

THE PORTERVILLE RECORDER

No Place Like Home: Groundbreaking for Finca Serena held

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Wednesday's groundbreaking ceremony for the Finca Serena 80-unit, new affordable rental and supportive housing development, wasn't only the first of its kind in Porterville, it also carried a bit of the American Rental Dream with it — offering a safe, serene and supportive environment where Porterville's most vulnerable residents can thrive.

The project is for mixed-income families and will include apartments targeted for individuals with disabilities, or who are at risk of homelessness.

Held on the future site at 358 E. Street, the event was attended by several community leaders and finance partners who helped make the project possible.

"Once you have a house, you're not homeless," said Jessica Hoff Berzac, Co-Founder and Principal of UPholdings after offering a welcome and talking about the new complex for Porterville's vulnerable population who are seeking a safe place to call home.

The project near Downtown Porterville will have 80 apartments, including 40 one-bedrooms, 20 with two bedrooms, and 20 with three bedrooms.

In addition, the homes will offer laundry facilities, a playground, computer room, a large community space and nearby access to the river and local trails. The property also features 24-hour, live-in support staff who will provide access to job training, mental health services, and will work collaboratively with local agencies to ensure a healthy and safe community for residents and neighbors.

And not only are the homes green and efficient, said Hoff Berzac, but also affordable.

"After people pay for rent, they must still be able to pay for groceries and medical bills," she said. "We give them services to make it happen."

Hoff Berzac praised the City of Porterville and Tulare County Board of Supervisors.

"I joined the County's Task Force on Homelessness, partnered with Self Help and here we are," Hoff Berzac said. "The City of Porterville rolled out the red carpet. We have a tight partnership."

Hoff Berzac also advised people should pay attention and vote for things that affect the community, such as Proposition 1 and 2.

"Vote for things that create solutions to your community," she said.

She ended by thanking the City of Porterville and Tulare County for stepping up with some last minute financial needs for the project due to inflation and other causes.

Tulare County Supervisor Dennis Townsend, District 5 — an architect by trade — talked about the emotional state of designing a home. When designing a business structure, it's all about meeting all the criteria.

“But when you're designing a home, it's emotional,” he said as it will be a place that will tie individuals down, offer memories, and ground them.

“So you can imagine these experiences for the homeless,” he said. “Programs like this are a wonderful thing.”

Finca Serena — which he understood to be a serene family home — Townsen said, was the perfect name with some of the units designated for the ‘No Place Like Home’ program and he spoke about the community support for the families.

“Just imagine the wonderful difference this house project alone is going to make in the lives of the people,” Townsend said.

“The County of Tulare and our Health & Human Services Agency are committed to providing supportive resources to ensure the Finca Serena model is successful. This will become a community of support for some of our most vulnerable residents and families. Finca Serena will provide an opportunity for them to live in a safe environment. Tulare County is committed to providing the necessary supportive services to partner with families and individuals as they progress on their wellness journey at Finca Serena.”

Porterville Mayor Monte Reyes said he was honored to be at the ceremonial ground breaking and talked of how all the puzzle pieces were coming together and of the hard work that' =s making the project a reality in a beautiful setting.

Reyes ended by presenting City proclamations to Hof Berzac, and Tom Collishaw of Self Help Enterprises. “The Finca Serena development is an important step towards addressing the need for affordable housing, specifically housing for individuals experiencing homelessness in our community,” said Reyes. “The project is a result of the partnership and collaboration of UPholdings and Self-Help Enterprises as well as local, regional, and state agencies that have come together to bring the project to fruition.”

Collishaw talked about the importance of partnership and leadership, and of the power of opportunities.

“We are proud to partner with UPholdings on the first supportive housing development of its kind in Porterville,” said Collishaw, President and CEO of SHE, Self Help Enterprises. “We are committed to providing quality and affordable housing opportunities to ill-housed and un-housed families in the Valley. In addition to the 24- hour support staff, SHE's Resident Services team will offer robust onsite educational, financial, and wellness activities.”

With an expected completion timeline of Spring 2023, Finca Serena will soon offer a space where vulnerable Porterville residents can have a secure and affordable place to live and thrive.

“Finca Serena was developed and named with the intent of providing a safe and serene environment for vulnerable individuals and families here in Tulare County,” said Hoff Berzac. “At UPholdings we believe that housing is a human right and that peace can be achieved only when people have a secure place to call home. We are committed to our residents for the long haul, and we will continue to work collaboratively with our community partners to ensure Finca Serena residents will have both

the foundation of housing, as well as the supportive services needed for them to achieve their goals."

The program ended with several community leaders picking up the gold-colored shovels and joining in the official ground breaking ceremonies.

"The outcome now is a manifestation of a conversation that started two years ago," said City Manager John Lollis as he praised the strategic planning of the homelessness task force. "City Council has been very diligent saying we needed to provide sustainable solutions. "This doesn't mean it's over. There's more to come."