

New affordable housing in Hollister

Buena Vista apartments celebrate grand opening

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WELCOME HOME Gerardo Venegas, property manager at the new Buena Vista apartment complex in Hollister, stands in front of one of the site's amenities for residents, a playground.

Before she moved into the new Buena Vista apartment complex in Hollister last month, Mary (who did not want to give her last name) lived with her two kids in one room at her parent's house.

"It was hard," said Mary, who has a 20-year old daughter with special needs.

For eight years, the mother-of-two had been on the waiting list for the Section 8 voucher program, which provides rental assistance to eligible low-income applicants.

"I had been waiting for a long time for Section 8, but when I got it all they had were places in Watsonville and Santa Cruz," she said.

The Section 8 program for San Benito County is operated by the Santa Cruz Housing Authority.

The Hollister resident did not want to leave the area as her daughter had one more year of high school to go. But, finding an affordable place to live was challenging.

“It is hard to find housing right now. A lot of places are full up,” said Mary.

Then, last year she found out that in her own town, a new apartment complex was being built and they were accepting applications.

“I turned in my application by the deadline and after waiting a month, they told me I got it,” said Mary. “The thing is, it’s a three bedroom. My daughter gets her own room.”

The 41-unit complex at the growing west end of Hollister is a project of CHISPA (Community Housing Improvement Systems and Planning Association, Inc.) a private, nonprofit housing developer based in Monterey County.

Since 1980, CHISPA has built and renovated 2,268 single-family homes and apartments for low and moderate-income people in Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties.

“We know how difficult it is for local people working local jobs to afford housing,” said Dana Cleary, director of real estate development. “Buying a home is impossible for many people, and apartments are expensive as well. The apartments in our building will be kept affordable for at least 55 years, so it is a stable source of housing for well into the future, regardless of what the rest of the housing market may look like.”

The complex consists of three one-bedroom apartments, 25 two-bedroom apartments, and 12 three-bedroom apartments. There is also a community room, laundry facilities, playground and residents have access to various on-site activities, including ESL classes that are given by Gavilan College.

“We do this because we want parents to feel confident that their children are safe and occupied productively after school,” said Cleary. We also provide classes for adults who are interested. We look forward to hearing from the residents in Buena Vista what programs they would like to see.”

The complex is also fitted with solar panels.

“Solar is standard on our recent apartment buildings,” said Cleary. “For the past eight or nine years, we have used solar panels to provide some power for the common areas: parking lot lighting, laundry-room, and power for community room and computer room. Buena Vista solar panels will provide power for common areas and contribute power to the apartments as well.”

On Friday, the complex will celebrate with an official grand opening. But, for many who are still looking for affordable housing in the region, the outlook remains grim.

“About 1,100 people submitted a preliminary application for housing,” said Cleary. “So definitely more than there were units. The people on the list who were not reviewed will remain on the list. As units turn over, we will call people in order on that list and see if they are still interested in completing an application.”