

Youth Renovate Duplex

By MARK JOHNSON

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Increasing youth employment and the availability of affordable housing are the goals of a non-profit renovation project launched Monday in Burlington.

Officials of the Burlington Youth Employment Program announced the purchase of a duplex apartment building at 81 Manhattan Drive in the Old North End. Twelve to 15 youths will spend three months on the renovations.

The entire project is funded by an assortment of state and local grants, and renovations are expected to cost at least \$25,000, according to James Hokans, Burlington Youth Employment director.

Financing the \$45,000 purchase was a low-interest loan from Bank of Vermont and help from the Burlington Community Land Trust, which has first option to buy the complex after renovations.

Hokans said the building will sell for \$60,000 when renovations are completed. The profit will be applied toward future renovation projects.

A grant by the Turrell Fund will cover the youths' wages of \$3.50-\$4 per hour. S. Whitney Langdon, a trustee of the fund, said during a press conference at City Hall that the foundation has had similar successful projects in New Jersey.

"If you give youths a chance to do something with their hands, it turns them around immensely," Langdon said. "They can point to it later and be proud." Needy applicants were screened by the Vermont Job Service.

Alderman Peter Lackowski, who lives near the site, said the involvement of the Land Trust group would assure the building's rents would stay affordable for lower-income residents.

"This means a lot for the neighborhood," Lackowski said, adding four of the five youths on the first crew are from his ward.

Mayor Bernard Sanders said the project would give the youths meaningful work experience and increase affordable housing. In addition, he praised public and private groups for joining hands on the project.



Free Press Photo by JYM WILSON

Cindy Kirby, 16, tosses a bathroom sink from the roof of a house being renovated by the Burlington Youth Employment Program on Manhattan Drive.