Affordable housing advocates say their job is getting tougher as they tackle higher demand with less resources. This week, Burlington plays host to a large national conference, as attendees from across the U.S. and the world look to learn from the Queen City's example.

National spokespeople call Burlington, and Vermont in general, a model for affordable housing efforts. But, city leaders say there's still a lot of work left.

August First owner Jodi Whalen scrawled the word "grateful" into the concrete outside her Burlington bakery. Whalen says it's a reminder of all that she's thankful for, including the initial grant that allowed her to become a homeowner years ago.

"We had great credit, but we just couldn't afford a house in the Burlington market," she said, "and the housing trust came to the rescue and helped us out."

She bought a new home on her own two years later. Now, she champions affordable housing issues, and is one of about 300 attending the National Community Land Trust Network conference in Burlington this week.

Spokespeople's say the city and Champlain Housing Trust continue to be world-wide leaders on affordable housing issues. "It's the diversity of the portfolio, the condos, co-ops, rentals, home ownership, home buyer education," said NCLTN board chairwoman Connie Chavez, "I mean that's something that across the country we just need to replicate."

Orange flags temporarily mark affordable living units in Burlington, so that guests from 35 states and six countries can grasp the scope of local efforts. But even with about 1,600 affordable rentals, C.H.T. spokespeople say they don't have a single opening. "We've been developing apartments at every opportunity we have and people fill them right up," said C.E.O. Brenda Torpy.

Despite a demand spike, affordable housing development may slow as federal budget cuts dry up capital sources. But, advocates say they'll remain optimistic so long as conferences like this one continue. "We can do more with less if we work band together and are smart about partnering," said Torpy.

Whalen says she encourages her young employees to seek out the help of the housing partnership so that they'll have something to be grateful for as well.

Champlain Housing Trust spokespeople say anyone earning less than the median family income - about $75,000 for a family of four - can qualify for home ownership assistance. The rules for rentals on the other hand are a bit more complicated and they encourage interested individuals to come chat with them in-person.