

Ready to move in

Special needs tenants check out new Tenafly apartments

By **DEENA YELLIN**
STAFF WRITER

TENAFLY — As Bryan Rosenberg led friends and relatives around his pristine new home on Monday afternoon, the excitement in his voice was palpable.

“This is the kitchen,” he said, pointing to the dark brown wooden cabinets surrounding all-new appliances. “It’s where we will keep the food and desserts and stuff!”

The 23-year-old from Dumont, who lives with disabilities, said “it feels good” to finally have his own place, a two-bedroom apartment that has been tastefully furnished with the help of donations from the community and local businesses.

He and the other nine residents are packing their bags and will move into the independent living facility for disabled adults next Tuesday. He said he will make sure to bring his Wii and computer system.

The six-unit, one-story facility at 311 Tenafly Road was constructed by non-profits Bergen County United Way and Madeline Corp. for 10 disabled adults who can live on their own. Much of the funding for the \$2.4 million project comes from the borough of Tenafly, the state Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, Bergen County’s United Way and the Bergen County Office of Community Development.

The project has been in the works since 2011 as Tenafly sought to build a facility for the

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disabled, which will help meet the state requirement of promoting housing for low- and moderate-income people.

At a ribbon-cutting Monday afternoon, a standing-room-only crowd of local and state officials and community residents lauded Mayor Peter Rustin and United Way President Tom Toronto for their focused leadership in ensuring that the project came to fruition.

The community room was dedicated to Karen Sperling Greene, who is credited as the catalyst for the project even as cancer was taking her life.

County Executive James Tedesco praised Rustin for creating the project while many other communities have voiced concern about having such residences in their “back yards.” He urged other communities to follow Tenafly’s lead in creating the much-needed facilities.

The housing complex is one of seven by United Way across New Jersey, with 17 having been completed over the past 10 years.

The initiative is an increasingly popular model for public-private partnership in which a non-profit develops attractive supportive housing in areas that help meet state Council On Affordable Housing requirements.

Several parents said they wanted their children in a home — rather than an institution — where they could live independently and gain a sense of community, before they grew too old to care for them.

David Weisberg, 24, of Oradell has watched as his typically developing twin brother moved into his own place, and he, too, yearned to move out of his childhood home into a place of his own.

David’s mother, Melanie Weisberg, searched for a facility where her son could live but many, she said, had long waiting lists.

“Our state is overrun with people who need services, and there’s not enough funding. The state

spends a lot on our kids up to age 21 and then they drop them,” she said. Pointing to the beautiful stone and wood construction where her son will live, she said, “This is an answer to our prayers.”

Last Friday, home furnishings were delivered to the apartments and community room, thanks to a crowdfunding website and donations by residents of more than \$31,000 to purchase furniture. Children in local elementary schools created artwork that adorns the walls.

As far as financial and human-services support for the residents, Toronto said Monday, “All have service-provider relationships and service budgets from the state Department of Developmental Disabilities, so they will be visited by service staff daily and for varying hours, depending on level of need. This is independent living, not intended for 24/7 supervision.”

He said that rent can be paid from Social Security and that some tenants work and will rely on earnings, adding that, “We will handle all property maintenance.”

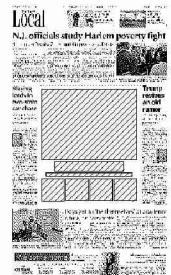
Marjorie Howes of Maywood said this is the ideal place where her 23-year-old son, Donovan, can form friendships and enjoy a community of his own.

“When your child has a disability, you worry: What will happen to him when you are no longer here?” she said. “Now they have a home for life.”

Donovan, who wants to be an animator after he graduates from Fairleigh Dickinson University, promised his mother he would eat healthy when he leaves her house. “I cook simple,” he said. “I make eggs and hamburgers.”

Rosenberg, meanwhile, wandered around his new digs in wonderment.

As he stood tall amid the freshly



painted walls and the tastefully decorated living room with its sofa and accent chairs and matching pillows, he beamed. But all at once, he seemed to realize what he will leave behind when he unpacks his suitcases and boxes on Tuesday.

