

MO BETTER BUILDINGS

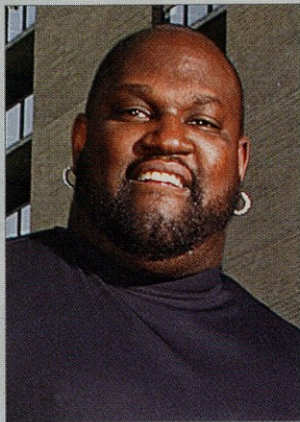
Former big league slugger Mo Vaughn is transforming blighted developments into livable communities

AS MO VAUGHN zips along the Deegan Expressway in his black Range Rover, he sneaks a peek at Yankee Stadium. "I did some great things there," says the three-time Red Sox All-Star and 1995 AL MVP, who was forced to retire in 2003 due to chronic knee pain. "Though my career didn't end the way I wanted, seeing it reminds me that I'm still able to do great things in other ways."

Vaughn found a new venue for great things at nearby Thessalonica Court, a 191-unit low-income development in the Bronx. Three years ago it was filthy, dilapidated and plagued by drug dealers. "It was horrible," says Vaughn. "Holes in the walls, everything leaking." With government financing assistance, he and partner Eugene Schneur bought Thessalonica Court and the nearby 95-unit Brookhaven Apartments in December 2004. Since then the two have added eight developments for low-income residents in New York and Wyoming. The old properties are completely overhauled, creating livable apartments with visible, day-to-day management. "In some cases tenants haven't seen their building's owner in 15 or 20 years," says Vaughn. "By our sixth month of construction, when we're finished and people say, 'I appreciate what you've done,' that's what it's all about for us."

As Vaughn, 39, gives a tour of Thessalonica Court, walking with a slight limp but otherwise as imposing as he was during his playing days, he proudly points out the improvements: flower beds out front, keycard access, new tilework in the lobby, updated bathrooms and kitchens, a communal computer room and a network of security cameras. "There are very few things you can do in life that benefit everybody," says Vaughn, who grew up in nearby Norwalk, Conn. "We're a for-profit company, but this is a win-win all the way around."

—Ben Reiter



HOME RUNNER The onetime Boston hero is a big hit with his tenants in the Bronx.

