

Aptos Blue celebrates housing for 40 families



Grand opening of the Aptos Blue housing complex behind the Community Foundation off Soquel Drive.

DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

\$22M project close to shopping, transit

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APTOS » The first night Laura Contreras spent in her new home, she cried.

Now 22 and raising a 2-year-old, housing had been a series of rooms since she became an adult, but never a home. That was impossible for someone going to school and working and trying to put together a life in high-priced Santa Cruz County.

Then a co-worker told her about Aptos Blue, a \$22 million, 40-unit low-income development that celebrated its grand opening Wednesday.

"Because I know how difficult it is to find affordable housing, I'm very grateful to have a home in Aptos Blue," Contreras said.

Situated on 5 acres between Rancho del Mar Shopping Center and The Forest of Nisene Marks, Aptos Blue is a much-needed development serving residents making less than 50 percent of area median income.

Officials, including U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, praised the project for its proximity to public transit, parks, a library and shopping. The units are tucked inside six two- and three-story buildings, and the project includes the renovation of Aptos' historic Castro House, built in 1877 by rancher Vicente Castro and now serving as a community meeting space for residents.

But the project was not without controversy, as some neighbors objected, with some singling out five units set aside for residents suffering mental illness. The county has done that in other developments, and Santa Cruz County Supervisor Neal Coonerty said it is needed to help get people lead productive lives.

"I'm really grateful for the fact that that was part of the project," Coonerty said.

The units are efficiently designed, with open common areas and small bedrooms. The kitchens have refrigerators, stoves and dishwashers, and many units have balconies

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Aptos Blue housing complex on Aptos Rancho Road behind Community Foundation. The 40-unit, low-income development celebrated its grand opening Wednesday.

"It's going to be a real center and anchor (for resident) and one I think Vicente Castro would be proud of, as we are."

— MidPen Housing president Matthew O. Franklin

+ **Online:** To view a video of the grand opening of Aptos Blue, a \$22 million, 40-unit low-income development in Aptos, visit SANTACRUZSENTINEL.COM and click on this story.

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overlooking a courtyard and small playground. The complex is named after the sometimes-used name for adjacent coastal redwood trees.

The project was developed by MidPen Housing, one of the Bay Area's largest providers of affordable housing. The agency also

is coordinating services for residents that include an after-school program, computer lab, financial literacy course and vocational guidance.

MidPen president Matthew O. Franklin said there were 400 applications for the 40 units, which are now inhabited by a diverse group of residents that include paramedics, teachers and baristas.

"It's going to be a real

center and anchor (for resident) and one I think Vicente Castro would be proud of, as we are," Franklin said.

Farr added his compliments of the project, saying the affordable housing is a foundation for many people trying to lift themselves up.

"You can't break poverty or drug addiction or street living until you have a safe place to live," Farr said.