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SCHENECTADY MUNICIPAL HOUSING AUTHORITY CELEBRATES GOING SMOKE-FREE

*Housing authority honored for being one of the first and the largest in the region
to go smoke-free on April 1*

(Schenectady, NY) April 11, 2013 – The Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority (SMHA) was honored today by the Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition for being one of the first and the largest housing authority in the Capital Region to adopt a smoke-free policy. SMHA staff and residents gathered along with the city fire department, legislators, health organizations and community members to celebrate the housing authority going smoke-free on April 1 at its senior developments.

The housing authority began considering a no-smoking policy in 2009 after tenants initiated complaints of secondhand smoke seeping into their units. Tenants were surveyed and resident meetings held to gather feedback and invite conversation. The majority of tenants favored a no-smoking policy.

“We went smoke-free because we value our residents and their desire to live in healthier homes,” stated Richard Homenick, executive director of the Housing Authority. “And it’s in line with our goal to improve the quality of life for our residents through safe, affordable housing.” Edward Kosiur, Chairman of the SMHA Board of Commissioners, adds “Our board considered all the pros and cons and determined that this is good policy that will have an immediate positive impact on the wellbeing of the people we serve.”

The policy requires that residents, guests and visitors refrain from smoking in individual units, in common areas and on grounds, except in designated outdoor smoking areas. The no-smoking policy applies to all 412 units in its three downtown developments - Schonowee Village, Lincoln Heights and Ten Eyck Apartments which house seniors and the disabled.

“Over the nearly 40 years that I’ve worked for the fire department, I’ve seen too many home fires caused by smoking indoors. In fact, cigarettes and other smoking materials are the leading cause of fire deaths in the home,” said Schenectady Fire Chief Della Rocco. “By creating

smoke-free buildings, the housing authority is taking a sensible step to protect not only the health but the safety of their residents.”

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) strongly encourages public housing authorities to implement non-smoking policies in some or all of their public housing units to protect against secondhand smoke as well as to reduce the risk of fire and to save on turnover costs. More than 230 housing authorities in 27 states have smoke-free policies. In the Capital Region, Hoosick Falls Housing Authority is the only other housing authority that has a no-smoking policy, covering 54 units in two buildings.

“Since the announcement was made that the buildings would go smoke-free, I’ve heard from many tenants who are excited about enjoying cleaner air in their own home,” said Joan Johnson, resident of Ten Eyck Apartment for 12 years, and member of the SMHA Board of Commissioners. “As for enforcement, I believe tenants will respect the new rules for the sake of their neighbors.”

About the Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority

Established on February 6, 1934, the Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority is the first public housing authority in New York State. Since the first tenants occupied Schonowee Village in 1938, the Authority has grown to encompass seven conventional housing developments serving a total of 1,018 low-income families. The Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority’s Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program serves the housing needs of 1,387 households throughout the City of Schenectady.

About the Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition

The Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition is a community partnership of organizations and individuals working to decrease the impact of tobacco on our community, by promoting smoking cessation, preventing youth initiation and promoting smoke-free environments. Information on the Coalition can be obtained by going to www.SmokeFreeCapital.org.

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