

DAILY NEWS

BRONX NEWS



Picture the Homeless member Kendall Jackman and Aleese Lowe stand outside boarded-up house in Fordham section. Photo by Richard Harbus

GIVE US SHELTERS

Initiative seeks vacant property for homeless

BY DANIEL BEEKMAN
DAILY NEWS WRITER

A HOMELESS advocacy group and Hunter College yesterday launched the first-ever campaign to count vacant property in the Bronx, to bolster their view that there is available space to ease the burden on crowded city shelters.

Picture the Homeless and Hunter's Center for Community Planning and Development are recruiting volunteers to scour Bronx neighborhoods for vacant lots, abandoned buildings and empty apartments.

"The goal is to get the buildings counted so we can turn them into affordable housing," said PTH member Kendall Jackman, 55, in front of a boarded-up two-family house on Morris Ave. in Fordham, vacated due to foreclosure.

Jackman, a laid-off postal worker, has lived in a shelter on Creston Ave. since losing her Brooklyn apartment two years ago when her landlord defaulted on his mortgage.

She hopes the vacancy census, scheduled for June 25, will rally support for a City Council bill that would require the city to conduct an annual survey of its own.

Introduced by Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito (D-East Harlem/Bronx) in 2004, it has the backing of 26 council members, including Councilwoman Helen Foster (D-Bronx), but not Speaker Christine Quinn.

Last fall, Quinn claimed a vacancy count would be difficult and costly. But PTH insists it can be done cheaply, with non-profit partners and volunteers.

According to preliminary research based on city records, there are tens of thousands of vacant units in the Bronx alone, said Prof. Tom Angotti of Hunter College.

A 2006 count by PTH and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer found 24,000 va-

New center joins fight vs. foreclosures

A NEW COUNSELING center opening today in the Bronx County Courthouse will help borough homeowners fend off foreclosures.

Staffed by expert attorneys from the Legal Aid Society, Bronx Legal Aid and other groups, the center will advise homeowners on mortgage matters for free from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Few Bronxites with homes in foreclosure are prepared to meet their bank in court, said state Senator Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester), who secured \$175,000 for the program. Many homeowners are still falling prey to loan modification scam artists who charge big bucks and do nothing, added Justin Haines of Bronx Legal Services.

Daniel Beekman

cant apartments in Manhattan. There are about 36,000 people in the shelter system.

"There are a lot of vacant apartments," Angotti said. "Our goal is find out where they are, why they're vacant and how they can be programmed as affordable housing."

Stalled construction sites are part of the problem, as are rundown buildings abandoned when the housing market collapsed.

The city has financed the rehabilitation of 72,702 "affordable" housing units and the construc-

tion of 40,430, said Catie Marshall, spokeswoman for the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. But it can't seize vacant units that have private owners, she said.

PTH member Aleese Lowe said, "There should be no reason why there are so many homeless people...when there are so many homes without people."

The PTH's Bronx count will cover Community Boards 3, 4 and 6 in the western and central sections of the borough. To volunteer or get information, visit www.picturethehomeless.org.