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Valencia Grove residents, operators give thanks for Redlands project

By Kristina Hernandez, Redlands Daily Facts

Thursday, September 29, 2016



REDLANDS >> Gail Eckel is happy to be a part of the [Valencia Grove housing community](#).

She has been in her apartment since April, but still worries it isn't decorated to her liking.

"Please excuse the mess," she said Thursday. "I still have so many pictures to hang up."

Eckel is one of dozens who currently call the housing complex home. And on Thursday, the 70-year-old shared her story with those who oversaw the complex's construction during a grand opening

celebration, one that had been decades in the making.

Previously a resident of the Lugonia projects where Valencia Grove now sits, Eckel moved back to the area when the complex's first phase of construction was complete.

She had reservations about leaving her previous home to accommodate construction plans, but when she returned to the area, Eckel was happy to discover her new home's layout and a new washer and dryer inside.

"I truly appreciate our new architectural design built in the style of Redlands, along with the green development which means maintaining and restoring the balance and nature in our environment," she told those in attendance.

The multi-million dollar project still has two phases of construction until its formally completed. But the Housing Authority of San Bernardino County wanted to thank those involved with the project, including Perea Construction, Housing Partners I Inc., and the city of Redlands, during Thursday's celebration.

Representatives from all entities spoke briefly about the project, but it was Eckel's story that put a face to why it matters.

"Thank you to all of our partners for helping build this community that's not only transforming our community and the lives of our residents, but also contributing to the greater good of our county and the city of Redlands," said Maria Razo, executive director for Housing Authority of San Bernardino County.

The three-phase construction project replaces a more than 70-year-old rental home community on the corner of Lugonia Avenue and Orange Street. Units now have a modernized look and energy-efficient amenities. The site was San Bernardino County's first public housing project when built in the 1940s.

[Ground broke on the overhaul of the site in summer 2012](#), with demolition of 62 of the original 115 units taking place months later. The first phase included the construction of 85 new affordable units with garages on the first floor and cost \$34 million to complete. It was funding through low-income housing tax credits, tax-exempt bonds and conventional financing, according to Housing Authority.

The project saw many delays during the construction process, leading to a grand jury report detailing some of the problems, notably the departure of the original contractor, Clayton Homes.

Once complete, Valencia Grove will offer 228 units with three park/playground areas, a recreational center with a swimming pool and an educational facility.

The second and third construction phases will follow when funds become available.

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