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Housing Clinic work builds to a beautiful finish

A long stretch of work by students and faculty in UB Law School's Affordable Housing Clinic paid off this spring with the opening of St. Martin Village, a 60-unit residence for low-income residents on Buffalo's East Side. The \$16 million project, which rehabs three historic buildings dating to the early 20th century, was financed with private equity generated by tax credits and a grant from the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal.

"We're going into our fifth year of students who have worked on this project – that's 12 students per semester, times two semesters, times five years," says Clinical Professor George Hezel, who has directed the Affordable Housing Clinic since its founding in 1987. "That's in addition to my time and all of Tom Disare and Lauren Breen's work. This is the kind of front-loading that most law firms cannot do. There is risk in doing this, because the state can fund only one in five projects for which it receives grant applications. As a public institution, we can afford to take that risk."

The housing initiative reclaims a brownfield that had marred the Dodge Street neighborhood and preserves the character of the German Roman Catholic Orphan Home whose buildings it adapts. The two- and four-bedroom units were built to be energy-efficient, including Energy Star-rated appliances to keep utility bills low for tenants. The complex's historic chapel was divided into two spaces for use as community rooms – one for tenants, one for neighborhood residents.

"This has been a long time in coming, and success was not always in sight," Hezel says. "When it's done after all that effort and patience, it's really satisfying."



Since the founding of the Affordable Housing Clinic, it has participated in developing 2,106 units of new or rehabbed housing and brought \$213 million in resources to Western New York for housing development – including St. Martin Village, seen here.

