

## Officials dedicate Crescent Commons housing complex

by John Koster

Allendale Mayor Vince Barra was the principal speaker at the dedication of the Crescent Commons special-needs housing complex on Nov. 19, but he said his own contributions were just part of the story.

"The real heroes are the people of Allendale," Mayor Barra said. "It has been a community project." The mayor also gave credit to state officials, volunteer and paid experts, and the entire Allendale Borough Council.

"We're seeing a vision, and that vision has come to fruition," Reverend E. Michael Allen of Trinity Episcopal Church said in a brief invocation at the opening of the ceremony. "What we're celebrating is community and what it means to us."

Barra agreed that the whole community had taken part in the hugely successful project.

"It wasn't just me," Mayor Barra said. "I am so blessed with the council I have. My town council has been so strong and steadfast from the first day to today. My council is phenomenal." He added, "Every little thing just fit into place perfectly. There is a higher power that is looking out for this project. My wife told me, 'God is directing you just which way to go because of the need for this project.' It's bigger than all of us."

Allendale Housing Inc. in collaboration with co-developer, BCUW Madeline Corporation and with financing from the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency constructed Crescent Commons for individuals with developmental disabilities and Multiple Sclerosis. The 1.5-acre site at 303 West Crescent Avenue is within easy walking distance of shopping, employment, transportation (including commuter rail), community services, and houses of worship. The property is also across from the 110 acre Crestwood Park, and offers residents access to open space, recreational facilities, and the town swim club.

The housing complex includes 10 one-bedroom units and seven two-bedroom units. The configuration of the three buildings creates an interior courtyard and handicapped accessible parking adjacent to each building.

The total project cost was \$5.8 million. Crescent Commons was completed with no direct taxpayer contributions from the residents of Allendale. The New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency put up \$3.3 million, and the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities put up \$250,000. Bergen County money covered \$600,000, and

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other sources covered most of the additional expenses. The Allendale Housing Trust contributed \$1.25 million from money that developers contributed in return for the right to build market-price housing in their own developments.

Barra led the project team on behalf of Allendale Housing, Inc. He was joined by co-developers Thomas Toronto, president of Bergen County's United Way; Shari DePalma, director of the Madeline Corporation; and Michael and Mary Sero of Z+ Architects.

Inside the tent that had been set up for the dedication



ceremony, several hundred seats brimmed with state and local officials and volunteers. Barra turned his attention to the future residents of the complex, who were seated in the front row.

"You have gifts that we don't have, and these gifts are special," Barra said. "This is a special, special day." He told the new residents that they are very welcome in Allendale, where long-term residents have already invited them to a number of activities.

Barra also presented a huge bouquet to DePalma, whose cleaning and sanitizing efforts had prepared Crescent Commons for immediate occupancy.

The new complex, together with the previously opened Orchard Commons, gives Allendale, with a population of 6,100, 37 state-approved units of special-needs housing in a state where 8,000 units are said to be needed and there is a long waiting list.

"If the other towns in New Jersey did one-third of what we did, we could wipe out that entire list," Barra said.

Most local officials were astounded by the huge turnout at the event. Richard E. Constable III, commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, was unable to attend, but Anthony Marchetto, executive director of the New Jersey Mortgage and Financial Agency, came in his stead. Constable, Marchetto said, had been called away at the last minute to deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

"We are trying to become a beacon," Barra said. "We are trying to be an example that everyone else in the state will follow...When you touch 10 of these lives, you touch 500 others."

"It's fantastic," said Glen Rock Mayor John van Keuren, who came out to examine the housing complex. "It's kind of incredible that it's so well planned and so well done."

Mayor Bud O'Hagan of Midland Park and Mayor Chris Botta of Ramsey were also in the audience, along with Assemblyman David Russo, several Bergen County Freeholders, most of the Allendale Borough Council, and council members from other municipalities. Gina Plotino, director of communications for Bergen County's United Way, also attended.



Mayor Vince Barra in front of the Crescent Commons special-needs housing complex.



State and local officials and volunteers tour the new housing complex.