

Providing Dignity and Housing for Families

BY CHRISTINE SERLIN

ALAMEDA, CALIF.

This island community that sits next to Oakland received a boost to its affordable housing inventory with the opening of Shinsei Gardens Apartments, part of the city's plan to convert and develop the Alameda Naval Air Station and Fleet and Industrial Supply Center.

Berkeley-based Resources for Community Development (RCD) was tapped to build two affordable housing developments as part of the base conversion, which also includes a large for-sale single-family home division. The 39-unit Shinsei Gardens, which was completed at the end of September, joins RCD's nearby 63-unit The Breakers at Bayport Apartments and Townhouses, which was completed in 2006.

RCD is filling this community's need for housing—1,500 applications were received for the 39 units—and helping to provide a sustainable community at the same.

"It's an amazing property," says Linda Mackey, deputy director of RCD. "Every time RCD finishes a new property, we say 'this is the best, most beautiful, most socially responsible,' then Shinsei comes around, and it's wowed our expectations."

Shinsei Gardens has a mix of one-, two-, three-, and four-bedroom units and serves formerly homeless veterans and their families as well as other income-qualified families.

The project features a first for RCD: Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification. It expects to earn platinum certification by the end of January.

Mackey says RCD always tries to

build and design all of its projects as green as financing will allow. More resources and opportunities were available to make Shinsei Gardens as green as possible.

From the get-go, this project had a holistic approach, Mackey says. The development team, the general contractor, the architect, and their subcontractors looked at all of the systems and made



Shinsei Gardens Apartments in Alameda, Calif., features a variety of green elements and resident services to help residents become sustainable. (Photo above: Treve Johnson Photography; photo right: courtesy)

sustainable choices during the design and spec phase.

Green building features include photovoltaic systems for common-area electrical loads, Energy Star appliances and lighting fixtures, radiant hydronic heating systems, sustainable flooring, drought tolerant landscaping, and storm water management.

More than 90 percent of the construction waste was recycled and diverted from landfills, and the overall energy performance exceeds Title 24,

California's Building Standards Code, by more than 25 percent.

The development also takes a green educational approach. Residents are provided with a bucket of green building products and a manual about operations and maintenance at move-in. There is also signage around the development with quick details about the green elements.

The \$17.1 million development was financed with \$6.9 million in low-income housing tax credit equity. National Equity Fund, Inc., was the investor. Financing also included \$3.8 million from the city of Alameda, \$3.5 million from California

Department of Housing and Community Development's Multifamily Housing Program, a \$1.3 million permanent loan from Citibank, \$1.1 million in general partner equity, and \$365,000 from Alameda County.

The Japanese word shinsei means dignity, and a big part of the project involves service provider Operation Dignity. The nonprofit will provide resident services, including community building, information referrals, computer classes, and job skills training. ■