

THE SUN-GAZETTE

The Lofts at Fort Visalia opens in downtown

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VISALIA – Locals, city and state leaders gathered in downtown Visalia for the opening of The Lofts at Fort Visalia and new Arts Consortium to celebrate the addition of the low-income housing site as well as pay homage to the lot's significance.

There was a full house at the grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony of The Lofts at Fort Visalia on Thursday, Dec. 8. People came to mingle and tour the apartments before the ceremony, which kicked off at 5:30 p.m.

“We approached the city about this site over 12 years ago with our dream to provide affordable housing opportunities in downtown Visalia, near transit and services,” CEO of SelfHelp Enterprises Tom Collishaw said.

Community leaders and elected officials highlighted the significance of this latest addition to the city. The new affordable housing project adds a total of 80 multifamily units in downtown Visalia, of which includes 40 units designated as Permanent Supportive Housing to offer onsite services in support of residents who were formerly unhoused or for anyone who is at risk of homelessness.

The site offers affordable rents between approximately \$300-\$1,100 a month for either a studio, one-bedroom or two-bedroom units.

Some noteworthy attendees at the event included Assemblymember Vince Fong (R-34), Vice Mayor of Visalia Brett Taylor and Tulare County Board of Supervisors Amy Shuklian, Larry Mircari and Eddie Valero.

“I couldn’t imagine anything having better use for this site than what is being used for right now,” Shuklian said during the grand opening ceremony. “Thank you for your vital role in providing affordable housing to the community of Visalia.”

One of the residents who has already moved into one of the apartments, Yolanda Guerrero, was also in attendance to explain how moving into one of the lofts has helped her get back on her feet.

For her story, Guerrero said she semi-recently found herself in a difficult patch after her husband of 32 years died suddenly in a motorcycle accident. She moved in with her daughter after the incident, and had a hard time getting approved for new housing due to her income before she moved into the Lofts of Fort Visalia.

“It has been life-changing,” Guerrero said. “I thank you all and I am so happy to have a home.”

The Lofts are also home to the Peter N. Carey Gallery, Visalia Arts Consortium and My Voice Media Center, all organizations that had an office on the former lumberyard site. This partnership with local arts organizations provides vibrant services to Lofts residents and the greater Visalia arts community.

“The My Voice Media Center is a program that helps people and adults with mental illnesses learn how they express themselves through art,” peer support specialist at My Voice Media Center Olivia Garza said. “We’re there for their families and their support systems.”

Lisa Hasegawa, the regional vice president of NeighborWorks – an organization focused on creating affordable housing for lower-income families – explained that the Peter N. Carey Gallery was named after the acting chief operating officer of Self Help when the project was started, Peter Carey.

The project also pays homage to the rich history of the site. Before it became the Lofts, the housing complex was a place where the Fort Visalia stood as the first wooden structure in the 1850s in what later became the city of Visalia. The plaza and heritage room at the front of the lofts explain the significance of the site and go into detail about the history of the start of the community.