

LIVING & REAL ESTATE

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**COMING IN
WEEKEND LIVING:**
Dave Nordstrand explores the
revolving world of aebleskiv-
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The new Wesley Oaks
Subdivision on Wednesday in
Salinas. TRAVIS GESKE/THE SALINAS
CALIFORNIAN



Wesley Oaks welcomes families

By Joe Truskot | jtruskot@thecalifornian.com

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COMICS AND PUZZLES INSIDE

Oaks

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Neighborhood blight is a disease. It strains the patience of hard-working folks who have to look at it. It causes property values to go down. It often brings to a halt the desire in others to maintain their own homes and yards. Houses get old, especially when more people live in them than was intended. Things break. A downward spiral starts. Unhealthy tenant-landlord relationships fuel the spin. City codes are ignored. Trash builds up. Tragedies happen. No one feels responsible. Enter CHISPA.

The largest private, nonprofit housing developer in Monterey County, CHISPA (Community Housing Improvement Systems and Planning Association, Inc.) has built more than 2,300 affordable single-family homes and multi-family and senior apartments since its incorporation in 1980.

On Wednesday, CHISPA added another success to its history of making Salinas a better place to live — house by house. Wesley Oaks, a 9-unit, low- and middle-income rental property that sits on the 600-block of Fremont Street in east Salinas, opened its doors to about 60 visitors for an official ribbon cutting and tours of the homes.

“I get so emotional,” Salinas City Council member Gloria De La Rosa confided to a friend in a shaky voice. “To know that families will be living in these homes ... just before Christmas.” She could barely finish the sentence as she choked back tears. De La Rosa was part of the effort to improve this part of the city that began in 2006 and took this long to complete. Her feelings were shared by others recognized by CHISPA’s



Project participants cut the ribbon on the new Wesley Oaks Subdivision on Wednesday in Salinas. TRAVIS GESKE/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

vice chairman, Deputy District Attorney Steve Holett, at the opening ceremony.

“This parcel of land sat here for years and years, collecting mattresses and couches and trash, and there were six run-down apartments as well,” Holett said. “It was through the vision of the city of Salinas, CHISPA

and everybody involved that were able to take something that was a collector of trash and make it someone’s home.”

“I was a policeman,” Salinas Mayor Joe Gunter said, “and I worked this street. I can tell you it was a dump.” Gunter went on to applaud the work of CHISPA’s CEO, Alfred Diaz-Infante, in



Dana Cleary, director of project development, CHISPA hugs Salinas City Councilwoman Gloria De La Rosa. JOE TRUSKOT/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

guiding this project to completion. “I walked through one of these units, and it’s absolutely gorgeous. Wouldn’t be afraid to live here now.”

Wesley Oaks contains nine, two-story individual family homes, all with private front and rear entrances, three bed-

rooms, two bathrooms, a garage and storage unit. The homes have insulated walls, double-pane windows, and the latest in energy-saving appli-

ances, features which will reduce the size of utility bills. In addition, a parcel of land adjacent to the rear driveway contains raised garden boxes and water spigots enabling each family to grow their own vegetables or flowers. A gate on Madeira Avenue will provide added security for the children to play on the long paved driveway.

Six of the homes will be rented to individuals working in agriculture.

The tenth home, built across the driveway from Wesley Oaks a few years ago, serves as a residence for young people at risk.

Wesley Oaks was named after a family that had owned the property for many years. They used to have a house on

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Oaks

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the property, probably near the big oak tree. The house was most likely built in the 1930s as were the five or six little apartments on the eastern end of the plot. As an income-producing property, not vacant land, it was more expensive. The five or six tenants had to be relocated and those apartments were demolished.

"We don't just build homes at CHISPA and walk away," Holett continued. "We provide community services to these individuals to make sure that this neighborhood becomes a success."

In addition to being able to rent these homes at below-market rates, the residents will receive credit classes at Wells Fargo Bank, access to the community room at an apartment complex on



Wells Fargo Bank manager presents a check for \$50,000 to support a future CHISPA project in Greenfield JOE TRUSKOT/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Roosevelt Street — just a block away — and a series of art and music classes. Children up to age 5 will be able to participate in "Partners at Play." There's an engage-

ment neighborhood group called Poder Popular that residents can participate in. It encourages community organization and gets people to come together. "Someone who took a



Local leaders present the new Wesley Oaks Subdivision on Wednesday in Salinas. TRAVIS GESKE/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

big deep breath when all of this was done," Holett said with a smile, "was Dana Cleary (director of project development for CHISPA). She managed to get through the storm to

make this happen." The downturn in the economy caused a reshuffling of the finances for the project. Pinnacle Bank was enthusiastically thanked for having finessed

changes in the loan's structure.

"We did begin speaking about this project in 2008, so like Gloria, it's a very exciting day for the bank to see these beautiful 10 homes," said Susan Black, president of Pinnacle Bank. "As a community bank, Pinnacle Bank is very committed to re-investing our shareholder's dollars and our clients' dollars right back in our local communities.

