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With opening of Finca Serena, formerly homeless mother has a place to call home

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Jessica Fulton's life changed once she had a place for her and her daughter to call home. Fulton struggled with homelessness before moving into a new development in Porterville.

"I've been looking for a peaceful place to live for a long, long time. There are more people out there like me, and we do need more homes for them," Fulton said.

Finca Serena, which translates from Spanish to "Serene Estate," hosted a ribbon cutting this week, offering affordable housing for Porterville residents. The 80-unit complex is the first of its kind in the region and was created to provide a safe and serene environment for vulnerable individuals and families, according to a news release from the developers.

The development broke ground in October 2021 and is now leasing.

Finca Serena is located near downtown, offering amenities such as a large community room, courtyard, laundry facilities, a computer room and proximity to local trails. The complex has one- to three-bedroom units for mixed-income families, also including units set aside for low-income families and individuals with disabilities and who are at risk of homelessness.

Developers UPHoldings and Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) hosted a grand opening and ribbon cutting for Finca Serena on Wednesday. Several community leaders and finance partners attended along with Tulare County Supervisor Dennis Townsend, Porterville Mayor Martha A. Flores, Finca Serena resident Jessica Fulton and community supporters.

During the grand opening, Mayor Flores highlighted the importance of providing housing for residents of Porterville.

The development provides various on-site services and 24-hour, live-in support staff who provide job training and mental health services. The staff works collaboratively with local agencies to ensure a healthy and safe community for tenants and neighbors, according to the release.

“These units represent a new chapter for the residents. For those exiting homelessness, this is a transformative change in their lives, as housing is more than just a place to live — it is stability, community, and it is also essential to public health,” Flores said.

The lead service provider contributing project-based rental subsidies is Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) along with Kings Tulare Homeless Alliance (KTHA).

R.L. Davidson was the project architect. BJ Perch Construction was the general contractor. Gateway Engineering, Inc. was the project engineer. UPA, LLC + GSF Properties serves as the property manager and compliance agent.

Funding for the project comes from a variety of sources, including \$40.6 million from KeyBank Community Development Lending and Investment, a \$23.1 million construction loan, \$2.5 million permanent loan, \$15 million in low-income housing tax credit equity and \$17 million from the California Department of Housing and Community Development.