



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Daniel L. Squadron

Senator Squadron, Speaker Silver, Council Member Chin, NYCHA Chairman Rhea Honor Housing Development for Successful Evacuation

DANIEL L. SQUADRON August 31, 2011

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Smith Houses TA President Partnered with NYCHA, Electeds, Volunteers to Evacuate Nearly 90 Percent of Residents Ahead of Storm

NEW YORK – Today, State Senator Daniel Squadron, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, and Council Member Margaret Chin joined New York City Housing Authority Chairman John Rhea, Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer and Councilwoman Rosie Mendez to honor Alfred E. Smith Houses Tenant Association President Aixa Torres, staff, and local volunteers for their work evacuating nearly 90 percent of the development's residents ahead of Hurricane Irene -- estimated shortly after the storm to have been the most successful in the city.

When NYCHA staff began to mobilize for the evacuation, Torres immediately stepped up and partnered with NYCHA and elected officials to ensure Smith residents understood that they were in a mandatory evacuation zone and needed to get out before the storm. The Smith Tenant Association's response included an emergency meeting on Friday, recruiting volunteers and translators, and helping to coordinate transportation to evacuation centers with NYCHA, elected officials, and other sister agencies.

Senator Squadron, Speaker Silver, Council Member Chin and Chairman Rhea also honored Alverista Hall, the Borough Administrator for Manhattan Property Management of NYCHA, and NYCHA staff members for their exceptional work, as well as the volunteers and translators who gave their own time to ensure residents' safety.

"Smith Houses' successful evacuation is a testament that even in the most challenging situations, successful evacuations are possible," said State Senator Daniel Squadron. "In the hours leading up to the storm, the leadership and dedication demonstrated by Aixa and all of the staff and volunteers ensured that residents got the message and got out. Smith Houses achieved a 90 percent evacuation rate -- estimated to be city-best -- despite language barriers, transportation obstacles, and the challenge of clearly communicating a message."

"While we are all grateful that Hurricane Irene did not cause the severity of damage and loss of life in New York City that was feared, what we did see was the spirit of compassion and generosity that we have come to expect from our Lower Manhattan community," said Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. "I want to commend Aixa Torres, President of the Smith Houses Tenant Association, as well as the brave volunteers and NYCHA staff who dedicated their time to ensuring that their neighbors evacuated and returned to their homes safely."

"Aixa and the volunteers at the Smith Houses were able to organize and take action when the City needed it," Council member Margaret Chin said. "Aixa showed great leadership and determination in preparing residents for the hurricane and ensuring that they were informed and safe. The evacuation at Smith Houses was an exemplary case and I congratulate everyone who worked so hard to make it happen."

"It is a pleasure to celebrate the courage, resolve and the amazing spirit of community that was shown here at Smith Houses—and all across our great city—during Hurricane Irene," said NYCHA Chairman John Rhea. "Mrs. Torres, as a leader, as a community advocate and as

a New Yorker, represents the very best of our city and the very best of NYCHA and we are grateful to her and proud of her outstanding contribution."

"Aixa Torres and the rest of the volunteers at Smith Houses are to be commended for their outstanding work," said Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez.

"During the recent storm, our City had a special responsibility to help evacuate the residents of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments in low-lying, vulnerable neighborhoods," said Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer. "I'm proud to join today with State Senator Daniel Squadron, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and New York City Council Member Margaret Chin and community advocates in saluting all those who helped us achieve a nearly 90% evacuation rate—the highest in the City—for residents of the Alfred E. Smith houses. This could not have happened without the strong leadership and engagement of Aixa Torres, President of the Smith Houses Tenant Association, along with NYCHA staff, local volunteers and, of course, residents who rose to the occasion as the storm approached. Their exemplary work shows once again that New Yorkers can come together under pressure-ridden circumstances and do the right thing."

"Today, we honor all the unsung heroes who live and work in NYCHA for their extraordinary work to ensure that the residents of Smith Houses would not be in harm's way upon Hurricane Irene's arrival," said Councilwoman Rosie Mendez. "The commitment and concern shown by tenant leaders like Aixa Torres to ensure the safety of your neighbors deserves our acknowledgement and appreciation."

"All of us came together to work as people, not 'you and us' but a 'we' to evacuate this development and to protect the lives of those who live here," said Smith Houses Tenant Association President Aixa Torres. "On behalf of our residents, we thank all the employees and volunteers who worked around the clock to ensure our safety and well-being. The

Chairman, Board Members, and especially the central and borough staff assigned to our Development, and Alfred E. Smith staff. The police officers who knocked on doors asking and helping people leave, and our Elected Officials. It is an honor to say these are our elected officials. They gave of themselves but also buses to transport our residents to safety, letters in three languages to give residents, and staff to communicate in their native language of residents about the need to evacuate Smith Houses. The list continues but most important your presence and your caring has been wholeheartedly felt. I want to give special thank you to a fellow Resident Leader Nancy Ortiz who came to support and help in giving guidance to residents about staying safe. Finally, thank you to the resident leaders and volunteers who came to the meeting, listened, and set an example by leaving with their families to safety and sending a message that we needed to evacuate.”

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