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The Bridge apartments are 'miracle' for families

By **CHRISTINA LENT**
Of the Times

BEAVERTON — Friday afternoon an eight-year miracle comes true for a group of families with developmentally disabled adult children.

The miracle comes when ground is broken for "The Bridge," a 15-unit apartment complex to support the needs of adults with developmental disabilities.

The ceremony begins at 4 p.m. at the project along Southwest Allen Boulevard at 141st Avenue.

It's the first affordable housing project of this type in

Miracle: Many residents forced to wait for years

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Beaverton and Washington County.

"This project was a long time in coming," said Mayor Rob Drake. "It's a very compelling idea that came from a passionate group of parents."

Members of Families for Independent Living began looking in 1996 for a housing solution to meet the needs of developmentally disabled adults between 19 and 40.

"The problem is that this population is so often forgotten and left out," said Barbara Forrer, president of the non-profit group. "My daughter is 33 and she was on the waiting list for housing for 12 years before a spot finally opened for her a year ago.

"We waited for so long, that we really began to believe there was

no hope that it would ever be a reality."

Forrer's daughter was lucky.

In some cases, if a spot opens up for federal Housing and Urban Development Section 8 housing, it could be anywhere in the state.

Most of the adults with developmental disabilities need continuing family support, she said. The competition for placements is so high that many who qualify may never be placed unless their parent or guardian dies or is no longer willing or able to care for them.

"The reality is that we will not always be here for our children — we will pass away one day," said Shari Kragrud, vice president of the group and another parent. "It's so important that our children learn these life skills while they are young and we are

here to offer support."

After years of applying for federal grants, building partnerships and securing a land grant from the city, local families see hope on the horizon for their children.

"Networking has opened up the world to us — it's been a magic pill," Kragrud said.

With the support of the Tualatin Valley Housing Partners, The Bridge project will open to 14 developmentally disabled adults early next year.

Each will have his or her own one-bedroom apartment. The 15th unit will be occupied by an onsite property manager.

"The purpose of this project is to give members of this population the best chance possible to lead an

independent life with a little help, encouragement and support," said Tom Benjamin, executive director of the Tualatin Valley Housing Partners.

"It's been a complicated, scary process, but it is so exciting to finally be at this point," Forrer said. "It's like a dream come true. It's so exciting to think we're actually going to do this. It's just a miracle."

"Suddenly, something is happening and it has reshaped our whole focus," Kragrud added.

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