Happy New Year and best wishes for a successful and productive year in 2016. As we look ahead to another year of addressing affordable housing needs in Summit County, we are again reminded that the demand for affordable housing continues to far exceed supply. The Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) provides housing assistance to more than 20,000 residents and partners with many local organizations to offer an array of support services to enhance quality of life and economic opportunity for residents.

Reflecting on end of year 2015, AMHA for the 15th year in a row earned high performer ratings from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for public housing, and for the 12th year for the Housing Choice Voucher program. I want to thank our staff, board of trustees, residents and community partners for making our continued high performance possible.

Just before Christmas, Congress and the President reached agreement on a budget compromise to keep the federal government open and establishing spending levels for the fiscal year 2016. This is the first year in many that federally funded programs have not been in doubt about current year funding. Overall, the amount of funding is about the same as 2015, so this will be another very tight budget year. Once again, funding for housing programs is “pro-rated”, meaning we will receive about 17% less than what we are entitled to under the HUD’s funding formula. So while we are happy to have the certainty of a full year’s budget allocation, affordable housing continues to be critically underfunded throughout the nation.

The Reach Opportunity Center at Summit Lake completed its first full year of operation in 2015 serving more than 700 families and individuals. The new center serves the education and workforce needs of children and parents in the Summit Lake area. We sincerely appreciate the community partnerships and private donations that contributed to a successful first year. Stay tuned… there are more good things to come there.

We are deeply appreciative of the responsibility we have to contribute to the local community and to serve people who depend on this vital assistance. We look forward to another successful year and wish you all the best in 2016.
Stephanie Norris was sworn in as a new member of the AMHA board of trustees on September 24, 2015. A resident of AMHA for 10 years, she is family and community oriented, and strives to grow personally and professionally. Stephanie lives in a single family home, which she says has put her in a better mind for self-sufficiency and homeownership. She moved to AMHA housing when health issues prevented her from continuing her employment in the construction field. She worked to develop new skills and engaged the services of various community agencies and AMHA to do so.

Stephanie began working at Project Learn in 2009 through an AMHA HUD-funded grant program, and was officially hired by Project Learn in 2010. In 2014, she attended Bridges Out of Poverty training and became involved in the collaboration between the Summit Bridges Collaborative and Project Learn to provide Getting Ahead classes in tandem with GED classes. Today, Stephanie uses her position at Project Learn to help people in poverty establish stepping stones to self-sufficiency.

Stephanie has always wanted to make a difference in people’s lives and feels that her role as an AMHA resident board member allows her to do so. As a resident who has benefited from many AMHA programs and services, she is able to give insight into how AMHA-provided services support the needs of our residents.