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ANITA LECHUGA, SEASIDE APARTMENTS RESIDENT

Housing fight won

S.C. apartments will remain low income



Victory

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rents. In those cases, most residents receive vouchers that allow them to continue paying the same rent. But when they leave, the owners can charge as much as they like.

And that is what Seaside residents were aiming to prevent. So they called on the help of a burgeoning affordable-housing movement in the county, working with a professional organizer, the countywide advocacy group Central Coast Interfaith Sponsors, Mercy Housing California, the Live Oak Family Resource Center, the Board of Supervisors and Rep. Sam Farr.

"I think it was the combination of everyone who worked with us that led to this result," said Anita Lechuga, who moved into the apartments when they opened 20 years ago. "And I think it shows that residents can work together to keep affordable housing in the county. I'm hoping we can be a model for others."

Contact Heather Boerner at hboerner@santa-cruz.com.

Housing
By HEATHER BOERNER
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

LIVE OAK — In perhaps the first victory for affordable-housing advocates, the residents of the Seaside Apartments convinced the owner of their building to re-enroll in the program that allows them to live there cheaply.

Apartment managers Davidson and Kavanaugh Development in San Jose informed residents last month that they had reconsidered plans to turn the apartments into market-rate rentals.

It was welcome news to residents like Willie May Johnson, a mother who moved into the building at the corner of 30th Avenue and Brommer Street seven years ago to have a safe, clean place for her daughter to live.

"It's such a relief," she said. "I was just waiting to see what would happen, because if I couldn't stay here, I would have to move out of this area, and I didn't want that."

The residents are holding a party Wednesday to celebrate the owners' decision and have invited the owners, representatives of the Housing Authority of Santa Cruz County, affordable-housing advocates and Supervisor Jan Beautz, who represents the area.



Lenaya Snell, a representative of the management firm, wouldn't say why the group decided to ask the federal Housing and Urban Development department to allow the firm to re-enroll in the program. The managers sent a letter to HUD recently asking to continue admitting residents who can prove their low-income status and then charge them a third of their income. The firm proposes to stay in the program for five years.

Snell would not comment further.

There are nine apartment complexes in Santa Cruz County that could see their contracts expire this year, and another nine that will see similar contracts expire in coming years.

Some, such as the Villa San Carlos Apartments on Soquel Drive, opted out and saw tenants leave. Such contracts expire after about 20 years and then the owners have the option of staying on the program or opting out and charging market-rate

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Anita Lechuga, above, has lived at the low-income Seaside Apartments complex at 30th Avenue and Brommer Street, left, for 20 years.

Dan Coyro/
Sentinel photos