

# For some, home is where they're welcome

**Housing - Merlo Station welcomes those who've had a hard time finding a place to live**

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## **The Oregonian Staff**

BEAVERTON -- For Ricky Hageman, the Merlo Station Apartments allows the 24-year-old with Down syndrome to finally move out of his mother's home.

For Michelle Morgan, she and her two children can get away from a scary neighborhood.

And for Will Calhoun, Merlo Station is the culmination of four years of working to find a home for his 20-year-old son, who is mentally disabled.

As if 128 new apartments on Southwest Merlo Road between 170th Avenue and the MAX light-rail line weren't a big enough deal, Merlo Station comes with a lot of meaning. For renters, it provides housing for people who have traditionally had a difficult time finding a place to live -- adults with developmental disabilities and low-income families who need more than one or two bedrooms.

For local bigwigs who celebrated the completion of the \$20 million complex last week, the project is significant because of all the agencies that had a hand in it. It was a complicated partnership that started when TriMet approached the city of Beaverton about making good use of 4.3 acres near MAX.

The city turned to Tualatin Valley Housing Partners, a 14-year-old nonprofit that manages 500 units of affordable housing.

The nonprofit used financing help from Enterprise Community Investment Inc., U.S. Bank, federal HOME funds and public agencies to cobble together financing.

Along the way, families of adults with developmental disabilities contacted Tualatin Valley Housing Partners about apartments for their children. Two groups of parents, Assisted Shared Apartment Program and Families for Independent Living, will have children in the apartments.

Calhoun's son, Tyler, will live in a two-bedroom unit with another disabled adult, Calhoun said. Living in a community with others will help Tyler feel less isolated, Calhoun said.

About 25 of the 128 units will be reserved for adults with disabilities, said Rhonda Brown, Tualatin Valley's executive development coordinator. One cluster will have an on-site provider to help residents with grocery shopping, cleaning, cooking and other life skills.

Merlo Station also has 88 three-bedroom apartments and 15 four-bedroom apartments.

Rents will range from \$190 a month for a studio to \$945 for a four-bedroom apartment, said Tom Benjamin, the housing nonprofit's executive director.

All of the apartments are affordable, with most set aside for families earning 60 percent of the median family income for this area. For a family of four, that's about \$40,000 a year, Benjamin said.

By late last week, 62 of the 128 units had been reserved.

One three-bedroom unit will be occupied by Morgan, 33, and her children, 10-year-old Bryan and 14-year-old Jordan. A single mother who works as a billing agent for Yahoo, Morgan has lived for six years in a Hillsboro townhouse. But, she says, the neighborhood has gone downhill.

Morgan has felt stuck because it's impossible to find a three-bedroom apartment for less than \$1,000 a month. She learned of Merlo Station in March.

"It's definitely nice to know they build housing for people like me who can't afford a lot," Morgan said.

Hageman will live with a roommate in a two-bedroom apartment for those with disabilities. He looks forward to making new friends, cooking his favorite meals -- spaghetti and broccoli and beef -- and lazing in bed watching wrestling.

"It's not that scary, but it's very exciting," he said. "It's one of the biggest things in my life."

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