope Evelyn Fields' new house is the first of many in the troubled neighborhood.

By JEFF KUNERTH
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

At the housewarming party the city of Orlando threw for Evelyn Fields, the only one from the neighborhood was a little old lady in a long, off-white coat.

Cora Williams cradled a plastic cup of punch in her hands as the mayor, city councilwoman and TV cameramen squeezed through the narrow hallways of Fields' new house on McFall Avenue.

Williams has lived in her house that backs up to Fields' new home since 1962. She tried, and failed, to recall when the last new house was built in her slice of the Parramore neighborhood.

"I don't remember. No, I don't," she said.

It is a momentous day in Parramore when a new house is built and a new homeowner moves in.

So to mark the occasion, Mayor



Fields dreamed of her own house. 'My children always came first,' she said. 'We always made a home, you know, anywhere, but to own my house is just so exciting.'

Buddy Dyer, City Commissioner Daisy Lynum, Orlando's housing director, the city's director of urban development and a small army of city employees showed up Thursday afternoon at the 1,100-square-foot home that Evelyn Fields has been living in since December.

She moves the needle a little in an area of the city where only about

15 percent of the residents are homeowners.

"I can remember when homeownership in Parramore was about 5 percent or less," Lynum said. "It's increasing again — one house and one family at a time."

At 74, Fields is a homeowner for

PLEASE SEE HOME, B4

City, new homeowner celebrate

HOME FROM B1

the first time because of a city program that gave her a \$30,000 down payment and paid a \$40,000 subsidy to the builder who constructed the house on a city-owned vacant lot, said Frances DeJesus, Orlando's housing coordinator.

A resident of public housing for 30 years, Fields is now paying about \$500 a month to be a homeowner.

The builder said he built the prefab house for \$125,000 to prove that affordable housing was still possible in Orange County. The home is termite-proof, fire-proof, hurricane-proof and vandal-proof, said Ron Davis, vice president of Insulated Component Structures of Florida.

During construction, vandals stole the home's landscaping and sprayed graffiti on the exterior walls, but when they tried to break through the windows with concrete blocks and steel pipes, they couldn't get in, Davis said.

Fields, who retired from cleaning classrooms for Orange County schools only last year, said she had some trepidation moving into a house on a Parramore street of vacant lots, old apartment houses and young people who like their music loud.

"Before I moved in here, I was skeptical. I had heard so many things, it really made me scared," she said.

But life on McFall has been largely uneventful.

Lynum told Fields she was working on getting another house built on the vacant lot between her home and the two-story apartment building next door. Another new house, another homeowner — someday.

Before she left, Lynum gave Fields a gift basket of household items and some advice.

"You need to learn to dial 911 when your neighbors get out of control," she said, "and don't be afraid."