

Somerton apartment project to serve low-income residents **Yumasun.com**

Jacob Lopez
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The National Farm Worker Service Center's Housing and Economic Development Fund is financing the one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments for low-income families — families that earn less than 60 percent of the area median income.

The 80-unit apartments will be located east of Somerton Avenue about half a mile south of Highway 95. They will include washer and dryer hook-ups, central air and heating, ceiling fans and appliances. The clubhouse will house a library, a computer lab, a laundry room and a community meeting room. A swimming pool, playground and volleyball area will be provided for recreational activities.

Cesar Marengo, senior project manager for the NFSC, said the center decided to build the Somerton apartments to provide farm worker families and other low-income families an opportunity to live at an affordable rate with the hope of buying a home in the future.

"We like to provide services to empower (families)," Marengo said. "The whole idea is to better people's lives."

In a growing community where values of new homes exceed \$100,000, the apartments offer an option to low-income residents who want to remain in Somerton, Mayor Agustin Tumbaga said.

"It's showing there's quite a few different projects coming into our community," Tumbaga said. "It would be great if everyone could own their own home, but at least this provides a step to anybody from farm workers, school teachers, all the way to those higher (income) individuals."

The Housing and Economic Development Fund of the service center provides quality, affordable housing and social facilities "so people can live, socialize and learn in a positive environment," according to the center's Web site.

Marengo said the center has been trying to get financing for the apartments since 1999, and then in 2002, the Arizona Department of Housing awarded the center \$5.1 million in funds. The \$7 million apartments project is also receiving funds from Bank of America and the Federal Home Loan Bank.

Rent for the apartments is calculated as 30 percent of what the families are expected to earn per month. For a one-bedroom apartment, rent will be \$299 per month, Marengo said. A two-bedroom will be \$355 a month, while a three-bedroom will be \$404 a month, he said.

Marengo said about 20 units have been set aside for farm workers only, while the remaining units are available to any qualifying low-income family.

Anyone interested in renting an apartment can call Lori Tristan at 1-623-975-7004. There are 30 applicants who have started the pre-qualification process. A temporary leasing office will be opened by July 12 at 3150 W. County 16th St. in Somerton. Emily Flores, who will be the complex's property manager, is the contact person.

Jacob Lopez can be reached at jlopez@yumasun.com or 539-6872.