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Largest project to date

CATCH adding 54 apartments

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Last April, Shellie Paul, 38, was glad to move into a two-bedroom apartment at the Royal Gardens complex. For more than a year, she had slept at the homes of friends and family after being evicted from an apartment, while her three sons lived mostly with their father and family members.

Now, as her sons, ages 10, 12 and 13, grow, the one-bedroom they share shrinks. Paul said she's rebuilt her credit, but with disability pay and a part-time job as a bus monitor and crossing guard for Concord schools, she makes less than \$1,600 a month - not enough to afford a three-bedroom apartment suitable for a family.

She hopes instead to move into one of 54 new apartments at CATCH Neighborhood Housing's Friedman Court I complex. Paul and more than 40 others - working parents, people with disabilities, at least one state employee and retired couples - are on the waiting list for the affordable units, set to open next month.

A ceremony dedicating the \$8.3 million project to founding CATCH board member and lifelong basketball fan Bruce Friedman will be held March 15. The first units could be ready in April, Executive Director Rosemary Heard said.

The four-building complex on 7.5 acres on Old Suncook Road is CATCH's largest project to date.

"It represents huge growth for us," Heard said.

Since 1989, the group has obtained and managed 140 affordable rental units in Concord. The group plans to break ground on Friedman Court II in May. That will include 41 apartments for people age 62 and older on the same property.

The complex was built using a \$777,216 low-interest loan from Citizens Bank, a no-interest loan from New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority, more than \$6.1 million in tax credits from Northern New England Housing Investment Fund, and other grants and private

donations.

Applicants must make no more than 60 percent of the area's median income, which for a family of four living in Merrimack County is \$70,000. Rents will range from \$545 to \$882.

Most of the apartments have two bedrooms; some are efficiencies. Six are townhouse style with three bedrooms on two floors and individual front doors.

The units are bright and airy but empty for now, except for stray tools, coffee cups and an appliance or two waiting to be installed. To-do lists are taped to each unit's door. Tim Curry, CATCH's housing production manager, walked through the complex Tuesday, taking note of tasks to add.

Curry said he is measuring just how much need there will be from the residents for maintenance and general assistance. The Hodges Companies manage other CATCH properties and take applications from potential residents. At Friedman Court, Curry said CATCH may keep a staff member onsite.

"It's a big step for CATCH," Curry said. "We don't want to be seen as just a contractor building these. We need to stay in touch with the people living here."

Heard said CATCH is moving toward maintaining closer relationships with residents and providing some basic services. Friedman Court will include a community room for meeting space, a computer room for residents' use and locked storage for every apartment. Heard said the two phases of the community are designed to give it an intergenerational feel.

Concord Housing Authority Executive Director John Hoyt said affordable housing is sometimes stereotyped as less-than-standard housing for the very poor. Friedman Court - like many affordable developments in the area, Hoyt said - breaks that stereotype: The design is like any modern condominium development, with clean, bright walls inside and a tasteful design outside. Many looking to live there have full-time jobs.

"We need to understand that this is middle-income America that you're talking about," Hoyt said.

Jennifer Gaeb, 27, is one example. She has an associate degree and works as a secretary in the secretary of state's corporate division. Gaeb lives in McKenna's Purchase with her parents. She said she's luckier than many of her friends - she has health benefits. But her salary, which is less than \$30,000, makes \$800 rents in Concord seem formidable.

"Rent is so high," she said. CATCH "is willing to look at people's salaries and are a little more understanding."

Though Friedman Court I will increase CATCH's capacity by about a third, it will barely make a dent in the need for affordable housing in Concord, Hoyt said.

The Concord Housing Authority has clients placed in about 500 units citywide, between the apartments that it owns and those that are rented using federal vouchers that the group

allocates. Many of those vouchers are used in CATCH housing, Hoyt said. Yesterday there were 431 people on the housing authority's waiting lists.

"These 54 units will remove some of our waiting list, but this list is growing every day," he said.

For more information, visit the CATCH website, catchhousing.org.

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