

Covington Housing Authority director resigns

By Peggy Kreimer
Post staff reporter

Covington Housing Authority Director Bill Simon resigned Friday after nearly six years heading Covington's low income housing program.

His last day will be Sept. 9.

His deputy director, Thomas J. Schmitz, will be interim executive director while the board makes a nationwide search for a new director.

Simon came under fire recently from residents of Jacob Price public housing who oppose the plan to demolish the 65-year-old complex that houses 163 families and instead house the families in subsidized apartments and houses throughout Covington.

Simon said that controversy had nothing to do with his decision to leave, and the plan will continue even without him.

"I really just want to pursue other avenues," Simon said. "I got a lot accomplished in my tenure here and I wanted to try new things."

He and his wife live in Fort Thomas and have a 25-year-old daughter. He said his wife had been co-owner of the Jerusalem Café in Clifton and is now self-employed.

"We're thinking about options for starting a whole new life," he said. "I'm pursuing a few options right now."

In an announcement Friday he said he was pursuing opportunities in community development and affordable housing.

Housing Authority Board president Rita Dreyer said Simon's decision surprised and saddened her.

"I think he felt he had done what he could for housing here," she said. "I'm very, very sad that he's leaving."

"He's been a wonderful director. I've been on the board since 1997 and I've seen almost a complete turnaround in housing as far as professionalism, the people that he has been able to hire to do the jobs."

"He brought about a new era for Covington housing. He has a very good way with his staff, he was open with them. I'm just sad to see him go."

She said the board hopes to hire a new director before the end of the year.

When he was hired in 1999, Simon had been executive director of the Affordable Housing Fund in Dayton, Ohio, and before that was a special projects coordinator for the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority from 1980 to 1991.

Simon said the Housing Authority board will proceed with the Jacob Price demolition application, which must be approved by the Department for Housing and Urban Development. HUD is the chief funder for the low income housing program and has been encouraging more scattered site housing projects nationwide.

When Simon started he vowed to pursue more community partnerships to increase services to low income residents and to deal with escalating crime and violence in Covington's Eastside neighborhood, which includes Jacob Price.

That area continues to make headlines because of shootings, other violence and drug dealing. But neighborhood activists also are working to restore pride in the neighborhood.

Under Simon's tenure, the Housing Authority launched a \$3 million renovation of Golden Tower apartments for seniors, which will be complete this year, built a \$1.2 million new headquarters at Madison Avenue and Sterrett in Covington and improved housing complexes with new boilers, new doors and new water lines in Latonia Terrace.

The Housing Authority oversees 919 housing units in four complexes -Golden Tower for seniors, Latonia Terrace, Jacob Price and City Heights. Simon said the complexes are 90 percent occupied.