

Local News

Veteran realizes dream in Hayes apartment lottery

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Haverhill resident Jose Arroyo won the first lottery for a newly renovated apartment at the Hayes at Railroad Square. The lottery was sponsored and organized by the Planning Office of Urban Affairs, and was designed to give low- to moderate-income residents an opportunity to live in a high-quality, yet affordable, apartment complex.

Arroyo, who has lived in Haverhill since May, says the feeling when he was notified was something he won't soon forget.

"Total elation," he said. "(I was) feeling fortunate, and (it was) a confirmation that living in Haverhill was meant to be for me."

A native of Paterson, N.J., Arroyo served in the Navy for six years as a petty officer 2nd class, and was living in Brockton in a Veterans Affairs apartment complex servicing homeless veterans.

He says he was referred to Haverhill by the Brockton VA Medical Center, and began looking at apartments online.

"We stumbled upon the Hayes website and the lottery announcement, so I decided to enter," Arroyo said. "The rest is history."

The Planning Office of Urban Affairs, the development arm of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, manages the development with the goal of providing safe, pleasant and affordable housing opportunities

for people of varying income levels, including those considered to be of low- and moderate incomes.

The Hayes building has a storied history in Haverhill. Built in 1894, it was used as a factory to build shoe boxes for Haverhill's many shoe mills at the turn of the 20th century, and served that purpose for several decades.

The building has occasionally been the site of some commercial businesses, but has sat mostly vacant for the last 30 years, said Bill Grogan, chief operating officer of the agency.

Haverhill created the Chapter 40R smart growth district late in 2006 and POUA obtained a purchase agreement for the Hayes building shortly after. The district encompasses a large portion of the downtown area with the stated goal of renovating the old mill buildings into ones that could be used for commercial businesses or residences.

"We saw some of the activities that were on the table to revitalize the downtown area," Grogan said. "We felt that a revitalized Hayes building ... was an important piece to bring back to the downtown area."

In 2007, the Planning Office received a permit allowing the organization to build 57 housing units and three ground-floor commercial units along Granite Street. For the next two years, the Planning Office worked to secure the financing needed to renovate the property.

During this process, the Planning Office worked to make a large

percentage of the building affordable to various demographic subsections.

"We are dedicated to providing vibrant communities," he said. "People from diverse backgrounds can live together, with a variety of income levels."

The Planning Office of Urban Affairs received 132 lottery applications. Once the organization sifted through the unqualified applicants and followed up with others, names were dropped into a hat, and Arroyo's name was the first to be pulled.

"Prior to this lottery, I wanted to live in a renovated mill building," Arroyo said. "And lo and behold, it's happened."

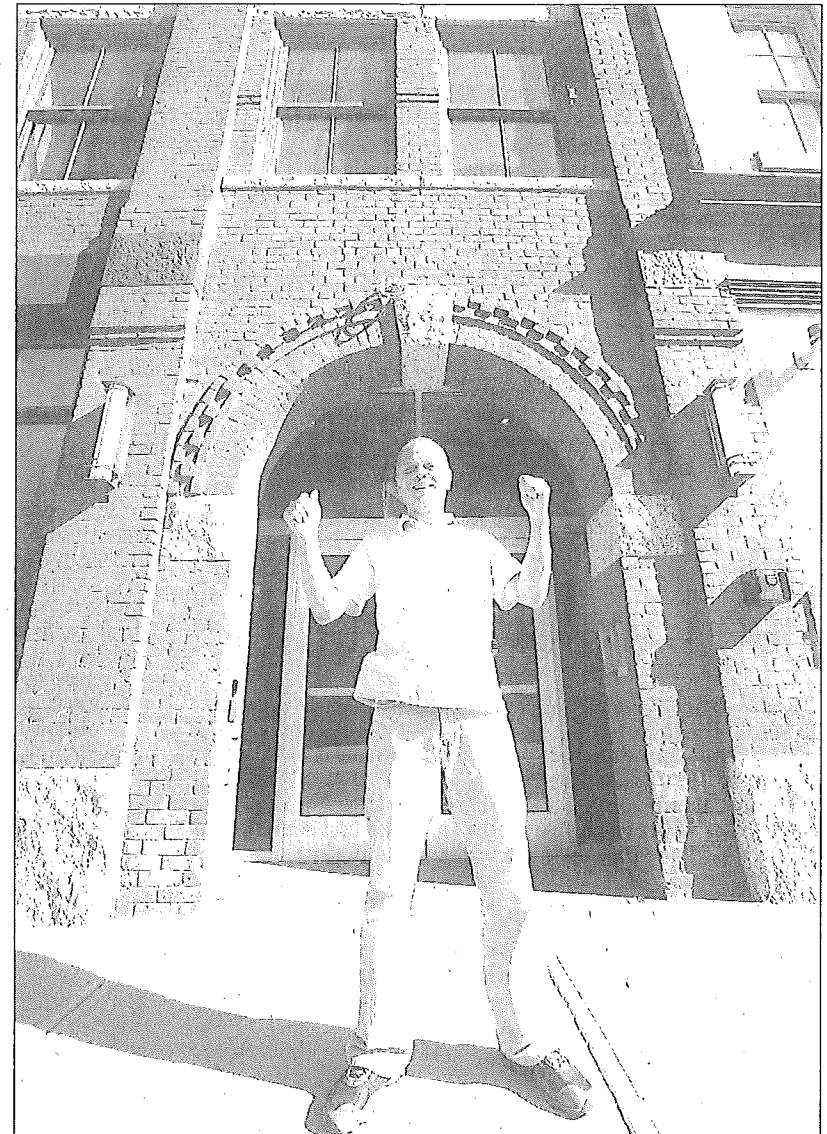
Of the 52 units available by lottery, 20 have been filled. The remaining are still available on a first-come, first-served basis.

There are 42 two-bedroom and 10 one-bedroom residences on the property, and 19 of the units are affordably available at 80 percent of the median income of the Merrimack Valley, while 33 of the units are available at 60 percent, which equates to a maximum monthly rent of \$1,150.

"Ours, though, are still a little bit below the maximum," Grogan said.

Arroyo says he couldn't be more excited to continue living in Haverhill, and calls the city "manageable" and "non-overwhelming."

"I love the diversity, the small-town feel, the availability of the MBTA to Boston and the beautiful old architecture downtown," he said. "I couldn't be happier."



JAN SEEGER/Staff photo

Disabled veteran Jose Arroyo stands in front of the new low-income apartments in the Hayes building, one of which he'll be moving into shortly. Arroyo, who was the first winner in a lottery spot for an apartment in the building at Railroad Square.