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## Hope springs from shovels for homeless

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**L**OWELL — Yesterday's groundbreaking for "New Hope Apartments" on Salem Street might have remained a dream, if not for the forward-thinking staff and board of directors at House of Hope.

House of Hope, an emergency shelter for 18 homeless families, announced a year ago it would build 10 rental units on a vacant lot fronting Salem Street, behind its Merrimack Street facility.

But an abutter on Salem Street, Dennis Hartley, charged in a lawsuit the Zoning Board of Appeals violated city zoning ordinances when it approved the apartment proposal.

The lawsuit definitely would have slowed the project, at the very least, plus cost us a fortune to defend," Executive Director Deborah Chausse said. "We had to do something to make it go away."

That something was borrowing \$200,000 from Enterprise Bank and buying Hartley's house.

So with a big, broad smile, Chausse and several other local officials, including Mayor Armand Mercier and City Manager John F. Cox, late yesterday morning drove shovels painted gold into rocky soil, officially marking the start of the \$2.1 million apartment project.

"What we're doing today is constructing permanent housing for homeless families," said Richard Jumpp of Chelmsford, board of directors chairman. The cause for homeless families will not wane."

Rather than just providing emergency housing, agency officials decided to become part of the solution by building their own apartments.

But that's just two steps in the process, Chausse explained. The third step is home ownership, and that's where Hartley's former home will enter the equation in the not too distant future.

Such philosophy has apparently impressed the state Department of Housing and Community Development, which kicked in about \$1.5 million.

"I'm delighted to come to Lowell," said Jane Wallis Gumble, DHCD director. "It's a wonderful place. The (state) delegation, the city, everyone up here is committed to affordable housing."

Besides the state, the project is being financed by the City of Lowell, federal Department of Housing and Community Development and two loans.

The Lowell Housing Authority is also involved, as it's been asked to provide Section 8 housing vouchers to apartment residents.

Construction on the three-story building should take about a year. "Two years ago, New Hope was envisioned, today it is born," said Chausse. Borrowing a line from a famous tune, she added: "Dreams that we dare to dream do come true."

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Deborah Chausse, executive director of the House of Hope shelter in Lowell, holds a rubber Gumby cartoon figure to show her ability to stay flexible, as well as creative. Chausse and other officials broke ground yesterday on a \$2.1 million apartment project for homeless families on a site that proved tough to acquire.