



Two Chicago-Area REALTOR® Associations Host Housing Expo/Trolley Tour with Housing Opportunity Grant – June 2014

It all started with an [Employer Assisted Housing](#) (EAH) training session hosted by the Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS® (MORE) and the REALTOR® Association of the Fox Valley (RAFV), overlapping organizations within and west of Chicago.

About 50 real estate professionals participated, many of them from Aurora, the second largest city in Illinois, and home to dozens of large corporations. "The EAH program spurred us to start talking to city officials and the Chamber of Commerce, to explore how we could use what we'd been learning," says Kristen Jungles, the Government Affairs Director shared by the 1,500-member RAFV and the nearly 15,000-member MORE, as well as three other local associations in the region. The City of Aurora has been lauded as a highly livable city; it has a strong down-payment assistance program, and plenty of affordable housing is available -- yet a high percentage of the employees working in Aurora commute from elsewhere. Partnering with the city and local lending institutions, the two REALTOR® associations decided to hold a housing expo and trolley tour to get the word out.

They called it "Experience Aurora," and received a [Housing Opportunity Grant](#) of \$4,000 from NAR to help cover costs of the event. The Mayor of Aurora sent a letter to local employers promoting the expo and tour, and on Saturday, April 12, several hundred employees arrived, many with flyers in hand, eager to learn and to visit available properties. The expo venue was a vacant commercial property owned by a partnering commercial bank, where REALTORS® and lenders staffed booths and met with would-be homebuyers. An old-fashioned trolley shuttled visitors to 10 available houses within a 10-block radius of the expo site, with an additional 20 nearby open houses poised to begin at 1pm, immediately following the expo.

Jungles describes an upbeat carnival atmosphere, with music and hotdogs, helium balloons, and even bags of fresh hot popcorn for the trolley passengers. The visitors were hungry for information, she says. "The whole purpose of Employer Assisted Housing is to educate the workforce, and they were there to learn. They clearly knew that Aurora would be a good place to live, but they hadn't known that it was an option."

To illustrate her point, she continues, "A man came up to me holding our flyer with the trolley tour highlighted. He told me he was a longtime employee of one of the big companies in town, and that for 10 years, he and his family had been living in a two-bedroom rental apartment. He had a down-payment saved, and asked me which of the 10 houses on the trolley tour he could buy!"

He was not alone: the trolley ran continually, taking about thirty people at a time on the forty-minute tour, and coming back for more. One month later, Jungles reports that three people who attended the event are now under contract to buy houses in Aurora. She's been hearing from her own members who want to know when the next expo and tour will be. The success of the event has opened doors to corporations in Aurora, and local human resource directors are responding to Jungles' outreach offering home-buying presentations by MORE and RAFV members who have received the EAH



training. And she is working with the nearby city of Elgin to replicate the event there. "There are 180 towns in my jurisdiction, so there's plenty of opportunity!" she laughs.

The opportunity is one of many that Jungles appreciates the REALTOR® Party for making possible. At a recent business meeting of the state association, where the Aurora event was highlighted, she notes that she and her colleagues reviewed a list of grants, to make sure they were aware of what other associations were doing, and how they could continue tapping in to available funds for housing opportunity efforts and beyond. "Projects like this one strengthen our position in Aurora," she explains. "They say, 'here is a group of professionals serving as an important public resource.' What's going to come from this is even bigger than all the good things that happened that day."

To learn more about how local REALTOR® associations are connecting homebuyers to affordable housing in Aurora, contact Kristen Jungles, Shared Government Affairs Director, at kjungles@iar.org or 630-816-6841.



Experience Aurora
HOMEOWNERSHIP EXPO

Saturday, April 12 • 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.



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- **Down-payment assistance programs** of up to \$12,000 for qualifying first-time homebuyers and those who have not purchased a home in the last three years!
- **Trolley Tours of 10 magnificent houses** in or near downtown Aurora!
- An additional **20 Open Houses of beautiful homes** throughout Aurora!
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Scenes from the Aurora Homeownership Expo and Trolley Tour

