VUCC's SUPPORT FOR IMMOKALEE

Farmworkers

Housing

IMMOKALEE FAIR HOUSING ALLIANCE, INC.

YOUR HEART BUILDS HOMES

for farmworker and other low-income families

VUCC's 20+ Year History Working with Immokalee

Farmworkers' working and living conditions in Immokalee FL have held a prominent place in VUCC hearts and activities for over 20 years. Immokalee, about 90 miles southeast of Venice, is a small farming community and used to be home base for thousands of low-wage, seasonal migrant and immigrant farmworkers who picked tomatoes and other crops. They often traveled north to follow the harvest seasons.

These workers labored under unsafe and abusive conditions: low wages, no clean drinking water, lack of shade, no rest breaks, and sexual exploitation.

The United Church of Christ (UCC), including Venice UCC, stood with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), formed in the 1990s, as it campaigned for fair wages and decent working conditions. Venice UCC supported the farmworkers with gifts of clothing, bicycles, money, prayers, and participation in protests and boycotts.

Every other year or so since the mid-2000s VUCC members and friends carpooled to Immokalee for an immersion experience with CIW. VUCC members were appalled by the living conditions suffered by the farmworkers.

The CIW eventually developed the **Fair Food Program** (fairfoodprogram.org) through boycotts, marches, and public support. The program has successfully spread to other states and internationally.

Addressing the Housing Need - IFHA

Two factors have dramatically changed the Immokalee community since 2017.

Hurricane Irma struck that year destroying or heavily damaging the already deteriorated rental trailers causing a dire loss of available housing. Assessments concluded the **only way to increase the supply of affordable housing was to BUILD it!**

The hurricane calamity gave birth to the **Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance, Inc.** (IFHA) in 2018. IFHA is a non-profit 501 (c)3 corporation. By fall of 2019, IFHA had found a 10-acre lot suitable for developing 8 apartment buildings with a total of 128 apartments, a community center, and playgrounds. The UCC and other faith-based organizations jumped at the opportunity to fund the land purchase. VUCC quickly raised over $6,000.

Enforcing H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers Program: This visa program requires large farm owners to pay to transport, pay fairly, house, and return to their home country, their seasonal labor (uscis.gov then search for temporary workers). Rounding up farmworkers daily in Immokalee diminished.
This meant many of the **farmworkers in Immokalee could no longer find jobs as farmworkers**. They looked for jobs in construction, landscaping, hospitality, or whatever they could find. This change did not diminish the need for decent, affordable housing because the same people being exploited by their landlords were just working different jobs.

Fortunately, the **IFHA had already begun** turning its dream of bringing affordable housing into a reality. VUCC has supported IFHA generously from its early days, giving a total of over $100,000. The following slides show the great progress the IFHA has made in building affordable housing for low-income families.

BUILDING LOW-INCOME HOUSING IN IMMOKALEE

Want to live here?

- Dilapidated
- Rent could be over 70% of income
- Appliances may not work
- Bugs and vermin
- Maybe multiple tenants in same unit
- Landlord exploitation
- If complain, may find possessions outside
- Hurricanes can destroy

Or live here?

- New construction – hurricane resistant
- Rent 1/3 of income ($750-$1,500 per month)
- New appliances (no dishwasher)
- Outside shared washer and dryer closet
- Wi-Fi
- Community building with classroom and playgrd
- Management oversight

WHY DO THIS?

DECENT, AFFORDABLE HOUSING HELPS PEOPLE OUT OF EXTREME POVERTY

AND STOPS THEIR EXPLOITATION BY LANDLORDS

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

- A hurricane to really drive home the need
- A <u>dynamo CEO</u> to lead the fair housing alliance
- Great cooperation from Collier County
- Dedicated volunteers
- Initial support from churches and their state and national denominational organizations
- $1 million starter donation - one-time giver

1. Find and acquire a suitable land parcel (found in 2019)
2. Get county approvals and permits
3. Get a good contractor
4. Build water, sewer, communications, etc., for all buildings

Corner 10 acres on bus line

Plan for 8 buildings with 16 apartments each = 128 total

WHAT'S INSIDE AN APARTMENT?

750 Sq Ft 2 Bedroom

- VERY small bedrooms
- Pullman-like kitchen

970 Sq Ft 3 Bedroom

- Nice light in family & kitchen
- Two bathrooms
- Small bedrooms
  - . Think bunk beds

Kitchen in 3 Bedroom at open house

- New GE appliances – no dishwasher
- Formica countertops

PLAYGROUND AND COMMUNITY CENTER

Playground 1

Parker's Place Community Center

Block parties help build the sense of community

FAMILIES BEING HELPED
- took 5 years to this point

They are leaving a trailer
- This was the first time they saw what their apartment will look like

Husband in tears
- able to tell his kids he can take care of them

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT WORK FINANCIALLY?

$ Land – Actual cost $400,000. Value at time purchased: closer to $1 million

$ Infrastructure on land (water, sewer, communications, etc.) $2 million initially
+ $1 million for final touches

$ Cost of EACH 16-unit building – Approximately $3.2 million; 4 more to build

Your donations pay for land and buildings

- so rent only has to cover maintenance and management costs

OUR FUN PROJECT THROUGH CHURCH

Varnishing Shelves for Apartments

STATUS IN IMMOKALEE

Building 1 – 16 Families moved in - December 2024

Building 2 – The Shelter for Abused Women & Children paid for building to use as transition housing

Building 3 – 16 MORE families moved in - January and February 2026

Building 4 – Under construction with completion planned in October 2026

Playground 1 – Completed

Adjacent land acquired to build more apartment buildings - 2025

Community Center – Expected completion in March 2026

A SUCCESS UNDERWAY-
IFHA HOUSING FOR
FARMWORKER AND OTHER LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

2019 - From Buying the Land

2024 - To Building 1 almost done

2026 – Now Buildings 1,2,3, Community Center, and Playground completed Building 4 walls started

YOUR DONATIONS MADE THIS POSSIBLE!

IFHA – Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance