

# OUR VALLEY VOICE

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## Self-Help Enterprises Hosts Grand Opening Celebration and Ribbon Cutting for the Lofts at Fort Visalia

December 8, 2023



On Thursday, December 7th, Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) hosted a grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony for The Lofts at Fort Visalia, the nonprofit's new 80-unit multifamily complex located at 340 E. Oak Ave. in downtown Visalia. The event was attended by elected officials, community leaders, and development partners who helped make the project possible.

"The grand opening of the Lofts, on such a historically significant site, is cause for celebration. It's a new and exciting chapter for several community organizations, as well as our downtown quadrant," shares City of Visalia Mayor Brian Poochigian. "Most importantly, it's a celebration of growth and new beginnings for the community members who will call this space home."

"This is another significant step in addressing our housing needs in Tulare County," commented Tulare County Supervisor Amy Shuklian. "I'm always grateful for the collaboration that makes important projects like this happen."

The community offers affordable rents between approximately \$300-\$1,100/month for studio, 1-bedroom or 2-bedroom units. The Lofts will be home to the Visalia Arts Consortium and My Voice

Media Center, organizations that previously had an office on the “lumberyard” site. This partnership with local arts organizations will provide vibrant services to Lofts residents and the greater Visalia arts community. The new shared space is approximately 2,500 square feet and includes offices, storage, an acoustic center for My Voice Media Center, and a large central gallery for Arts Consortium programs and community events.

“I am very grateful to all of the partners who have come together in order to create the Lofts at Fort Visalia and especially the forward-thinking leader in this effort, Self-Help Enterprises,” said Ampelio Mejia Perez, Executive Director of The Arts Consortium. “Through this collaboration, our community will not only enjoy low-cost housing, but they will also have increased access to the arts and to mental health services.”

The celebration included the dedication of the Peter N. Carey Gallery, who worked at Self-Help Enterprises for over 40 years, including serving as SHE’s third President/CEO for nearly 25 years. Peter is a Visalia resident and served our community on the Planning Commission and City Council, including a term as Mayor. Peter is also an avid supporter of the arts scene in Visalia, playing a vital role in improving the Ice House Theater and The Creative Center. The Lofts celebrates the intersection of affordable housing, community partnerships, history, and art, all of which embody Peter’s life of service and impact in Visalia and the San Joaquin Valley region.

“The Lofts is truly a community asset, linking to Visalia’s history while investing in our present and in the future,” said Peter Carey. “It represents the very best of community development, and I feel incredibly honored to be a small part of it.”

“Self-Help Enterprises is working hard to build and sustain beautiful homes for local families,” said Assemblyman Vince Fong. “This project is a great example of how building new mixed-use housing strengthens communities. Visalia’s growth is an inspiration for other municipalities to follow.”

In addition to serving the needs of low-income residents, The Lofts reserves 40 units as Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) units, supporting formerly unhoused residents or those at risk of homelessness. A partnership with the Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance’s Coordinated Entry System helps to refer all incoming PSH residents. They will move into a fully furnished apartment and receive Welcome Home Kits, including essential household items such as bed linens, bath towels, and kitchenware.

The Lofts will also offer robust services including financial literacy, health, and wellness classes. The Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency has committed to providing and/or contracting for services to PSH households for the first 20 years of operations, and a private office is available in the community center, along with a larger group meeting space. The County has contracted with RH Community Builders to provide case management and behavioral health services.

The location of The Lofts is believed to be the original site of the fort that was constructed when settlers came to this region and established Visalia as a community. SHE conducted extensive site research and was intentional during excavation to ensure historical artifacts were not destroyed. In addition, Visalia Heritage prepared special project elements celebrating the site’s history, including a diorama of the original Fort Visalia and historical information on display in the Fort Visalia Heritage Room in the leasing office and Fort Visalia plaza.

“The Grand Opening of the Lofts at Fort Visalia represents a wonderful collaboration between Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) and Visalia Heritage – one that can serve as a model for future joint efforts,” expressed Visalia heritage member and local historian Terry Ommen. “Thanks to SHE, this very important Visalia site will be marked forever. This project reflects an appropriate and effective

melding of Visalia Heritage's respect for the past with SHE's hope for the future. Visalia Heritage looks forward to other community opportunities to make the richness of Visalia's past, a part of the town's future."

"The Lofts at Fort Visalia is the realization of a dream that SHE envisioned for this underutilized site for over a decade," said Tom Collishaw, President and CEO of Self-Help Enterprises (SHE). "It combines history, the arts, and desperately needed housing in a vital space that adds to the economic vitality and culture of downtown Visalia."

For more information on The Lofts at Fort Visalia development and other projects of Self-Help Enterprises, please visit [www.selfhelpenterprises.org](http://www.selfhelpenterprises.org).