

VISALIA TIMES-DELTA

Home for the holidays

November 15, 2016

By: Daniella A. Martin



This is the playground Chloey Martins and other children who live in the new Highland Gardens development will get to play on.

Visalia officials teamed with Self-Help Enterprises to provide a new low-income housing complex — just in time for the holidays.

Tuesday morning community members gathered to celebrate the ribbon cutting of Visalia's new development, Highland Gardens Apartments in north Visalia.

The community features 36 two- and three-bedroom apartments, a half-court basketball court, playground, community center, and a community garden where residents can grow fruits and vegetables.

Monthly rents range from \$366 to \$830 and are determined based on family size and income. Energy saving appliances, solar, water conservation components and solar carports will help keep the utility cost lower for residents.

"The reason we were able to do this project is because of the city of Visalia," said Tom Collishaw, CEO of Self-Help.

The project in whole costs around \$7 million, Collishaw said.

Self-Help is a community development organization whose mission is to work with low-income families to build and sustain healthy homes and communities.

They are in their 51st year of helping more than 50,000 families take the next step toward building a better community and neighborhoods.

Visalia gets federal grants on an annual basis for Community Housing Development Organization, also known as CHDO. Self-Help is one of many organizations that meets the requirements to use the money, said Rhonda Haynes, a city housing specialist said.

The city sets aside a percentage of home investment partnership funds for a CHDO project and provided \$1,980,000 toward the development.

"That's how these projects work, you put in some public money and investor's money," Collisahw said. "When combined, you can build the project and keep the rent low."

For Courtney Shelley and her twin boys, her approval came at the perfect time. She had been living with her grandmother and had been looking for a new place to stay.

"It's really exciting for me to have a fresh start, a whole new life for me and the babies," Shelley said. "It's amazing to help people out to not struggle so much."

The mayor agreed.

"By doing projects like this, we are able to take families that have little kids and give them a fresh start," Steve Nelsen said. "It gives them an apartment to be proud of, one that they can call home."

What really made today special for the families, is the timing, Nelsen said.

“What’s a better way to celebrate family and giving thanks than by doing it in a facility that is modern, that’s not deteriorated, that’s not run down,” Nelsen said “A brand new and a fresh start.”

The Martins’ are one of 35 families to move in to the new development this Saturday. Their 3-year-old daughter Chloey said her favorite part is the new playground. She was already making use of the slide Tuesday morning.

“We can’t wait to move in this weekend, before the holidays” Crystal Martins said. “To have family over to show them everything, our new place. It’s going to be great to share it with everybody.”