



First home on the market

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The smell of fresh paint hasn't yet faded inside the home at 209 Julian St.

The recently paved concrete walkway is still pearly white and sprinklers are watering fresh, green sod. The new Summit Township home is the first to be put on the market by the Jackson County Land Bank Authority, and was granted an occupancy permit on Wednesday.

The lawn carries more than a "For Sale" sign -- it's a sign of good news for Jackson County.

Land banks buy tax-foreclosed properties from the county and redevelop them to be sold. The goal is to curb housing blight, encourage home ownership, increase property values and get houses back on the tax roll.

"It's a win-win situation for everybody," county Treasurer Janet Rochefort said. "But

really we want to change neighborhoods and change lives."

Jackson County's Land Bank Authority is the newest in the state, and joins similar organizations in Genesee, Calhoun, Ingham, Saginaw and Grand Traverse counties.

It began in November 2006 with \$250,000 borrowed from the county's delinquent tax foreclosure fund, and will continue to be funded by capturing taxes from the redevelopment and sale of parcels.

The Julian Street home was rebuilt from the ground up by local contractor Cranberry Shores Construction after the previous structure burned in a fire. It boasts 1,000-plus square feet, three bedrooms, a bathroom, a two-and-a-half car garage, washer, dryer and central air conditioning.

"Certainly the Julian Street home is a prime example of what the Land Bank can do," acting county Administrator Randy Treacher said. "It takes neglected or abandoned homes ... and makes them usable and ultimately taxable."

For Rochefort, the home is the culmination of everything she's worked toward as treasurer, she said. She's even making curtains and painting pictures for the walls.

"This is what the community needs," she said. "I can't wait to give the key away to someone because I know they're going into a beautiful home."

The asking price is \$119,900, an "affordable starter home or retirement home," Rochefort said. The Land Bank strives to price homes appropriately for the area, and curbs turnover and rentals with a five-year home ownership requirement.

The house also represents a myriad of community partnerships, Rochefort said. A collaboration with the sheriff's office brought jail inmates in to paint walls and lay sod, and the state's Prison Build program provided shrubs and flowers at little cost.

With a wink and a smile, Rochefort vows the next home will have more of her "eccentric" touches. More color on the walls, more personality.

"A part of me will be in each one of these homes," she said. "It's my passion."

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