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Home > New American Canyon affordable senior, veterans housing complex opens



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- [Print This Page](#) ^[2]

New American Canyon affordable senior, veterans housing complex opens

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By RACHEL RASKIN-ZRIHEN | Vallejo Times-Herald | July 8, 2019 at 4:55 pm

Joe Jackson, Jr., now of American Canyon, said he "feels blessed" to be a resident of the newly opened Valley View Senior Homes complex in this city.

"You feel like God lives around the corner," the 66-year-old Texas native said. "It's real nice, and I hope to help keep it that way."

The new development, which celebrated a grand opening on Monday, is comprised of 70 affordable housing units for low-income seniors and veterans, American Canyon officials and those of the developer, Satellite Affordable Housing Associates (SAHA) said.

Valley View is one of 17 California projects to receive the first round of funding through Proposition 41 and the Veterans Housing and Homeless Prevention Program. The community consists of 70 apartment and cottage-style homes, all affordable to very low and extremely low-income seniors and veterans aged 55 and over.

Jackson, 66, said he'd been homeless for five months before landing his spot in the new complex.

"I was sleeping in my car," he said, fighting tears of joy. "A bad divorce brought me out here, looking for a place to stay."

A U.S. Navy veteran with one grown son, Jackson said the new place is a new lease on life.

"It's a breath of fresh air," he said. "It's a different world."

One thing Jackson said has struck him as especially "refreshing" is the apparent lack of overt racism he said he lived with in the South.

Matthew Kertianis, 64, is another formerly homeless veteran now living in the Valley View complex. He said he'd been homeless for about six years in Vallejo and Contra Costa County following a debilitating industrial accident.

Originally from New Jersey, Kertianis calls his new digs "as close to heaven as I'm going to get until I get there. This is what I said when I first got here. When I was sitting in my new living room and realized what it was; literally an answer to prayer."

A widower for 14 years with five grown children, Kertianis said nearly everyone he's made contact with at Valley View agrees they are sharing a unique experience and will likely remain "friends for life."

"Everybody here is so nice, and helpful," he said. "It's a very beautiful place."

To celebrate the grand opening of the now fully rented complex, city and SAHA officials made a gathering in its central clubhouse, which is complete with a computer room, a kitchen, restrooms, laundry room and a seating area with a flat screen TV and a fireplace.

"They did a nice job here," American Canyon businessman and philanthropist Arvid Nischal said. "People came here from different cities and even different states."

American Canyon Mayor Leon Garcia, among the speakers at Monday's event, said the complex wasn't originally conceived as an affordable housing project.

"It was originally going to be market rate housing, but that was impacted by the recession," he said. "The city acquired the property and that was its contribution to the project. What's unique is that the housing is individualized; not institutional-looking. It's more like individual

houses.?

SAHA executive director Susan Friedland said the project was six years in the works, with a team of developers and financial partners that were able to make it happen.

Also on Monday's speakers list were John Nunn, Jr., Veterans Housing and Homelessness Prevention Program manager with the California Department of Veterans Affairs, Napa County Supervisor Ryan Gregory, and Napa Mayor Jill Techel, chair of the city of Napa's Housing Authority.

Also on the program were Daniel Perl, senior vice president of community lending & investment for Wells Fargo Bank, and Fiona Hsu, manager of community development finance for Silicon Valley Bank, as well as a couple of new complex residents.

The project provides housing for seniors earning between 30 percent and 60 percent of the area median income, with 22 units set aside for veterans with incomes at 50 percent or below, and, of those, 17 units are reserved for formerly homeless vets through the VASH program. Three units are set aside for homeless households referred by Napa County, and the City of Napa Housing Authority provides 34 project-based housing assistance vouchers.

Garcia said city officials are happy with the result.

"We are very pleased to be able to be part of the solution, especially for the veterans' housing, and they offer services, too," he said. "It's our solution to a growing homelessness problem, at least among older adults."

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