"I'm going to miss my mom so

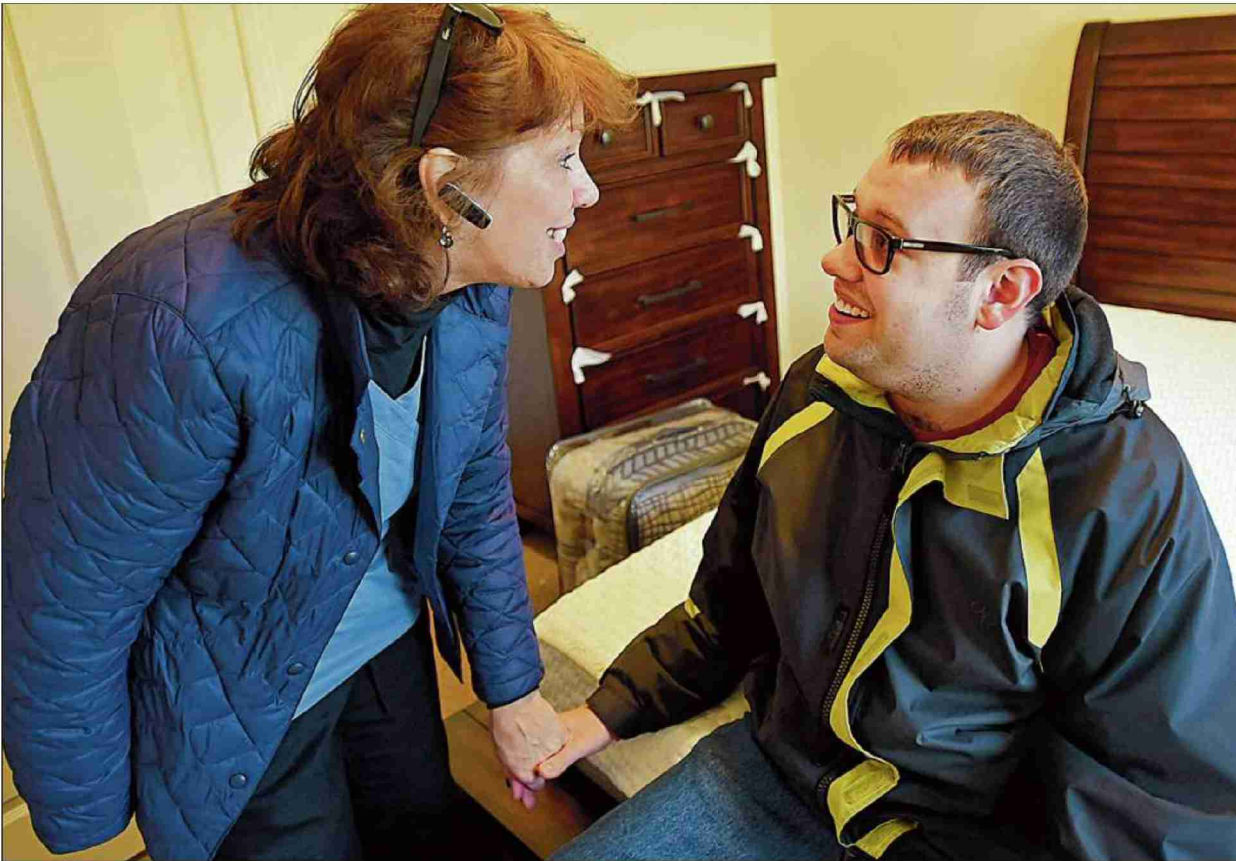
much," he whispered to a reporter, as tears welled in his eyes. He bounced across the room and wrapped his arms around his mother, Judy Rosenberg of Dumont, who was chatting with a friend.

His mother smiled and quickly

reassured him that she will visit often.

"You're going to be OK," she said, blinking back her own tears.

And she hugged her son back, right in the middle of the living room of his new apartment.



MITSU YASUKAWA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Judy Rosenberg of Dumont with her son Bryan, 23, in the bedroom of his new home, a two-bedroom apartment.



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The Tenafly housing project's community room being dedicated to Karen Sperling Greene, pictured at left. Next to the picture is her husband, Steven Greene; children Jared and Ariel; and Karen's aunt, Carmen Del Campo.