

Toggle navigation

Burlington County Times



New Jersey's Community Newspaper of the Year



Officials gather in September to celebrate the opening of the Duffy School Apartments in Florence. "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.

By Todd McHale, staff writer Nov 4, 2015

Florence honored for redevelopment of historic school

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.

FLORENCE — The township has received high marks from a statewide affordable housing association for turning a former school into homes for dozens of seniors.

The Housing and Community Development Network awarded Florence with an "Outstanding Municipal Partner" honor for the Duffy School Apartments for Seniors.

The award is in recognition of the township's leadership and commitment to the creation of affordable homes.

"It's a great honor," Mayor Craig Wilkie said of the township being recognized for a project years in the making.

"It's always nice when you get some recognition when you take on something that others haven't been able to get done," Wilkie said of the project the township partnered with Moorestown Ecumenical Neighborhood Development, MEND, to turn the Marcella L. Duffy School on West Second Street into 53 one-bedroom apartments along with a community room, gymnasium, auditorium and a host of other amenities.

"Between MEND and the township we worked together to save a historic building that will provide good affordable housing for people," Wilkie said of the school.

The \$14 million redevelopment project, 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, opened for seniors in the fall.

Matthew Reilly, president of MEND, said the township deserves some credit for taking on such a project at the more than a century-old school.

"It takes a lot of hard work and cooperation on the part of the municipalities to get these projects in place," Reilly said. "Quite frankly not all municipalities in New Jersey put out the same effort to get affordable housing built and I think Florence Township just put out an outstanding effort."

In addition to contributing \$1 million toward the project, the township also deeded the land to MEND for a dollar along with several other measures to ensure it would be a success, Reilly said.

Given the redevelopment met all the requirements of the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office and National Park Service the school will be listed on the state and federal registries of historic places.

The mayor appreciated MEND's assistance in getting the building listed on the registry of historic places.

"These are great things, good stuff," Wilkie said.

He added that new resident Melva Gilyni, who attended the school decades ago and knew educator Marcella Duffy, described the affordable housing project best.

"They used to call it low-income housing, but this is high-end — million-dollar housing," Wilkie recalled Gilyni stating at a ribbon cutting in September.

He also expressed his gratitude to MEND and all those involved in helping to bring the project to a successful conclusion.

"(MEND) put a good high-quality product out there and preserved a great building," Wilkie said.