

LIVING & REAL ESTATE

FEATURES EDITOR: Joe Truskot **PHONE:** 754-4167 **FAX:** 754-4293 **EMAIL:** jtruskot@thecalifornian.com
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**COMING IN
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COAST LIVING:**
Dave Nordstrand's
Valley Views column
returns with duck hunt-
ing in downtown
Salinas.



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SALINAS BUILDS A BETTER TOWN

From sad to glad

CHISPA gives 523 Archer
Street a full body makeover

By Joe Truskot
jtruskot@thecalifornian.com

▣ The living room of 523A Archer Street was a chop shop for motorcycles. The garage at 523B was a grow house where drugs were regularly sold. Suspicious people were coming and going at all hours. The two detached homes built in the 1930s had become the eyesore of the South Salinas neighborhood located only a block from Hartnell College. The homes went into foreclosure and the former tenants disappeared. Then, CHISPA bought the property from Wells Fargo Bank for \$177,000 and the revitalization began.

CHISPA (Community Housing Im-

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Gabe Torres, CHISPA's director of operations, enters 523A Archer Street. This major improvement project has sparked a neighborhood clean up effort. JOE TRUSKOT/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

COMICS AND PUZZLES INSIDE

Archer

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provement Systems and Planning Association, Inc.) is the largest private, nonprofit housing developer in Monterey County. It has built more than 2,300 affordable single-family homes and multi-family and senior apartments since its incorporation in 1980. It is a nonprofit community-based housing development organization overseen by a nine-member board of directors. Its philosophy: High quality housing should be available to all people, not just those with high incomes.

In Salinas alone, CHISPA has renovated six foreclosed properties using NSP2 funding: three single-family homes, two duplexes, and one three-unit apartment building. It has constructed 114 new homes and 428 apartments in Salinas, including the 124 senior apartments created by the massive renovation of the old Rodeo Inn at Bernal and North Main Street.

“CHISPA received an award of \$3,520,000 under the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Neighborhood Stabilization Program Round II (NSPII),” said Dana Cleary, director of real estate development. “We acquired and renovated foreclosed homes and duplexes in the Cities of Salinas, Gonzales, Soledad, Greenfield, and King City.”

CHISPA’s NSP2 award is part of a larger award of \$137.1 million in federal funding made to a national consortium of several community development organizations organized by the Chicanos Por La Causa (CPLC) and the National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders (NALCAB). This consortium received the largest NSP II award in the nation. The funds are to revitalize neighborhoods in eight states and the District of Columbia that have been negatively impacted by foreclosures and abandoned properties.

“All of the organizations that make up the NALCAB consortium serve predominately Hispanic/Latino communities and provide bilingual/bicultural services,” Cleary said.

Gabe Torres, project man-



Energy efficient range, granite countertops, wood cupboards and malmolian flooring in the newly renovated 523A Archer Street home. JOE TRUSKOT/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

ager for the 523 Archer renovation and CHISPA’s vice president of operations, oversees all construction projects and holds a general contractor’s license. Torres conducted a tour of the property to review the improvements.

“There was major water damage to the floor boards under the galley kitchen in the two-bedroom front unit,” Torres said. “So our architect redesigned the entire home. We moved the kitchen to the corner of the house, eliminated the fireplace, and created a dedicated dining area. A laundry room was installed where the kitchen had been and leads to the garage. It had been just a carport but we turned it into a single-car garage. We left the bedrooms the same but revamped the bathrooms. We redesigned the homes for bet-

ter flow, more cabinet and counter space.”

Both units required major structural changes to bring them up to code and to keep within CHISPA’s goal of being environmentally conscious and energy efficient.

“We installed forced air furnaces in the attics and replaced the wall heaters,” Torres noted. “We put in double-paned windows, granite countertops, marmolian floors, tankless water heaters, state-of-the-art efficient appliances, and even whisper fans in bathrooms that require less electricity. The organic paints we put on the walls give off no harmful gas. There’s thick cellulose insulation in the walls and ceiling, low-flow toilets and shower heads, and hard-wired smoke alarms with backup batteries. Our goal is to get these families

to not spend as much on utilities.”

CHISPA has done significant research into the lives of the individuals ultimately selected to live in its homes and apartments.

“You saw how narrow this lot is and probably even had trouble parking out there on the street,” Torres noted. “So instead of making the area between these two houses a play area, we are putting down DG (disintegrated granite) and giving each unit additional parking inside the gate. Many people in this neighborhood have converted their garages into living spaces and have to park on the street. Trust me. The people who will live here are going to own trucks. We want them to park them inside. We’ve tried to make this a secure living area.”

A management agency goes through the prospective families that apply to live in CHISPA homes and conducts thorough background checks.

“We have invested about \$200,000 in this renovation,” Cleary said. “That budget is high because we had to literally tear down and rebuild part of the home in front to make it safe and to meet current codes. The two-bedroom home will rent for \$706 a month. The three-bedroom home will rent for \$824 a month. Over 100 people have signed an interest list for these homes.”

“We see it everywhere we do projects,” Torres added with a sense of pride in achieving CHISPA’s larger objective. “The neighbors have started investing time and money in

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taking better care of their own homes. The neighbor on this side has put a new roof on and the one on the other side has repainted. Two or three dumpsters of trimmed tree branches and shrubs have come out of the neighbors' yards since we began this project.

"Folks don't have a lot of money, Torres added, "but they do start little improvement projects on their own."

Next door neighbor, Jazmin Lopez agreed. She purchased her duplex a year ago last June.

"We are so happy," Lopez said. "When we first moved in we realized the folks in the back unit were dealing drugs. There were a lot of questionable people in the neighborhood. The landlord didn't care about the property. It was very run down and the fence was completely rotted."

"Those neighbors were a big issue. Having them gone was good. Then, squatters moved in.



Removing the fireplace at 523A Archer Street to make a larger living room CHISPA MONTEREY COUNTY

I was constantly having to call the police to keep people out of the abandoned unit. Then we learned that CHISPA was buying the property," Lopez added. "They rebuilt the entire fence. The project manager was very good to us. He kept us involved and let us know what they were

working on. It's so exciting to see the change."

"It has inspired the neighbors to give their yards a face lift. I was talking to folks across the street and they said, 'I think I'll repaint the trim on my house,'" she continued. "It's just been great."



Gabe Torres, project manager and director of operations for CHISPA Monterey County JOE TRUSKOT/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

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