

Part of the Community

Developer affiliated with a Midwestern laborers' union creates affordable housing that's connected to community

For over 50 years, the Laborers' Home Development Corporation (LHDC) has used its strong ties to its parent organization, Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), Midwest Region, and local communities to bring affordable housing to underserved areas.

The private, nonprofit development organization intends to enhance the standard of living for working families and seniors both through the creation and management of low-income properties. Currently, LHDC owns and manages 14 properties across Illinois and Iowa totaling 910 units, with residents spanning workforce families, independent seniors and seniors in need of supportive care.

But LHDC's work does more than create housing—it also generates jobs for union members and contractors, enhances economic development across cities and builds stronger connections within the communities in which it operates. Under the leadership of Executive Director Karlee Macer, LHDC is on a path toward sustainable growth, with the goal of connecting with and being in service to even more Midwestern neighborhoods in the coming years.

Passion for service

Karlee Macer's career history has given her the skills, passion and dedication needed to lead a service-driven organization like LHDC. She started her journey in the senior housing market, helping older adults and, in particular, veterans access independent retirement communities. In this role, she developed a passion for connecting veterans and their spouses with benefits and services to ensure their safety and housing stability.

This work helped Macer identify an opportunity to effect change in her community, leading her to run for office in Indianapolis. She was elected to the Indiana State House of Representatives and served from 2012-2021. Here, she served as a committee member on matters of economic development and veterans affairs and was supremely successful in establishing better support, including establishing Veterans Service Officers in Indianapolis, where there previously were none.

After leaving the House of Representatives in 2021, Macer returned to work in the retirement community industry before joining LHDC in 2023. She took the leading seat of Executive Director in May 2024.

The personal connection to service and community that drove Macer's career progression is reflected in LHDC's mission and operations. The properties LHDC creates are small and carefully toe the balance between financial feasibility and doing the right thing for the community and its residents.

"We don't want to own and manage a property that isn't the right fit for the communities that we're-developing in, and being too big just hasn't been what we do. ... We're focusing on quality," Macer says. "Clearly, if Laborers' Home Development was about units, they would

have a lot more in over 50 years. But they've really done an exceptional job to keep it small and mighty, and quality [is] always the big piece for us."

By focusing on quality first and foremost, LHDC has created homes that its members take immense pride in. It all comes back to that community connection, creating a cycle of service for the laborers, residents, city leaders and other stakeholders.

"Being a part of the laborers' organization—on our development project jobs, they're all union jobs. ... We all take ownership of those properties. It's ours, and not only is it built with quality, but there's a lot of pride and ownership of our properties from the people that work for us; they become members too," Macer says. "There is a remarkable sense of pride and ownership among the laborers towards Laborers' Home Development and our mission. It is truly exceptional, and I am proud to be a part of it."

Expanding the mission

LHDC is currently wrapping up construction on a new high-quality community, Sunnybrook. The \$20 million development will host 10 four-plex town homes totaling 40 residences on 7 acres in Alton, Illinois. With one- to three-bedroom units, Sunnybrook will offer affordable rental homes to entry-level workforce families in Madison County. Amenities will include an outdoor green space with walking paths, a playground and a play court and a 2,000 square-foot community building.

Sunnybrook is done in partnership with EBJJ, LLC, led by Dr. Ed Hightower, and Morrissey Construction Company. Illinois Housing Development Authority provided tax credits for the property, and INB was a critical lending partner. LHDC will be Sunnybrook's on-site manager. The community is expected to open and begin lease-up in spring 2025.

New communities like Sunnybrook are part of Macer's future growth plan for the organization.

"It is thrilling for me to strategize the overall vision for the Laborers' Home Development," she says. "What I envision is exciting, knowing that our organization will grow and also for what we will be able to continue to do in communities creating more affordable housing units." It is truly exciting to have the opportunity to strategize and successfully implement important next steps to grow. I have not completed a full year [as Executive Director], and I know this is an extraordinary opportunity and an exhilarating time."

Reflecting on her role thus far, Macer says she's proud of the way the laborers' union has extended its mission to housing and assisted those in need throughout their communities in numerous ways.

"What has made me most proud, for starters, would be being a part of the laborers' union—to be able to see their mission outside of the work [they] do to maintain our roads and bridges and waterways and tunnels. It really is so much about our family-oriented locals and how active they are in their communities and volunteering [and helping] anyone in need," says Macer. "I've been able to see that firsthand along with the feedback about what we're doing. The most rewarding aspect is the opportunity to engage with underserved communities in need of housing solutions, it is fulfilling to assist them in supporting their families and workforce by providing quality

housing options, and to be able to alleviate and help the communities with quality housing that fits, it's incredible." The impact we continue to make in alleviating housing challenges is energizing."

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COMPANY: Laborers' Home Development Corporation

NAME: Karlee Macer

TITLE: Executive Director

LOCATION: Springfield, Illinois