

Burlington County Times

Wednesday, September 16, 2015 11:45 pm

By Todd McHale

New senior affordable housing development opens in Florence



A ceremony that celebrated the transformation of the Marcella L. Duffy School in Florence into affordable housing for seniors.

FLORENCE — A building once used to educate the township’s youth will serve seniors for years to come.

Local, county, state and federal officials joined Moorestown Ecumenical Neighborhood Development, MEND, and Conifer LLC of Mount Laurel to celebrate the opening of the new Duffy Senior Apartments on West Second Street on Wednesday night.

“What we’re doing is we’re cutting the ribbon on the next chapter of all of our residents' lives and we hope those lives will be warm and wonderful and tremendous as long as they live here,” said Matthew Reilly, president and CEO of MEND.

MEND, along with its partners, transformed the Marcella L. Duffy School into the affordable housing development with 53 one-bedroom apartments, a community room, gymnasium, auditorium and a host of other amenities.

“This project is a wonderful example of preserving our history by saving this facility and repurposing it in a manner that will serve the community,” Reilly said.

The \$14 million redevelopment project was funded with Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits, Federal Historic Tax Credits, Florence Township Affordable Housing Trust Funds, Burlington County HOME funds, and a construction loan from TD Bank.

New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Charles Richman credited the town for doing the right thing for its older residents and was impressed with how well the project turned out.

“What you have here is a thing of beauty,” Richman said. “This is terrific.”

New residents couldn’t agree more.

“Whoever did all of this had good taste,” Migdalia Dicupe said. “It’s perfect and safe. I love it.”

Resident Melva Gilyni said she attended the school decades ago and knew educator Marcella Duffy.

“She used to have this tapping committee,” Gilyni said of Duffy. “If you danced too close they would tap on your shoulder and we would have to stop and we would have to leave.”

Regardless, she said Duffy “was a wonderful person and kept the school nice.”

And now it will be her home for years to come, which is fine with Gilyni.

“It’s like high luxury living to me,” she said.

Mayor Craig Wilkie, who also attended school there, said the project “preserves a part of history and fabric of Florence.”

Thirty-five of the apartments are in the old school and the remaining units are in a new three-story addition on the eastern side of the building, which fronts on West Second Street.

The project is the second affordable housing development celebrating an opening this week.

On Thursday, Burlington City plans to celebrate a grand opening of The Apartments at The Mill, an affordable housing community consisting of 65 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments for low- to moderate-income households.



Photos by William Johnson