

Senior complex getting revamp News of project lifts spirits in east N.O.

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A \$7.7 million project to reopen a Sisters of the Holy Family apartment **complex** will begin in two weeks, eventually allowing dozens of low-income elderly residents to return to their home in eastern New Orleans. Delille Inn will be renovated over the next nine months and should open in the fall of 2009, said James R. Kelly, president and CEO of Providence Community Housing, which along with Enterprise Community Investment, helped obtain financing for the project, which includes acquisition of \$2.4 million of debt on the 51-unit apartment **complex**.

Delille Inn was built in 1987 at 6924 Chef Menteur Highway by the nuns, whose convent is across the street.

"We need our **seniors** to return. We need their wisdom," Kelly said. "Some studies have shown that **seniors** have decreased crime in some areas. We need anchors."

Lois Sylvester agreed. She was among a small group of former Delille Inn residents invited to a ceremony Friday to hear the news about the resurrection of the **complex** erected in honor of Sister Henriette Delille, a free woman of color who in 1849 began providing housing for elderly slaves.

"Everything was wonderful here," said Sylvester, 75, who had lived at Delille Inn for five years before Hurricane Katrina hit the area and the levees broke. "You could catch the bus across the street and go to the (nearby) Winn-Dixie to shop for groceries."

"It's like one big family here -- and I'm close to my children," said Sylvester, who resides at an apartment **complex** in Marrero. "It's OK where I am, but it's not home. I can't wait to get back into my one-bedroom apartment on the first floor."

Delille Inn residents must be 62 years or older and their income cannot be more than \$31,000, said Andreaneccia Morris, a spokesman for Providence Community Housing, a 2-year-old New Orleans nonprofit. Anyone interested in renting any of the units not occupied by returning residents should call Christopher Homes at 596-3460.

The renovated Delille Inn will be managed by nonprofit Christopher Homes and Sisters of the Holy Family, which was established in New Orleans in 1842, said Sister Eva Regina Martin, congregational leader of the second-oldest female-led African-American organization in the United States.

The price tag for the overhaul includes \$2.4 million of debt and higher-than-normal renovation costs associated with three to four feet of flooding, said Aron Weisner, development officer for Enterprise Community Investment in Columbia, Md.

As part of the deal, Delille Inn Apartments LLC was created to buy the property from the nuns and the Archdiocese of New Orleans, he said, noting that the property likely will be returned to the order in about 15 years or so. A loan from the Federal Housing Administration covered the acquisition cost.

Enterprise was able to obtain \$4.7 million for project-related expenses by selling Gulf Opportunity Zone low-income tax credits to investors who will use them to deduct business profits from their taxes. And the remainder of the total includes contributions from Providence and a reduction in fees by Providence, the archdiocese and the nuns, who may later recoup some of the income lost by reducing fees.

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Delille Inn was built in 1987 at 6924 Chef Menteur Highway by nuns with Sisters of the Holy Family, whose convent is across the street. A renovation of the apartment**complex** will start soon, and the building should open in the fall of 2009. [4126419]

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