

Airmount Woods development now officially open

Airmount Woods, a publicly funded and purpose-built housing development for adults with autism, is now open in Ramsey.

Gina Plotino from Bergen County's United Way, Ramsey Mayor Christopher Botta, and Bergen County Executive Kathleen Donovan, joined the members of the Ramsey Housing Inc. and future Airmount Woods residents and their families at the Oct. 25 ribbon cutting ceremony.

The 6,000 square foot property located at 180 Airmount Avenue will be home to eight young adults on the autism spectrum. Residents, including Michael Olivero, who led the pledge of allegiance at the ribbon cutting, will receive on-site services suited to their needs.

"The Borough of Ramsey is proud to have served as a catalyst for expanded opportunities that meet the housing needs of people with autism," Mayor Botta wrote in the event program. "Airmount Woods is 'purpose built,' that is, built specifically to provide affordable housing that supports the needs of individuals severely affected by autism and is among the first in the county to be built with public funds.

"In doing so, we have brought together a unique mix of partners and resources who have turned a compelling idea into a meaningful solution. Our heartfelt thanks go out to the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities and Bergen County's United Way for their investments, and to the BCUW/Madeline Partnership, Virgona & Virgona Architects, Reduce Construction Corporation, and new Horizons in Autism for their expertise."

The housing complex was designed to provide homes that meet the needs of each resident and impart a sense of stability and comfort. A special feature of Airmount Woods is the Sensory Room, which is

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described as an oasis of calm that will foster healthful and positive behavioral change, increase focus and attention, and increase self-esteem and well-being.

In addition to Mayor Botta, the trustees of Ramsey Housing, Inc. include Mary Connolly, Ken Gubala, the Hon. Paul Huot, and Barbara Smith. Project partners include Ramsey Housing, New Horizons in Autism, Virgona & Virgona Architects, Reduce Construction Corporation, Conklin Associates, and BCUW/Madeline Partnership.

Architect James Virgona's design includes two buildings attached by a breezeway. Each building contains four



private housing units, common areas, and space for staff members, although no service providers will reside at the premises. The property will feature 24-hour supervised care by New Horizons in Autism, Inc., which will also provide programming services at the residence and will arrange for off-site services and activities. Residents will also be able to attend vocational programs suited to their abilities.

This project was spearheaded by Ramsey Housing, Inc., the non-profit corporation created and formed by Ramsey residents to oversee the development.

The Borough of Ramsey transferred ownership of the site to RHI for this development and the operation of the residence. The project, which cost approximately \$1.6 million, is being funded by various sources. The property acquisition cost to the Borough of Ramsey of nearly \$900,000 has been reimbursed from the Borough's Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and an \$800,000 development contribution has been made to RHI from this trust fund. The fund was created through past fees on commercial and residential development in Ramsey pursuant to COAH regulations.

The New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, established under the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, helped fund the project through a restricted mortgage. Funding was also provided by the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities, and BCUW.



Left: James Olivero and his brother Michael. Right: A view of Airmount Woods.



Ramsey Mayor Christopher Botta (holding scissors) and a host of other dignitaries at the ribbon cutting for Airmount Woods.