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Hospital, CHISPA build house plan

Workers would get first shot at buying home below market value

By Larry Parsons
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A Salinas low-cost housing builder and one of the city's largest employers, Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System, are teaming in a novel approach to the affordable-housing crunch.

Under a first-time deal between SVMH and Community Housing Improvement Systems & Planning Association, or CHISPA, hospital employees would get first dibs on three, below-market-priced homes in two new northeast Salinas subdivisions.

"We're really excited about it," said Sam Downing, president/chief executive officer of the 2,000-employee health-care system, on Monday.

"We have a shortage of affordable housing," he said, which makes it difficult to recruit health-care workers.

The three homes would be sold to income-qualified SVMH workers, picked by lottery, for \$210,000. They are among 41 moderate-income homes that CHISPA will build, along with 50 "self-help" homes for low-income farm-worker families in the Falcon Ridge and Mesquite Manor subdivisions in Williams Ranch.

"We're developing a pilot program and reaching out to certain large employers," said CHISPA president Alfred Diaz-Infante. His agency has made overtures to the Alisal Union School District, Monterey County and other large employers.

CHISPA hopes to sell about half of the moderate-income homes through major employers, while the others would be offered to the general public.

"It's a response to concerns we've heard in the community," Diaz-Infante said.

Many families that earn too much to qualify for low-income housing "have nowhere to go because they can't afford \$300,000 homes on the market," he said.

If the Salinas experiment works, CHISPA will look at using more employer agreements with moderate-income homes planned in Greenfield and Soledad.

"We don't have all the details figured out," he said. "We're working on how best to put it together to be effective and fair."