

Lewiston-Auburn

Lewiston tenant-owned housing cooperative opens 2nd building



[SCOTT TAYLOR](#), Staff Writer

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LEWISTON — A clean, newly renovated apartment, the ability to pick his own paint colors and friendly relations with all his neighbors — those are all good things, according to Hussein Abdi.

The best thing about his new home at 79 Maple St. is that his fate is in his own hands.

"If I have a problem with my property, I don't have to wait three, four months before it gets fixed," he said. "I'm paying to fix it, but I get to decide when it will get fixed, and how."

Abdi's was one of three families that celebrated the grand opening of Raise-Op, Lewiston's new housing cooperative. It's a group that owns the bright yellow, three-story building and sells shares to tenants — giving them a say in decisions about the building's maintenance and upkeep.

Not public housing, the organization is a private nonprofit supported by members, private loans, grants and donations.

The idea is an expansion of the FaireOp Housing cooperative next door at 75 Maple St., which started in 2008. Members purchased shares in the cooperative, earning the right to occupy a unit. Over the next seven years, they will decide house rules, pay for repairs and build equity.

A group of 11 interim board members created the new group to expand on the idea last year, purchasing 79 Maple St. building and starting work renovating it. Shaad Massood, president of the cooperative, said they hope to add nine more dwelling units during the next year.

"We are looking around the market right now," he said. "It would be a wonderful thing to be able to open a new building every October, but now our goal is to have nine new units by next December. That could be any combination of two to three new buildings."

Members need to purchase a share in the cooperative — about \$750 per share. They pay monthly "carrying charges" of about \$650 — rent, fees for

utilities and whatever the building members' group decides needs to be set aside for repairs and maintenance.

The group is also there to decide house rules, divide up chores such as who shovels the walks on a given morning and help settle member disputes.

Habiba Mohamed, treasurer for the cooperative and a new tenant in the building, said it feels much more like a community.

"If you know your neighbors well enough, it makes your life brighter," she said. "I feel comfortable knowing them and knowing what to expect. It's a very important priority for life."

People interested can apply for membership by filling out a form at the www.raiseop.com website.

staylor@sunjournal.com