

Promises kept in Rivertown

Dave Roberts

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A little over two years ago, the 1.7-acre lot on I Street between Seventh and Eighth streets in Rivertown was an eyesore covered with weeds, piles of broken cement – and more weeds. Today that site contains an attractive, affordable apartment complex for low-income residents, a colorful playground and a community center.

So there was much to celebrate at the grand opening Friday for Rivertown Place, which provides 40 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments for people earning half of the area median income or less. It's the second affordable housing project provided in Rivertown by Eden Housing with city, county and federal financial support.

"This once-vibrant community had deteriorated into a haven for gangs, prostitution and methamphetamine labs," said Eden Housing Executive Director Linda Mandolini in a press release. "Now the area is cleaned up and families are moving in to a supportive community with a range of enrichment programs for their children."

Two of the new residents at Rivertown Place are Marcia Cofie and her granddaughter Tania, who had been renting a room in a house. They are now living in a brand-new one-bedroom apartment, paying just \$568 per month.

"It's wonderful," said Cofie. "I was just overjoyed that I was blessed to get in an apartment and live in permanent housing again. I hope I rent it for many more years."

The grand-opening celebration featured speeches, a ribbon cutting and lunch, all under a canopy in the parking lot at noon as the temperature rapidly reached triple digits. Kathleen Hamm, one of the Eden Housing board members, kicked off the speeches.

"Looking around here it's hard to believe that this is the same site where many of us gathered about 15 months or so ago to celebrate the groundbreaking for this project," she said. "I'm not sure that I miss those big chunks of cement that were on the site. But I do think that this project is a great improvement and a beautiful development."

"It was a really cold and rainy day for the groundbreaking. I ended my comments by saying that I hope whenever we get together for the grand opening it will be in warm and sunny weather. As the saying goes, be careful what you wish for."

Mandolini noted that Eden Housing has been working to redevelop Rivertown for the past 10 years. Rivertown Place is the second phase of that effort. The first phase was the 57 low-income apartments in the West Rivertown complex at Fourth and J streets.

"We and our architect worked with a whole host of community members and council members and planning commissioners to create a master plan to deal with some blocks that were clearly substandard and just a mess," she said. "Every time I come out here and see the building, I think, 'We really achieved what we set out to do.'"

"We did that because the city was committed to having a plan for a product that looked really good and people wanted to live in. Mayor Freitas has been part of this since its inception. Not only did they roll up their sleeves and plan with us; they committed millions of dollars to both phases of the project."

Freitas was on hand for the grand opening to congratulate Eden Housing for the success of its project.

"For a lot of us in elected office, a lot of people promise they are going to do this and going to do that, and you say, 'OK, yeah, sure.' I hate to say it, but you get a little cynical with time," he said. "But what was so wonderful about Eden Housing is they did make commitments and promises – and they met or exceeded



Marcia Cofie and her granddaughter Tania are two of the new residents at Rivertown Place, a 40-apartment complex for low-income residents at Seventh and I streets.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Roberts

every single one.

"Nothing succeeds like success. We were so ecstatic with Phase I and are even more ecstatic with Phase II. Maybe Eden Housing should just take over the downtown. They are doing such a good job, just keep on going.

"One of the things I talked about in the State of the City Address is that while it's been a long time coming, the city of Antioch is reclaiming what has been considered lost. Eden Housing has done an outstanding job of bringing back neighborhoods, bringing back pride into the community and truly providing outstanding housing for residents in this community. And that's exciting.

"It's about vision and a lot of hard work and people coming together. I realize it takes a lot of partners. You guys know how to do it, and you do it very successfully. Thank you very much."