'Raise the Roof' event in Summit supports affordable housing

By Jamie Duffy

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The Raise the Roof cocktail buffet kickoff was held on Sun. Oct 4 at the Grand Summit Hotel. The event was held to raise money for six new affordable housing units on Morris Avenue. There are six affordable housing units to be built on Morris Avenue in Summit, and local churches and wellwishers threw their back into the project on Sunday with a "Raise the Roof! cocktail buffet kickoff at the Grand Summit Hotel.

"I have never come across a community like Summit," said Lou Riccio, the newly appointed executive director of the Summit Affordable Housing Corporation (SAHC) and Summit Housing Authority.

Riccio, who holds the same titles in Madison, added without community support, "You can find the land, you can find the money...(but) nothing ever happens." Summit mayor Jordan Glatt said Summit proponents of affordable housing should be vocal about their support of the project. A partnership of the SAHC and Morris Habitat for Humanity will build the units, estimated to cost $850,000. The gala co-chairs, Penny Barth, volunteer coordinator at St. John's Lutheran Church, and Dave Reiley, a Basking Ridge resident who volunteers for Morris Habitat, said the event would raise about $40,000 which will be applied to the $300,000 pledged by a consortium of churches.

So far the 12 churches have raised $150,000, said Blair Schleicher-Bravo, executive director of Morris Habitat.

Summit people came together in the 1960s to build affordable housing and a senior citizen complex in the 1980s, resulting in 200 units of affordable housing, said Vito Gallo, the retired Summit Housing Authority executive director who served from 1971 to 2005. Summit showed a combination of "civic pride and a commitment to diversity," Gallo said.

"People think of the Wall street connection," he said. But it was "the commitment of the clergy - ministers, preachers and rabbis - who preached from the pulpit to the bond traders and captains of industry about the needs of the city of Summit."

The new units are "long overdue," he said. Mayor Jordan Glatt said there were some people in Summit who opposed the idea and called on the 300 plus guests at the Grand Hotel to "break down the stereotype people have of such a project."

While people bid on silent auctions, "bought" sinks, toilets and other items from a shopping list, others socialized, munched on a generous buffet and listened to the swing tunes of Chatham Community Band Jazz Ensemble.
The Summit Interfaith Build Congregation includes Calvary Episcopal, Christ Church, Corpus Christi Roman Catholic Church, Fountain Baptist Church, Interweave Center for Holistic Living, Mt. Olive Temple, Presbyterian Church of Chatham Township, St. John's Lutheran Church, St. Teresa of Avila Church, The Unitarian Church in Summit, United Methodist Church, and Wallace Chapel AME Zion Church.