

Star Tribune

WEDNESDAY/May 15/1991

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Public Housing Agency honored as one of top in U.S.

By Pat Prince
Staff Writer

The St. Paul Public Housing Agency has been named one of the two best large public housing authorities in the nation by the federal housing department.

The PHA was recognized for its unusually well-maintained developments, its reputation for management and administrative excellence, sound financial management, its long history of resident involvement and service and its participation in an

array of public/private initiatives.

"This is a great agency," said a spokesperson from the Housing and Urban Development's headquarters in Washington, D.C. The award is meant to "recognize the unsung heroes that are out there and their efforts," he said.

Friday, HUD secretary Jack Kemp will present the award for outstanding overall performance for a three-year period to officials of the St. Paul authority. All of the nation's approximately 3,300 public housing agencies

were eligible for the award.

Last year, the St. Paul agency was named the best large public housing authority in HUD's Region V, a six-state area comprised of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio.

Of the dozen agencies to receive the 1991 Public Housing Agency Sustained Performance Award, only the St. Paul and Norfolk, Va., agencies are large, a HUD category for agencies that operate 1,250 to 4,999 low-income housing units.

The St. Paul agency owns 4,343 housing units — home to 10,651 people — an unusually high number of units for a city of its size, according to HUD. The agency has 2,657 high-rise units for elderly and handicapped residents and 1,686 for family housing, including four congregate housing sites and 350 single-family homes and duplexes scattered throughout the city.

The agency's accomplishments, detailed in a nomination form submitted by HUD area manager Thomas Feeney, include many innovative hu-

man service programs for residents that the agency has initiated or carried out in partnership with community organizations. In addition, the agency maintains an extremely high occupancy rate, nearly 99 percent, a stand-out among agencies, which usually struggle to maintain a rate of 90 percent.

The agency "has been an outstanding agency for the last several decades, providing the highest level of service and quality in every facet in their operation," Feeney wrote.

Jon Gutzman, the agency's executive director, who left a position as director of the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority before coming to the St. Paul office four years ago, said, "We're deeply honored and very grateful we have been singled out for this national award."

"We like to think part of our success is just geography. We're located in St. Paul, which is a very caring and supportive community," he said.