

Bethesda House opens its doors to families

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October 22, 2009 2:00 AM KENNEBUNK — A major increase in affordable family housing in Kennebunk was celebrated last Thursday when The Housing Partnership hosted a ribbon cutting at Bethesda House on Shape Drive.

Commenced in January, the 41-unit complex off Route 1 has 28 two-bedroom units and 13 three-bedroom units. Amenities include a community center, off-street parking, a play area, walking trails, free Internet access and a laundry.

A portion of the units began renting in October, and the remaining units will become available in December. Sixteen of the units are for households with incomes below 60 percent of the area median income; 25 units are for households below 50 percent.

Marty Chapman, executive director of The Housing Partnership, said last Thursday's event was "an opportunity to thank the group of partners who worked over many months and years to bring this important project to fruition."

He said a charitable landowner, a town ordinance that provides incentives for affordable housing and the participation of several funders made the project "a model of affordable housing collaboration and persistence."

Town Manager Barry Tibbetts said the housing is an "extremely positive" use of the site and will share mutual support with new and existing commercial establishments in the area.

He also said he is very pleased with the success of the project at a time when the development of affordable housing is difficult because of financing problems and the high price of land.

The seven-acre site was sold to The Housing Partnership at a discount to its estimated value by Nancy Horn, a former resident of Kennebunk. The transaction reflects her concern for persons with disabilities and abused women. Nine units have been contractually reserved for the disabled, and there will be other units for victims of domestic violence. The property borders permanent conservation land uphill from the Kennebunk River.

Bethesda House is the result of a 26-month effort to assemble a complex package of public and private financing required to make the project feasible. The Maine Housing Authority, Northern New England Housing Investment Fund, Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston and Bangor Savings Bank have stakes in



Courtesy photo From left: Kennebunk Town Manager Barry Tibbetts; landowner Nancy Horn; Marty Chapman, executive director of The Housing Partnership; John Anton, president of Northern New England Housing Investment Fund; Maine Housing Development Director Dan Brennan; and John Moore, senior vice president of Bangor Savings Bank, gather for a ribbon cutting at Bethesda House on Shape Drive. By Norm Ritter

the project. The Housing Partnership's other Maine properties include apartments in South Berwick, Eliot and Kittery.

Now in its 22nd year of operation, The Housing Partnership continues to help low- and moderate-income residents of the Greater Seacoast region of New Hampshire and York County. It serves more than 500 adults and children every year. To achieve its mission, the Portsmouth-based organization constructs affordable workforce housing, purchases and rehabilitates existing homes, revitalizes neighborhoods, trains first-time home buyers and collaborates with social service agencies or community interest groups to develop housing for special needs.

Writing in The Housing Partnership's latest annual report, Board President Jeffrey Gilbert and Executive Director Chapman said the Partnership invested more than \$200,000 in its existing housing portfolio in New Hampshire and Maine last year. Strong corporate and individual giving, as well as funding partnerships with other nonprofits, strengthened the organization's hand.

A popular way to help The Housing Partnership finance its projects is to buy tickets to the annual benefit performance of The Capitol Steps at The Music Hall in Portsmouth. The irreverent annual performances of music and satire are the organization's best fundraisers.

Bethesda House leasing information may be obtained by calling MB Management at (603) 516-0590, or by visiting The Housing Partnership's Web site at housingpartnership.org.