

Leaders break ground on 55-unit housing complex

By ERIC LINDBERG — Jan. 14, 2010

Local youth transitioning out of foster care or struggling to get off the streets will soon have a wider safety net after community leaders broke ground yesterday on a 55-unit housing complex in downtown Santa Barbara.

Artisan Court, the 42,678 square-foot facility going up at 420 E. Cota St., will offer affordable studio apartments to emancipated youth as well as low-income downtown workers and people with special needs.

“This is going to be an important solution for youth who become homeless just because they had their 18th birthday,” said Lynn Karlson, executive director of YMCA’s Youth and Family Services in Santa Barbara.

Spearheaded by the Housing Authority of Santa Barbara, the \$17-million project includes two-story and three-story sections, a garden, courtyards and free high-speed Internet for residents.

YMCA and PathPoint, a local nonprofit that offers work training, will provide onsite support services at the complex, including workshops and classes in job skills, job placement and financial competency.

“It’s about creating successful tenancy, especially for people who need more than just a roof over their head,” said Cindy Burton, CEO of PathPoint.

While other affordable housing complexes offer a place to live to low-income residents or those transitioning out of homelessness, Artisan Court will be one of the few facilities in the county to provide a home to youth that leave the foster care system.

Karlson said another eight-bed facility that serves youth typically receives 70 referrals a year, a sign of the growing need for housing for emancipated youth. Roughly 40 youth transition out of foster care every year, and a study found that 32 percent of emancipated youth in 2007 were homeless after six months.

As a court-appointed special advocate, Karlson said she worked with a boy named David, who had been shuffled through the foster system and seemed to disappear after turning 18. David’s father and older brother were in prison and his mother had substance abuse problems, Karlson said, and she has no idea where he is now.

“Our program at Artisan Court would have given him a chance he never had,” she said.

During a groundbreaking ceremony at the site, newly sworn Mayor Helene Schneider wielded a golden sledgehammer and delivered three solid whacks to the base of the building in her first official ceremonial act as the city’s leader.

“Who needs a gavel when you have one of these,” she said, gesturing to the sledgehammer.

Schneider, who has made homelessness and housing issues a cornerstone of her political career, referred to the future 55-unit complex as El Carrillo 2.0, referencing a successful affordable housing venture across town.

“What a great addition to the area,” she said, “especially being across the street from Transition House.”

Rental rates at Artisan Court will range between \$408 and \$817 for each 450 square-foot studio apartment, and Section 8 subsidies may be available as well.

Rob Pearson, executive director of the housing authority, praised the city’s redevelopment agency for contributing \$5.2 million to the project, saying the agency’s participation is “the only way we would get this done.”

Additional funding is being provided by the housing authority and federal tax credits, as well as a loan through the federal stimulus program.

“This project is economic stimulus with a capital E,” Pearson said, noting that the yearlong construction will employ local workers.