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First low-income family housing communities open at Irvine's Great Park Neighborhoods

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Local representatives, contributors, and neighbors pose for a photo as they cut a ribbon for a grand opening at Espira Apartments in Irvine on Friday, Oct. 27, 2017.
(Photo by Kyusung Gong/Contributing Photographer)

IRVINE — The first two all-affordable housing communities for low-income families in the developing Great Park Neighborhoods are now open, featuring clubhouses, a pool and a dog park.

The rent prices at the Luminaira and Espira apartment communities range from \$657 to \$943 for two-bedroom and \$742 to \$1,029 for three-bedroom, compared to the average asking rent of about \$1,800 for apartments in Orange County. Two-bedroom units are 809-842 square feet, and three-bedroom units 1,076-1,129 square feet.

The units are available only to households that make less than 50 percent of the area's median income adjusted for household size. For example, the income limit for a family of three is \$43,900.

"It's important to have affordable housing because it gives an opportunity to folks to come to Irvine and realize a dream

they might not otherwise be able to realize and that strengthens our community,” Mayor Don Wagner said at the grand opening event Friday, Oct. 28.

Still, the 82-unit Luminaira and 84-unit Espaira communities, across the street from each other, offer amenities and exteriors designed to blend in with the urban architecture of the surrounding Parasol Park neighborhood to take away stigma against affordable housing, officials said.

“No one would even know looking at them that they are affordable housing,” said Bill Witte, CEO of Related California, which worked with developer FivePoint to build Luminaira and Espaira. “They become part of the community.”

Luminaira is now fully leased, and Espaira will have its units filled by the end of the year, Related California officials said.

The communities are no longer accepting applications.

The affordable housing project was a requirement for FivePoint, which oversees the development of 9,500 homes around the Orange County Great Park.

Wijdan and Mehdi Abbas moved into a three-bedroom apartment at Luminaira after it opened in June.

The couple said they immediately fell in love with Irvine, especially its people and reputable schools, after moving there from Los Angeles seven years ago.

But after years of trying to get into affordable housing with no success, the couple with four sons could no longer afford to live in the master-planned community, said Wijdan Abbas, a full-time mother whose husband works as a linguist for the U.S. Marines.

They were starting to lose hope, she said, when the family applied to Luminaira early this year.

“I was honestly happier to receive this congratulation call than I was for my college admission,” Abbas said. “While it may seem like a small thing, for us it was a dream come true. This meant my boys would continue to go to their schools, be with their friends and best of all receive the excellent education provided by the Irvine school district.”

As of Friday, there were 118 school-age residents at these two communities, and they go to K-8 Beacon Park School and Portola High School, both of which opened last year.

The Abbas were fortunate, as they were chosen by lottery out of 2,156 applications for Luminaira. Related California officials said Espaira, which opened in September, also received 2,144 applications.

Although no applications are being accepted at this time, company officials are asking people who are interested to check the community websites often. (Click [here](#) for the Luminaira website and [here](#) for Espaira.)

Witte said it’s common to see thousands of applications for affordable housing in California’s coastal counties.

“That’s really not surprising when you think about the need for housing,” he said. “It’s sort of a symptom of the big challenge.”