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Forty to call new 40B units home



Cardinal O'Malley visits the new Rose Hill Manor, an affordable-housing complex in Billerica, yesterday. Lisa B. Alberghini, president of the Office of Urban Affairs, helps cut the ribbon next to O'Malley, center, along with Undersecretary Aaron Gornstein, state Department of Housing and Community Development, second from right, and the Rev. Eugene Tully, formerly of St Theresa's.

SUN PHOTOS/BOB WHITAKER

By Evan Lips
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BILLERICA — A little more than a year and a half after officials broke ground on a 3.2-acre plot of land behind St. Theresa of Lisieux Parish, Rose Hill Manor is now a home.

The completed 41-unit affordable-housing complex on Boston Road near the Shoppes at Billerica was the star of yesterday's ribbon-cutting ceremony, in which Cardinal Sean O'Malley, the archbishop of Boston, was in attendance.

He spoke of the need for more affordable housing throughout the state and pointed to Rose Hill Manor as an example of what can be done when municipal and state

leaders work together.

"It's a catalyst for communities to enjoy the benefits that follow when you become neighbors," he said.

One of those neighbors experiencing the joy of living in a community she can call home is Rose Hill resident Joan Kilday. Kilday moved some members of the gathering to tears when she talked about being widowed in 2000 and finding a new family when she moved into Rose Hill in January.

She recalled the day of the lottery last July, when 75 applicants would learn which 40 people would be able to land the cost-controlled apartments.

"It was one of those huge 'thank you God' moments," she said.

The new units mean the amount of affordable housing in Billerica now hovers near 10 percent, the percent required by state law.

Speaker Aaron Gornstein, undersecretary for the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, pointed out that the Bay state is number one in the nation when it

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Officials gather near the new Rose Hill Manor complex.

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comes to least affordable states for seniors to reside in.

State Rep. Marc Lombardo, a parishioner at St. Theresa's, said at the ribbon-cutting that it "puts a smile on my face to see the government working with the church because so many times on Beacon Hill we're viewed with disdain."

He called Rose Hill Manor an example of a responsible 40B housing development, a sentiment Town Manager John Curran agreed with.

"Billerica, time after time, has proven it helps those in need," Curran said.

Some of the loudest cheers came after the Rev. Eugene Tully, St. Theresa's former reverend of more than 20 years and the person officials said played the most important role in the project's success, spoke and later accepted a hand-crafted table from O'Malley that had been carved from the wood of a cherry tree found on the property.

"I made up my mind that we'd never part with any

parish land unless it furthered the mission of the church," he said. "When you focus on gospel initiatives, great things can happen."

When the plan was approved in April 2005, Billerica's affordable-housing stock stood at 3.2 percent, one of the region's lowest.

According to a June 2011 Northern Middlesex Council of Governments study of affordable-housing availability, Billerica's 8.21 percent ranked second to Lowell's 12.62 percent. Tewksbury checked in with 8.95 percent while Chelmsford featured 7.03 percent.

The new project pushes Billerica into the 8.5 percent range.

The Rose Hill Manor development was backed by \$5.6 million from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, \$2.5 million from various state sources and \$225,000 from the town of Billerica.

The new complex boasts a community room with a dining section, kitchen facilities and a gym.

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