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Seniors celebrate new low-income housing

By Vince Rembulat

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U.S. Congressman Jerry McNerney hobnobs with San Joaquin County Board of Supervisor Steve Bestolarides at the event welcoming the newest in affordable and quality

1 of 3



Ed Crom could remember when Almond Court was once an agricultural area.

His uncle farmed the land not too far from the newest affordable apartment homes for seniors located at 2030 N. Union Road.

The former Escalon and Modesto resident recently decided to make Almond Court his new home.

"At first, I was skeptical about moving in," Crom said at Monday's grand opening celebration of the

new 40-unit addition by Eden Housing, Inc. "I'm a people person. I find that most seniors usually keep to themselves."

But in a short time he's had a chance to meet some of his neighbors, including Mel Liles.

"We know a lot of the same people," Crom said.

He later added. "I think I'm going to like it here."

Located next to Almond Terrace – Phase I of Eden Housing was completed in 2004 and is now home to 77 seniors – Almond Court officially opened on Feb. 28.

According to Eden Housing executive director Linda Mandolini, tenants including Liles moved in the very next day.

She indicated that it didn't take too long before the place for independent-living seniors age 62 and older to become fully occupied.

"We now have a three-year waiting list, which is fairly standard," Mandolini said.

Each apartment is about 580 square feet equipped with one bedroom, one bath, living room, kitchen, dining area and private porch.

The \$8.7 million project was a partnership consisting of the City of Manteca (Redevelopment Agency), San Joaquin County (HOME funds), Federal Home Loan Bank's Affordable Housing Program (Farmers & Merchant Bank) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Among the special guests and dignitaries at the ribbon-cutting event were Mayor Willie Weatherford, U.S. Congressman Jerry McNerney, San Joaquin County Board of Supervisor Steve Bestolarides, HUD field office director Cynthia Abbott, Farmers & Merchants Bank's community development officer Keith Land, Sen. Lois Volk's senior field representative Dillon Delvo and Assemblyman Bill Berryhill's field representative Jennifer Bond.

Weatherford, for one, is familiar with Almond Court.

"I hang out with a lot of seniors because I am one," he said.

Almond Court tenant Mel Liles is one of his friends.

"Mel was still playing basketball in his 60s," Weatherford said.

Liles, who is a former contractor, later confirmed the mayor's statement.

"I used to play in all of the basketball tournaments," he said. "I miss playing."

McNerney, meanwhile, was thrilled to take part in the grand opening event.

"Our area has been particularly hard hit by the tough economy and housing crisis, and many senior citizens are struggling to make ends meet," he said. "It's good to know that with the opening of the Almond Court apartments our community's seniors will now have greater access to affordable housing."

Mandolini added that those living at Almond Court are those on fixed income such as Social Security benefits.

Since 1968, Eden Housing has developed more than 5,000 housing units and more than 44,500 square feet of adjoining commercial / retail space in 70 properties.

Currently, Eden Housing is looking to expand in Lodi, according to Mandolini.

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