

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Lake Forest to open new affordable-housing units

[BY SCOTT BOSCO](#)

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LAKE FOREST – The city celebrated the closing of escrow of four affordable-housing apartment units with its nonprofit partner, Families Forward, on Sept 18.

“Today’s Saguaro rehabilitation kickoff event was a celebration of the start of construction and the partnership between the city and Families Forward to provide affordable housing in Lake Forest,” said Jessica Gonzales, Lake Forest economic development and housing manager, via email.

The four units at 23201 Saguaro St. include three two-bedroom apartment and one three-bedroom apartment.

Families Forward will lease the two-bedroom units to families whose annual income is below 80 percent of the county’s median annual income of \$80,950 for a five-person household.

The three-bedroom unit will house a family whose annual income is below 50 percent of the county’s median annual income.

“With the cost of living and the cost of rents, families are just so precarious in their ability to sustain their families,” said Margie Wakeham, executive director at Families Forward. “And so this is one answer to that.”

Wakeham said the purpose of the affordable housing is to help working families in Lake Forest.

“What we see is this very tentative and very at-risk group of folks, primarily the workers that support industries in the county,” Wakeham said. “Affordable housing allows families to normalize in a community; by that I mean they can get a job, they can clean themselves up and they have an address.”

The renovation project team consists of project managers HomeAid, architects Bassenian Lagoni, landscape architect Stantec and construction managers Brookfield and Marx Okubo.

The properties will undergo a complete renovation, said Tracie McCloskey, a Families Forward board member and an interior designer. Renovations include new floors, drywall and lighting, new interior and exterior paint, new stone countertops, new bathrooms, patios, landscaping and more.

“It will really look like a brand-new home,” McCloskey said.

The Lake Forest Redevelopment Agency acquired the property in 2011 for \$925,750 to pursue an affordable-housing project with a nonprofit, affordable-housing provider.

After the Redevelopment Agency dissolved in 2012, the property was transferred to the Lake Forest Housing Authority, which selected Families Forward as the nonprofit partner.

The city sold the four units to Families Forward for \$200,000 and is providing the organization a grant of up to \$400,000 to renovate the property.

“This project has been five years in the making,” Wakeham said.

Residents in the neighborhood had mixed feeling about the project.

"I think it is great," Edward Carrillo said. "I'd rather have it controlled than have it independent. They raised the rent too high."

Other residents, including Michelle Ruthford, a 13-year Saguaro resident, said things were better when the neighborhood was independently owned.

"When I first moved here, it was full of drug people," Ruthford said. "A lot of renters raised the rent to get people out of here, which made a difference. It is a lot better than it used to be."

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