

APPEAL-DEMOCRAT

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Move-in day at Harmony Village

Six local families will spend the rest of the holidays in their own places

By Jake Abbott



Ricky Buck receives the key to his apartment at Harmony Village on Wednesday, which was move-in day for several individuals at the new low-income permanent housing project overseen by Habitat for Humanity Yuba-Sutter.



Steve Whatley and Julie Robinson inside their new apartment at Harmony Village.

Six local families will be spending the rest of the holidays in their own places this year. Wednesday was move-in day at Harmony Village in south Sutter County.

Over the coming months, the project will provide around 100 people – the area’s most vulnerable, including the elderly, disabled and veterans – with much-needed affordable housing.

“It’s wonderful to see people getting stability right at Christmas time,” said John Nicoletti, deputy director of Habitat for Humanity Yuba-Sutter.

Sutter County purchased the Baymont Motel along Highway 99 in October in order to establish 62 units of low-income permanent housing. The facility, which includes a 302-unit storage facility, was purchased for \$7.3 million and was paid for by a combination of state funds (\$6.7 million in Homekey Project funds) and federal dollars (approximately \$520,000 in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act funds).

Following the purchase, the county transferred the property to Habitat for Humanity Yuba-Sutter, which will oversee operations. Habitat has set aside \$350,000 of its annual Restore revenue to cover ongoing costs associated with the project, and will use revenues generated through rent and the storage facility.

Joseph Hale, CEO of Habitat, said the affordable housing project adds a much needed link in the chain of addressing homelessness in the community. In addition to the area’s facilities that provide emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive housing, local residents in precarious situations now have a permanent housing option.

“I think one of the big elements this project helps with, we have a lot of shelters in the community but not a lot of places for them to go once they successfully complete the programs. When they do well but are caught in the same system of not having somewhere to go after, they can fall right back into homelessness, so this provides one of those next stages,” Hale said.

Since the transfer of the property, Habitat has been working to get the site ready for move-in. Much of the work revolved around general upkeep as the motel had some wear and tear from prior use. They also put up a fence around the property to make it more of a gated community.

Residents will be charged up to 30 percent of their income for each unit – in most cases, that will likely be around \$250-\$300 per month. Rent will also cover utilities and garbage.

Hale said eligible applicants will have gone through the area’s coordinated-entry facility and have received letters of recommendation from Hands of Hope and the Health and Human Services department through Better Way, Sutter County’s emergency shelter project.

“We want to make sure that when they go in there they are going to be successful and are working with the system to better their lives,” Hale said.

Right now, there are around 23 families who have been approved to move in. Up to eight families will move in each week, with the project expected to reach half capacity by mid-January. Hale said they hope to reach full capacity about a month after that.

The affordable housing project is a big step forward for the area in terms of addressing the homelessness situation, but there is still a long way to go. Hale estimates that there are up to 1,200 people currently living precariously in the Yuba-Sutter area that would qualify for the project.

“This project represents 20 percent of the county’s permanent supportive housing needs. That’s one move taking a measurable chunk out of the pressure the community is under,” Nicoletti said.