

'New Westpark Digs Almost Done; Tenants Soon to Come'

By Tom Giratikanon



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With a jazz band playing and guests munching on chocolate-dipped strawberries, the Bremerton Housing Authority celebrated the near-completion of a low-income, assisted-living complex on Friday afternoon.

A parade of officials praised the partnerships and financing that produced the 72-unit Bay Vista Commons. Bremerton City Councilman Will Maupin said it was part of the city's rebirth.

"It's a symbol that the revitalization of Bremerton isn't limited to the downtown part," Maupin said. "It's happening in Westpark, too."

Bay Vista Commons is part of a \$300 million project to redevelop the Westpark neighborhood, now primarily public-housing units.

From 1 to 4 p.m. on Saturday, the public is invited to view the building at 191 Russell Road, just off Kitsap Way.

Residents will begin moving in within a few weeks, said Lee Field, CEO of Senior Services of America, the company managing the units. Bay Vista Commons is an innovative project that will draw imitators, Field said. "We're going to see more and more of this," he said.

Most tenants will pay 30 percent of their income as rent while Medicaid picks up daily assistance costs. Six units will be sold at market rates. Residents with Alzheimer's will live in 12 memory-care units. This secure wing has circular paths where residents can walk around freely but can't wander away.

Clarence Nelson, a BHA official who helped conceive Bay Vista Commons, emphasized the standard of living that the building makes accessible to those who normally couldn't afford it. "You can be a low-income person and live in a quality building," Nelson said.

Started in December 2005, the construction is finishing a little late. BHA had aimed for a \$12 million project to be done in March and got a \$14 million one done in August, said Kurt Wiest, executive director of BHA.

He said weather and the competition for materials and labor were factors, but overall, the construction went smoothly.

"It's been remarkably consistent," Wiest said. There was at least one surprise though. While digging one of the building's foundations, Jim Cave, project manager for Marathon Development, said he found a giant void in the earth that measured about 1,500 cubic feet. The last ice age had deposited a large ice cube there, he surmised, but the cube had subsequently melted away, leaving behind nothing but air.

Though the apartments are just about complete, BHA still has a long way to go in the rest of the Westpark project, Wiest said.

After getting federal approval last week, BHA can now begin to move residents, sell lots to developers, and design and build new units on the 82-acre site. It plans to demolish all 571 existing units and replace them with 790 units of mixed-income homes.

BHA is also applying for federal relocation vouchers, needed to help residents move to other sites, and a \$20 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The overall Westpark redevelopment is scheduled for completion in 2011.

"We're finishing phase one in a magnificent way," Wiest said. "Our intention is to continue to redevelop the rest of Westpark."