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After years of talking about the rebirth of West Park, Aug. 17 made the first part of that dream a reality as soft whispers of smooth jazz welcomed guests to the grand opening of the Bay Vista Commons.

The 72-unit assisted living facility is the first phase in the overall redevelopment of Westpark, which is expected to take several more years.

"This has been a difficult building for lots of reasons, but it is one that is sorely needed in this community," BHA board of directors president Lynn Horton said.

With 60 assisted living units and 12 memory-care units, the facility is designed to meet the growing need for affordable assisted living units, Horton said.

"I think this will be of great comfort to people in the community, now and in the future," Horton said.

Bremerton City Council President Will Maupin said when he was appointed to the council in 2001, he "heard there was something big going on in Westpark."

"To us on the city council back then, there was a lot of motion, but not a lot of progress going on," Maupin said.

"However, that perception has changed during the past two years as the BHAs leadership team has pushed the project forward," he said.

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

Maupin said he was "impressed with the overall quality of the facility" and said, "I think it's a good preview of what we can expect with the rest of Westpark."

"Two years ago, the BHA was given a challenge," Horton said, referring to consolidation discussions with the Kitsap County Consolidated Housing Authority.

"In many regards that's one of the best things to happen to the housing authority," Horton said. "Sometimes you need a push."

Mayor Cary Bozeman, who has exhorted the BHA to move ahead with the redevelopment of Westpark, thanked all those involved for stepping up to the challenge.

"I have no doubts we will get this done," Bozeman said. "Well done, well done."

Marathon Development president Ted Johnson said the event marked "only the beginning of what is to come." The building's almost finished, Johnson said. We look forward to moving on Westpark now.

Mike Miller of Rice Fergus Miller, which designed the building, said his firm was "grateful for the opportunity to assist with the project." "It's been said that it takes time to develop good things and I think this is one of them," Miller said.

Although the facility is owned by the BHA, it will be operated by Senior Services of America, which specializes in assisted living communities.