We don't send it out of the state, out of the country ... or even out of Salinas. We are very pleased to have Wesley Oaks as an example of keeping our money right here."

Holett went on to

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Oaks

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acknowledge others for their contribution to the effort.

“There are 10 homes here but these 10 homes are the result of 33 different subcontractors who all worked here during the past year. Sixteen of them live here in the city of Salinas; all of these individuals contributing tax dollars, going to local businesses and buying things from them.”

Speaking for the contractors, Jay Fenzke, vice president of operations for Quality Plumbing Associates, also noted that it was an emotional moment for them as well. He thanked Luis Ortega and Jose Lopez. “They did the actual construction. They got the underground put in, surface improvements, vertical construction, landscaping. They are the ones that direct the orchestra of all the subs. This is just an example of their commitment to excellence and perfection. You know, Luis is the sergeant. Compromise isn't an option. You do it right.” Fenzke also thanked the city of Salinas for its vision of a better community and asked them to continue to raise the bar.

“Wells Fargo,” Holett said, “has been with CHISPA for a long time providing grants. It's through Wells Fargo that we were able to pay building permit fees to get this development done.”

Holett introduced Terrie Fuentes, Salinas Valley district manager of Wells Fargo Bank. “Wells Fargo has long history of serving Salinas and coming through for this community,” Fuentes said. “We are familiar with families facing financial difficulties and that's why we are committed to bringing solutions to people in this

DETAILS

FUNDING SOURCES

Funding for Wesley Oaks came from Pinnacle Bank, City of Salinas Entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, City of Salinas Entitlement HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) Program, City of Salinas Entitlement funds provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, City of Salinas/HOME-CHDO Competitively Reallocated Funds (Energy Efficiency Greenbuilding Construction) - HOME-CHDO funds provided by the U.S. Department of HUD, Office of Affordable Housing Programs, City of Salinas Housing Trust Fund, State of California HCD Joe Serna Farmworker Housing Grant Program, Wells Fargo Leading the Way Home® Priority Markets Initiative, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, National Association of Latino Community Asset Builders (NALCAB)

SUBCONTRACTORS

AC Fire Protection, Inc. - Salinas; Bob Sams Stucco - Watsonville; Bright Green Strategies (HERS Rater) - Santa Cruz; Built-In Distributors - Seaside; Central Coast Garage Doors - Salinas; Dennis Jones Mechanical Engineer - Monterey; Eagle Hauling - Salinas; E-Cat Mechanical, Inc. - San Ardo; El Camino Electric - Greenfield; Faria Drywall, Inc. - Gilroy; Freeman Painting - Salinas; Hayward Lumber - Salinas; Heart Wood Manufacturing, Inc. - Gilroy; Hydro Turf, Inc. - Salinas; Lopez Painting - Salinas; Montejano Roofing - Salinas; Monterey Bay Engineers - Seaside; National Security Agency - Salinas; New Creation Construction - Gilroy; Ponzini Insulation, Inc. - San Juan Bautista; Pro Build - Santa Cruz; Quality Plumbing - Salinas; RH Framing - Salinas; Romero Builder - Salinas; San Benito Supply - Hollister; Seatec Underground Utilities, Inc. - Salinas; Soil Surveys, Inc. - Salinas; Staley Construction - Salinas; Swift Tectonics - San Ardo; Tisc, Inc. (Architecture) - Salinas; Tom's Site Services - Salinas; Wheeler Termite Co. - Salinas; and Wheeler's Flooring - Salinas.

community.” Two years ago the Wells Fargo Foundation approached Fuentes and offered her an opportunity for a Priorities Market grant that had been traditionally only available to urban communities.

Fuentes approached CHISPA and worked with them in the application process, and CHISPA was awarded \$50,000 for the Wesley Oaks development. It was the first organization in a rural area to receive such a grant.

“Today,” Fuentes continued, “Wells Fargo Bank is awarding CHISPA with another Priorities Market grant of \$50,000 for help with the Cambria Park subdivision in Greenfield. It's very exciting.” Fuentes asked Luis Dominguez, a local branch manager to present the check to Holett on behalf of Wells Fargo.

Alfred Diaz Infante concluded the presenta-

tions by recognizing Gabe Torres, project manager, and the rest of his staff and thanking them for their hard work.

After the ribbon was cut, the guests toured the homes.

Dana Cleary commented, “Something I like about the design of these homes is the fact that someone in a wheelchair can visit each one. All have low thresholds in front (no steps) and space to move a wheelchair around on the ground floor. There is a bath on the first floor.

“One has wiring in the staircase that would allow us to install a wheelchair lift if someone needed that accommodation.”

Diaz Infante concluded, “CHISPA is about building homes. If you think about your own home and what it means to you, you understand. It really is what makes a difference in families'



Councilwoman De La Rosa expresses her gratitude to CHISPA for the new Wesley Oaks Subdivision. TRAVIS GESKE/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

lives. It makes a difference in building healthy communities. It's really

transformational for families coming from living in garages and

dilapidated houses. It allows them to progress and be successful.”

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