



Government

When a Home is More than a Home: Aspen Family Apartments

The high-density, affordable housing development celebrates its grand opening with residents, developers, builders and city representatives.

By Adelaide Chen | Email the author | April 13, 2011



For every family living in affordable housing at **Aspen Family Apartments**, there is a story. And then, there's a story of all the parties that came together to make it happen.

Take just one of the 101 apartments which has been a safety net for longtime Milpitas residents Leo and Prezi Miguel, who raised their kids in a house less than three miles away.

"Before we had this [apartment], we lost our house [in foreclosure]," said Leo Miguel. "We found out there was low-income housing and [we] qualified."

The Miguels occupy a two-bedroom with a parking space in the underground garage. They shop for groceries at SaveMart, **Lion's** and **Seafood City** supermarket.

They attended the grand opening on Wednesday, along with the property managers, developers, public officials, builders, city planners and engineers.

"I want to thank you for providing a basic need to our community, and that's a home," said Milpitas City Councilman Armando Gomez.

Currently, every single unit at Aspen is occupied.

"I've seen a lot of affordable housing projects," he said, "and a number of good projects not happen because of [the stigma]."

The residents at Aspen pay subsidized rent that's considered affordable for Silicon Valley standards. At \$103,500, Santa Clara County has the **highest Area**Median Income compared with all counties in the state.

For a two-bedroom (900 square feet), rent ranges between \$1,093-\$1,219. For a three-bedroom (1,100 square feet), rent ranges between \$1,259-\$1,697.

The income of the households at Aspen is 30-60 percent of the Average Median Income, according to Joe Britsch, area manager for Buckingham Property Management. The number of people in the household is another factor.

The housing development is the first footprint in the Mid-Town Transit area, according to Felix Reliford from the city's Department of Neighborhood and Planning Services. The area was re-zoned for high-density housing for as high as 12 stories, he said.

"When other cities talk about it, we're actually doing it," he said.

The city's redevelopment agency provided a \$2.3 million loan, the majority of which was collected from "park-in-lieu" fees, said Reliford. Each developer is required to provide a certain amount of open space. When the site is small and there isn't much room for park land or open space, the developer has to pay the city to pay so that, eventually, the city can use the money for a park.

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The developers, builders and city engineers experienced many challenges along the way, including working weekends, and at one point, around-the-clock construction to make deadlines.

But 1½ years after the first family moved in, Randy Chenier, senior vice president of construction at Global Premier Development, Inc., met the parents of the fallen soldier whose name now is also the name of the street that intersects Main where the housing development is located.

"We were honored with the name," said Chenier, a Vietnam vet who said he chose the name "Mihalakis" out of a couple of names, for 18-year-old Specialist Michael G. Mihalakis, who died in Baghdad.

Parents George and Diana Mihalakis, who lived in Milpitas for three decades while they raised three kids, were aware their daughter had submitted the name to the City Council.

The grand opening was the first time they were inside the building.

The street naming, said George Mihalakis, turned a tragedy into something positive.