

Riverwalk at Reseda's 77 apartment units open for the working poor

By Dana Bartholomew, Los Angeles Daily News
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RESEDA >> Sara Salas had for five years huddled with five family members inside a run-down one-bedroom apartment.

Then came the call last month that would free them from their impoverished dump. She, her husband and three young children now qualified for new affordable housing — and would soon be moving into a two-bedroom dream.

“I was shaking,” recalled Salas, 24, of Reseda, whose three children range from 5 to 8. “I thought, over and over again, this must be a dream come true.”

As funding for new affordable housing dwindles across Los Angeles, low-income families will join city officials and housing advocates Thursday for the grand opening of Riverwalk at Reseda — a \$24 million T-shaped apartment complex built especially for the working poor.

The four-story buildings, developed by [Adobe Communities](#), come with views for 77 resident families along Reseda Park across the Los Angeles River.

Built to replace the former Trinity Lutheran Church at 18425 Kittridge St., Riverwalk adds a fresh sheen to a neighborhood once speckled with graffiti, time-worn buildings and vacant lots.

And as rents rise and housing costs soar in the ninth-most expensive market in the nation, it also fulfills an agonizing need, housing advocates say.

Some 1,200 low-income families applied for the 77 units with cut-rate rents, with a waiting list that now grows by the day.

“The overwhelming number of applicants for Riverwalk speaks to the unmet demand for high-quality affordable housing,” said Robin Hughes, president and CEO of Abode Communities, a \$7 million Los Angeles-based nonprofit agency with 33 affordable housing developments, including seven in the San Fernando Valley. “We’re one of the highest cost cities in the country as far as housing affordability.”

The problem, she says, is a lack of affordable housing funds to help revitalize poor neighborhoods.

After California disbanded its community redevelopment agencies a few years ago, Hughes said, hundreds of millions of dollars were lost for such affordable housing projects, while federal support dropped by half. Money from Proposition 46, a \$2.1 billion bond measure for affordable and emergency housing, has also run its course.

That left agencies like Abode — which still has 1,135 affordable homes in its development pipeline, half of them new apartments — scrambling for reliable funding sources.

“This is one of the last few projects to benefit from (redevelopment agency) funds,” Hughes said of Riverwalk. “It’s been a big loss to the community.”

The 88,000-square-foot Riverwalk at Reseda, an environmentally sustainable LEED Gold development, is ringed by California friendly gardens. A community center and computer lab for after-school programs for kids and job, health and other services for adults.

While painters, gardeners and custodians completed the final touches Wednesday, the last of 270 residents moved in.

“The Reseda Riverwalk is a great example of how partners like Abode Communities are leading the way in sustainable development and community transformation,” Councilman Bob Blumenfield, who will attend the opening ceremony, said in a statement.

For Salas, a Pierce College student with three kids, the spacious digs with new kitchen appliances and Corian countertop is a godsend. “Everything was depressing,” she said. “And with all those people, you’re always in someone’s way. Your kids are always fighting. Something had to change.”

For Mikhail Gayed, once crammed with his wife and two kids in a one-bedroom flat, it’s from heaven. The recent immigrant from Egypt barely scrapes by on his job at a liquor store. But he now pays \$902 for his two bedrooms, less than he was paying for one.

“It’s very good. Here it’s beautiful,” said Gayed, 29, struggling for the words. “Here, rent is inexpensive. Thank God.”

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