

Low-cost housing developer makes dreams come true

Dana Perrigan, Special to The Chronicle

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For Teresa Benavides and Michael Perry, the new three-story building at 99 Oak Ave. in South San Francisco is so much more than a pleasing arrangement of concrete, wood, drywall, glass, paint, pipe and wire.

It is - as detective Sam Spade commented while gazing at the Maltese Falcon in the classic movie of the same name - the stuff dreams are made of.

A divorced mother of three who suffered debilitating injuries from a horseback riding accident, Benavides had spent the past three years living with her children in a relative's garage. Perry, who became a quadriplegic after an auto accident in 1984, had been living with his mother. Now both, after a long, seemingly hopeless search for clean, safe and affordable housing, have found just that at BRIDGE Housing's Grand Oak Apartments.

"It's amazing," says Benavides. "My children were so excited when we walked in and saw all the sunlight streaming into the apartment. They were making carpet angels on the carpet and running around saying, 'Oh my gosh, I've got my own room!'"

"Being in my own home is just a wonderful experience," says Perry, who lives in his two-bedroom apartment with a full-time caregiver and spends much of his time painting abstract expressionistic oils and watercolors. "I've become more independent with the move. I feel like I have more energy. It's really worked out well for me."

Built within walking distance of schools, shopping centers, BART and other public transportation routes, Grand Oak Apartments is a joint development of South San Francisco, San Mateo County and BRIDGE Housing - the state's leading nonprofit developer of affordable housing that, since being founded in 1983, has built more than 12,000 homes for 35,000 Californians.

The county donated the 1.15-acre site, while the city's redevelopment agency provided \$3.5 million of the \$17.3 million in development costs. The state's Department of Housing and Community Development supported the project with a \$4.6 million loan. "We spent a lot of time working on the design," says Lydia Tan, executive vice president of BRIDGE Housing. "There's a new neighborhood across the way and we met with neighbors who were concerned about the density."



Grand Oak Apartments consists of 43 apartments, 38 of which are town homes. The five one-bedrooms range from 576 to 600 square feet and rent for \$385 to \$915 per month, depending upon the income of the occupant.

The 23 two-bedroom apartments, from 743 to 1,002 square feet, rent for \$465 to \$1,200 a month. The 15 three-bedroom apartments, 1,102 to 1,330 square feet, rent for \$540 to \$1,200 a month. All apartments are occupied.

Tan says that, while the need for affordable housing is great in the Bay Area, it is often difficult to find land upon which to develop.

Benavides and Perry don't have to be reminded how great the need is for affordable housing. "There was absolutely nothing available, nothing at all," said Benavides, who was almost in despair of finding anything for her family. "The thing that was really disheartening was that there was so much housing discrimination going on. There would be an offer, I'd show up with the children and suddenly the housing would evaporate."

"I had been looking for housing for the past five years and I couldn't find anything," Perry said. "I have a lot of gratitude for the people at BRIDGE. They really did a good thing."

E-mail Dana Perrigan at perrigan2000@yahoo.com.

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