

VISALIA TIMES DELTA

Rancho Colegio brings 80 units of affordable housing to Visalia

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Self-Help Enterprises celebrated the grand opening of [Rancho Colegio](#), a new 80-unit affordable rental community in Visalia, with a ribbon-cutting on March 6.

The project was funded by government grants and contributions from community organizations, including a land donation from Colegio de la Tierra, an education institution with a longstanding tradition of service to local farmworker families.

[Self-Help Enterprises](#) CEO Tom Collishaw started the brief program that preceded the ribbon-cutting by defining Rancho Colegio.

“It is our newest affordable rental housing project in Visalia, and it honors the legacy of this property as hallowed ground for area farmworkers and their families,” he said. “It’s 80 units of permanently affordable housing, all of which serves lower-income households.”

Twenty units are set aside for farmworkers and their families, he added.

The project consists of one, two, and three-bedroom units, with the lowest rent slightly over \$525 for a single, and rent for three-bedroom units starting at \$730.

“It has a graduated scale, but the top rents here are no more than about \$1,200, which makes it the most affordable new rental project in Visalia, and well below market rent,” Collishaw said.

“This is an exciting and meaningful day for our community, and it’s always extra special when we’re able to work with community partners and celebrate the completion of such an amazing project,” Visalia Mayor Brett Taylor said. “Today, we’re not celebrating just the completion of a project, but we’re actually opening up the doors of nearly 80 units for family members here in our community.”

Brett went on to say that the housing complex was designed to meet the community’s need.

“The city of Visalia was proud to invest \$1.3 million in federal home funds to help make this development a reality,” he said. “The investment reflects our city council’s strong and ongoing commitment to housing opportunities that strengthen neighborhoods across our city.”

Rancho Colegio is more than just housing, he added.



"It's a community built with purpose," Brett said. "Those who will call Rancho Colegio home will have access to on-site services that create pathways to opportunity, including job training, medical service, financial education and homebuyer education."

Taylor mentioned some of the amenities of the project including the community center, outdoor recreation, laundry facilities, computer labs and "spaces to connect and grow."

"For the youngest residents, it means a stable place to play and to study," he said. "For adults, it means a community of opportunities and connections. For everyone, it's a place that they will be able to call home."

Bea Hernandez, Colegio de la Tierra board member, talked about living on the north side of Visalia years ago, married with five children, when she met a young man passing out flyers.

"He came over to me and said, 'Hey, do you want to go to college?'" she said. "He went on to tell me about a Chicano college in Goshen called Colegio de la Tierra. While he was talking to me, I quickly told him that I had five children – two in school and three at home, including a set of twins that were three years old.

"He looked at me and he said, 'No problem. We have childcare,'" she said. "Wow. My heart was pounding. Going back to school and getting my education was unbelievable. It was something that I had always wanted to do. Without checking with my husband or my mother, I just said yes."

In the fall of 1976, Hernandez became a full-time student at Colegio de la Tierra where she took accounting classes, improved her Spanish, and learned about farming and the farmworkers' issues.

"At Colegio, I learned that we could actually help change things to make it a better place to live in," Hernandez said. "I went to rallies, and there I met a person who gave everything to make a difference in the lives of so many, Cesar Chavez. I learned about community involvement, and how important it is to vote, and the importance of speaking up when injustice occurs.

"I had never before been exposed to people like them," she said. "It was just inspiring. They taught me to look at the world through different eyes.

"Now, it is my honor to be here today as a board member of Colegio de la Tierra, to celebrate the opening of Rancho Colegio," she said.

"There's a word in the name of this place that carries deep meaning in our part of the world – 'Rancho,'" Tulare County Supervisor Eddie Valero said. "In the Central Valley, a rancho has always been about belonging. A rancho is where people gather after long days in the fields, where children run across open ground and imagine their future, where neighbors become family and community becomes identity. A rancho is where roots are planted and where hope grows strong enough to last generations.

"We believe that when we work together, there's no limit to what our communities can achieve," Valero said. "That's why developments like Rancho Colegio are important, because it represents roots being planted, it represents families finding stability, and it represents children growing up with possibility instead of uncertainty."

Collishaw returned to the podium talk about the project's finances and thanked the organizations and government entities that made it happen.

"First are the 9% low-income housing tax credits and our generous private investor, U.S Bank, who made an investment of over \$20 million in this project," he said. "We thank them sincerely."



He thanked the city of Visalia for contributing \$1.3 million.

"We also enjoyed getting almost \$2 million from the Affordable Housing Program of the Federal Home Loan Bank, and our sponsor is Community West Bank," Collishaw said. "The backbone of the financing comes from our most important single financing partner, which is the Department of Housing and Community Development at the state of California."

For the project, Department of Housing and Community Development made awards from the Multifamily Housing Program of over \$3.6 million and the Joe Serna Jr. Farmworker Housing Grant Program at over \$10 million, according to Collishaw.

“Rancho Colegio represents more than new housing,” said Melissa Harty-Swaleh, from the California Department of Housing and Community Development. “It’s an investment in the long-term growth of community resilience, economic stability, and improved quality of life for families who will call this development home. This project stands as a strong example of what is possible through partnership, commitment, and a shared vision.”

After thanking the California Coalition for Rural Housing, CSET, and some of the key members of Self-Help Enterprises, Collishaw introduced one of the residents of Colegio de la Tierra.

“I just want to take a moment to say how grateful I am, and what an honor it is to be here,” said resident Shonna Salter. “Moving into this new home means more to me than words will express. Before this opportunity, I had been living in room and boards for years. It was very difficult in a very toxic environment. It didn’t feel safe and it didn’t feel peaceful.

“Today, I stand here in a different place, physically, mentally, and emotionally,” she said. “This apartment is priceless to me. It is stability, it is peace, and it is a fresh start. Now, I can plan. I can grow. I can dream again. This means more to me than you’ll ever know.”