

PLACENTIA VETERANS VILLAGE WILL BE MORE THAN HOUSING COMMUNITY

By Nathan Nguyen

Correspondent

After 19 months of development, the long-awaited Placentia Veterans Village opened its doors July 22 with a private ceremony.

The 50-unit complex will be the new home for retired and rehabbing veterans who were previously homeless or did not have a strong support system.

Veterans can face all sorts of hardships and trauma that may prevent them from reacclimating to a life that isn't all about war, Placentia City Administrator Damien Arrula said. The society they swore to protect doesn't always return the favor, he said.

"Placentia decided to take the initiative to create a vision of how we could help our veterans," Arrula said.

At the ceremony, Arrula asked veterans in the audience to stand so everyone could give them an ovation. While shaking hands and hugging were discouraged because of coronavirus concerns, Arrula encouraged people to cheer as loud as they could for the men and women who served.

The village, a partnership between the city and nonprofit organizations Mercy Housing and New Directions for Veterans, cost around \$20 million to build.

"Placentia's not the largest city in Orange County, but we scraped together some funds and used our own grit and determination, and behind us is the result of that

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David Salazar and his girlfriend, Delia Farias, take in the view from the balcony of an apartment at Placentia Veterans Village during its opening ceremony July 22. Salazar, a Navy veteran, has been homeless for more than five years and will be a resident. "Having a place like this is going to allow me to take this moment and grow," he said.

PHOTOS BY MINDY SCHAUER — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Members of the Placentia Fire Department fold a large flag after the opening ceremony of Veterans Village, a 50-unit affordable housing development for homeless or disabled veterans, on July 22.

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grit and determination,” Arrula said.

Soon to be resident David Salazar is a veteran of the Navy and said having a place to live is giving him a new sense of security and hope for the future.

“I feel like I can take a deep breath now,” he told the audience. “I feel safe, humbled and thankful.”

Ed Holder, vice president of real estate development for Mercy Housing, said he could easily imagine himself living in the village and spending time reflecting in the gardens and pathways or relaxing on the patio barbecuing and playing bocce.

“This is a stunning property. It’s a fitting setting for the heroes who have faithfully served this country and will soon call this place home,” Holder said.

Though the village looks complete on the outside, soon to be added are dedication plaques for service members, pieces of artwork, flowers and a vegetable garden. Leo Cuadrado, executive director of New Directions for Veterans, emphasized the Placentia Veterans Village is not meant to be just a shelter or transitional housing, but instead a home.

Along with leisure activities, there will be vocational training and socialization and rehabilitation programs provided for the veterans. Cuadrado said he hopes the village community will build hope and resilience among its residents. "In the Marine Corps, we are always taught never leave a Marine behind," Cuadrado said. "We will continue to fight for them and do so until every homeless veteran has a place to live and the supportive services they need to ensure they never live on the streets again."

City Council members and leaders from around Orange County were present at the ceremony and the hope is, officials said, that in the future there is a facility like the Placentia Veterans Village in every community.



Community members and officials attend the opening ceremony of Placentia Veterans Village on July 22.

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Placentia Police honor guard member Frank Garza takes part. Veterans Village will include vocational training and socialization and rehabilitation programs.

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