Historic Houses - Central

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$500,000 renovation revives Heiner House

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SANTA CRUZ — The Heiner House, one of Santa Cruz's Victorian-era homes, took center stage Tuesday, its renovation as a home for low-income single parents and kids celebrated.

"Without it, I would be homeless," said Lupe Ortiz, who moved into the Heiner House a month ago with her son, Gabriel, 2. "It's hard to find a place for a child, even sharing a house."

Instead of being homeless, Ortiz will pay $276 a month rent, attend Cabrillo College and will have a housekeeper twice a week.

The Heiner House is a collaboration between the Santa Cruz Community Housing Corporation and Manos de Amigos: Nuestra Opportunidad para la Superacion ("Hands of Friends: Our Opportunity for Success.")

Community Housing Corporation, at a cost of $584,686, moved the house from its former location on Chestnut Street to the new site at the corner of Elm and Center streets, and renovated it.

Manos found the residents, all low-income single parents who are completing their education. Along with housing, the parents receive career planning, job placement, parenting classes, stress management, and financial advise, according to Joan Junquiera of Manos.

"Basically this is like an incubator for people, not for businesses," she said.

Residents started moving into the five-bedroom home a month ago. The home will be shared by two mothers, a father, and four children, all boys, between the ages of 2 and 17, said Junquiera.

Originally built in 1877 as a double tenement, the Heiner House was purchased by the city in 1970 for $25,000. It housed the city's Parks and Recreation Department until 1989, when the building was damaged by the Loma Prieta earthquake.

The city sold the house to Community Housing Corporation for $1 after determining that it would cost more to repair it for office space than to construct another building.

The house was moved in November to a lot left vacant by the demolition of another earthquake-damaged Victorian, the Dreher house.

The house was gutted inside to transform it to a single residential dwelling, an outside deck added on the second floor and the ground floor was made accessible to people using wheelchairs, according to Geoffrey Mayer, project manager for Community Housing Corporation.

The ground floor now includes a shared kitchen, dining room, living room, study, bathroom, and coin-operated washers and dryers. Upstairs are four bedrooms, a shared bathroom and south-facing deck.

Rents are $276 a month, which includes utilities and housekeeping for the shared areas, and are permanently restricted to remain affordable to very low-income residents.

"It certainly beats knocking it down, which was one of the things being considered," said Councilman Mike Rotkin who attended the grand opening celebration. To celebrate its

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The Heiner House, top photo, after its renovation. Gabriel and Lupe Ortiz, and Virginia Lopez, above are residents in the completed Heiner House.

renovation, Santa Cruz Mayor Scott Kennedy declared Tuesday "Heiner House Day" in Santa Cruz.

Councilman Louis Rittenhouse, who did not attend the festivities, had a lower opinion. "It's a gross, excessive expenditure of federal and contributed funds," he said. "It's wasteful spending."

Mayer said the final cost of $584,686 was not far off from $562,030 estimated in 1991. The higher costs were to replace rotted timber which was more extensive than thought, he said.

He said costs are often higher for non-profit housing developments than they would be for market-rate housing for a comparable unit. That is generally true of all low-income housing developments, he said.

Financing was provided by loans and grants from the city, the state California Disaster Assistance Program, the Henry Cowell Foundation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union and Manos. Manos also is sponsoring a capital fund drive to raise $55,000 toward the project.