



On Monday, February 7 Governor Tony Evers paid a visit to Prairie du Chien to highlight the recently completed and listed Work Force Housing created by Couleecap. Evers also paid a visit to the Bargain Boutique Food Pantry to learn about how they are continuing to serve the community in the ever-changing landscape of food security and insecurity.

The housing project was the product of a large community collaboration that began with just a conversation. “Chad Abrams, the Prairie du Chien City Administrator and I were meeting one day when he explained that Prairie du Chien has jobs, all employers are looking for employees, but they lacked to support the work force was housing,” explained Couleecap’s Executive Director Hetti Brown. “He shared data of how many people were traveling in and out of the area for work since there wasn’t housing available. That’s when we started talking about high-quality, affordable, workforce housing opportunities, Couleecap’s experience as a housing developer and the resources that the city could bring to the table to make it happen.”

It wasn’t long before the wheels were really turning as the city and Couleecap hit the ground running on the project. “I am approached frequently by communities in need of affordable workforce housing,” Brown explained. “In those conversations I explain, that as a nonprofit developer, we rely on grants and donations to build homes that income-qualified residents can afford. To make the projects viable, we need collaboration and investment from the local community. In the case of Prairie du Chien, the State of Wisconsin gave us a housing development grant, the city government and Redevelopment Authority worked together to donate the lots and the City provided a zero percent interest construction loan, saving us over \$20,000 in closing costs and other fees. Even with these contributions, we still had a \$100,000 gap due to abnormally high lumber and construction costs and that’s when our community partners really stepped up.” The George Family Foundation, People’s State Bank, Truivant, Alliant Energy Foundation and Prairie Motor Sports provided the funds needed so the project could begin. Top Notch construction, a local contractor, was selected through a competitive bid process. “It was important that we engaged the local workforce for this project.”

From groundbreaking the project took nearly a year to complete. The housing is situated as twin homes, to help create four homes in total on the two lots.

“The way the lots are designed we would have normally just been able to fit two to three single family homes,” Brown explained to the Governor during the tour. “But by utilizing the twin home model we’re able fit four homes.” The homes offer modern flair and lots of natural light across the three-bedroom two bath homes. Each home is identical with only slight differences to the interior color schemes. The homes are connected through an exterior wall in the single car garage to help give the feel of a single-family home, in the twin home model. The large outdoor space of the homes rounds out the beauty and comfort of these spaces, with the back lots poised to remain undeveloped.

All four of the homes are in various stages of sale, with one anticipating closing this month. The homes are available to home buyers whose income qualifies at 80 percent of the county median income or below. The homes were listed

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-Governor Evers

Couleecap
your local community *action* program



A United Way member agency

A equal opportunity employer and service provider.
Auxiliary aids and services available upon request.

Our Mission

Couleecap fights poverty and promotes self-sufficiency, economic development, and social justice. We are **People Helping People**, and every day our actions make a difference in the lives of people and families throughout the Coulee Region.

at \$210,000, with a \$70,000 of downpayment assistance available to help make the mortgage more affordable for buyers.

"I hear it everywhere I go in the state, we need more affordable housing," Evers observed to the group in attendance. "It isn't just a Prairie du Chien Problem; it is a Wisconsin problem. And projects like this are just outstanding. Thank you for serving your community in this way."

"The community has been with us the entire way," Brown said. "From groundbreaking until now when we are offering the properties to families who have a dream of home ownership. It has been such a pleasure working with the city of Prairie du Chien and other partners on this project. It was a true collaboration from concept to completion. In terms of feedback and interest, that has also been great. Sometimes when we were at the construction site, neighbors would pop over to talk, see progress, and tell us how excited they are to meet their new neighbors."

Following his visit to the Work Force Housing Twin Homes, Governor Evers made a quick stop at the Bargain Boutique Food Pantry. The visit came following the announcement that the Supplemental SNAP Benefit would be ending this month. The pantry is anticipating increased need with the change in the benefit, as the thousands will be impacted.

"The supplemental food benefits have enabled many families to accomplish food security, which helps them achieve other economic goals," Brown said. "The rollback of these benefits will mean that people will have to start to make choices between providing food to their families or paying for other necessities. Our food pantries will be there to help fill the gap."

Governor Evers and his team met with Bargain Boutique and Prairie du Chien Food Pantry Director Jann Strumer and the volunteers and employees of the pantry during his visit. The team toured the small, but mighty pantry tucked off to the side in the thrift shop.

"We are very lucky to have incredibly strong community support for the pantry," Strumer shared with the Governor.

Gazing around at the vertical lay out of the pantry Evers marveled aloud "How do you get everything up there!?" "We have big muscles." A volunteer quipped to the Governor, while flexing with a smile.

Strumer explained to the Governor that the pantry serves many individuals five to six days a week, accommodating the cooking limitations for many folks living in motels that are served, as well as distributing monthly Badger Boxes, which the Governor, described as "Manna from Heaven." The monthly boxes are a collaborative effort between The Hunger Task Force and many Wisconsin Businesses, offering a variety of wonderful Wisconsin food products such as cheese, milk, eggs, meat, and spices.

The local pantry operates as a The Emergency Food Assistance Program or TEFAP pantry, as Couleecap is the TEFAP administrator for the local region. The program is funded by the USDA and collects and redistributes food commodities from growers and suppliers to food banks and food pantries.

"Costs for all necessities have increased significantly over the past couple of years-housing, utilities, clothing, toiletries, and food. Hunger does not have a 'type' of person. Hunger impacts people across our community at all ages and in many situations. Couleecap works to address the need by providing fresh, nutritious food, for all dietary needs and preferences, when people need it. Couleecap also works to remove barriers to accessing food, such as transportation barriers and leverages partnerships to enhance community access to food."