

# Apartments Offer Inclusive Option For Adults On The Autism Spectrum

by Linda Wilson Fuoco, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette/TNS | August 9, 2016

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PITTSBURGH — Adults with autism soon will be able to move into new apartments where they can live independently, and where half of their neighbors will be people who do not have autism.

“Most housing for people with autism is just for people with autism,” said Elliot Frank, president and founder of Autism Housing Development Corp. of Pittsburgh. “Inclusiveness is what makes this different.”

In the entire country, Frank said, he has found only one other apartment project like this one — in Richmond, Va.

He explained that when educational and social services stop at age 21, many people with autism “graduate to the couch,” with most living at home with their parents. Frank founded the autism housing group in 2011 to develop safe and affordable housing for adults with autism.

The Dave Wright Apartments in Heidelberg are a joint project of Autism Housing Development Corp. of Pittsburgh and ACTION-Housing Inc. Construction is on target to be completed before Sept. 15, the goal for tenants to move into the building.

Half of the 42 apartments are reserved for people on the autism spectrum. All of the apartments are for people with low- to moderate incomes, with monthly rents of \$565 to \$795. All of the apartments are wheelchair-accessible, and six of the units meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards for people with disabilities.

This is ACTION-Housing's first apartments for adults with autism, said Linda Metropulos, director of housing and neighborhood development for ACTION-Housing, which has been helping people with special needs or low incomes find and maintain housing since 1957. The nonprofit will be the management company for the apartments, she said.

The new apartments are on the site of Wright's Seafood Inn, which was a popular restaurant for 106 years before it closed in 2007 after being heavily damaged in a flood.

The Dave Wright Apartments are named for the last owner-operator of the restaurant. The new building is closer to Route 50 and away from the creek that flooded the restaurant.

The apartment building is five stories high, the highest building that has ever been built in Heidelberg, Mayor Kenneth LaSota said.

Because the total value of property and buildings in Heidelberg is currently \$75 million, the \$13.5 million Dave Wright Apartments will significantly increase borough property values, LaSota said. The apartments will put the site back on the tax rolls, and many of the tenants will be paying wage taxes, he said.

All prospective tenants will be screened, and criminal background checks will be conducted, Frank said. Tenants must meet income requirements — maximum income is \$29,000 per year — and must show they are able to pay the rent. “We would like them to have jobs,” he added.

The apartments are designed for adults with autism who are capable of living independently with, perhaps, some support. Staff from NHS, which provides education and human services for people with special needs, will be on site 25-40 hours per week to help tenants, including linking them to social opportunities, financial counseling and medical services.

The building has a community room, a “quiet lounge,” an exercise area and an office for NHS staff. Thirty-four apartments have one bedroom and eight have two bedrooms.

A Port Authority bus stops at the apartments, and grocery stores and other shops are within walking distance.

Financing for the apartments came from a variety of sources, including a \$1.5 million loan from Allegheny County Economic Development, and \$11 million in federal tax credits awarded by The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Authority.

More housing for people diagnosed on the autism spectrum is planned. Frank said his organization is “exploring a couple of opportunities with other groups.”

The Glade Run Foundation hopes to build Jeremiah Village in Zelienople, north of Pittsburgh, with a goal of opening in 2018. The project is envisioned as housing for those with special needs and their families, especially people with autism, but people without disabilities will be welcome. Rents will be “market rate” — higher than what will be charged in Heidelberg.

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