

## Press Releases

**May 18, 2004**

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**Grand Opening:** Geel Place, 3990 Reynolds Road, Riverside, CA

### **The Coachella Valley Housing Coalition's Geel Place provides a safe haven for 44 Individuals with Special Needs in Riverside**

Riverside, Calif. – Indio-based Coachella Valley Housing Coalition (CVHC), in partnership with the Riverside County Department of Mental Health and Economic Development Agency, celebrated the completion of its \$4.7 million Geel Place Special Needs apartment complex in the City of Riverside on May 26. In time for National Mental Health Month, 44 individuals under the care of the Riverside County Department of Mental Health moved into the new apartments specifically designed for independent living. Rents in the attractively designed complex are \$261 a month. Representatives from the Riverside City Council and the Riverside County Board of Supervisors participated in the opening celebrations.

Much like the internationally-renowned community in Belgium that Geel Place is named for, the housing complex provides individuals with special needs a communal environment where they can gain much-needed independence while still receiving care and support services. A highly innovative partnership made Geel Place possible as CVHC's housing experts joined forces with Riverside County Departments of Mental Health and Economic Development Agency staff to create the only permanent special needs housing facility in Western Riverside County.

"The residents of Geel, Belgium have opened their doors to individuals with special needs for hundreds of years," said John F. Mealey, Executive Director of the Coachella Valley Housing Coalition. "We hope to create that supportive environment here at Geel Place in Riverside."

Geel Place in Riverside honors the open-door communal setting of Geel, Belgium, a community known historically for its support of persons with mental illness. The town's approach to mental illness has its roots traced back to approximately 600 A.D. when according to the legend; Saint Dymphna, Patron Saint of the Mentally Ill, was killed by her Irish chieftain father in this village. According to legend, when her father killed Saint Dymphna he had his sanity restored in the process. A shrine was built in her memory prompting a worldwide pilgrimage to the shrine by thousands of people in an attempt to deal with their own or a family member's mental illness.

Over time, legend has it, that many people were indeed cured, but eventually a number of people settled into the town and were taken in by the town's people. The number of residents with mental illness gradually increased over the decades to the current day population. Today, Geel has a population of 30,000 citizens, of which approximately 1,000 families care for 1,100 individuals who live with severe mental illness.

The town of Geel continues to inspire hope through its open acceptance of persons who are mentally ill and through demonstrating a supportive community approach for persons suffering from this much misunderstood illness.

Geel Place in Riverside carries on that welcoming philosophy. The housing complex consists of 44 Single Resident Occupancy units (and one manager's unit) in six buildings, clustered around a beautiful open-space area lined with a variety of plants, trees and flowers, and free-flowing walkways.

Individual units are designed with efficiency in mind. Each unit features a private bathroom, furnished living room and well-appointed kitchen. The one- and two-story buildings offer residents their own private patio or balcony, as well as a communal patio or balcony perfect for social interaction among neighbors.

Project amenities include a large community room designed for residents to use for more formal gatherings, resident support services and meetings. The attached large kitchen is perfect for resident events such as potlucks, movies and other formal and informal gatherings. Events are planned monthly by the management staff. The community room also features two state-of-the-art computers for use by the residents.

The Riverside County Department of Mental Health provides on-site counseling services and meetings with case workers, ensuring a supportive environment throughout the complex.

"This is a great day in Riverside County. One of the barriers that face persons who are challenged with mental illness is affordable and decent housing. This project represents what is possible and it also represents the dreams of many persons that we serve," said John Ryan, Director of the Riverside County Department of Mental Health. "This project has been possible because of the partnership that created this project, Riverside County Supervisor Bob Buster and the need of those we serve. We plan to continue to look for further opportunities to create similar projects here in Riverside County."

Geel Place was built using a mix of funding sources including: Riverside County Department of Mental Health; County of Riverside Economic Development Agency – HOME Funds; National Equity Fund - Investor; Affordable Housing Program Funds from Citibank, N.A.; and the State of California Tax Credit Allocation Committee. The State of California Housing and Community Development Department – SHIA Program will provide rental assistance for all Geel Place residents, ensuring that residents pay no more than 30 percent of their income for rent.

Geel Place is CVHC's second joint-venture with the County Department of Mental Health and its third Special Needs development in Riverside County. In 1995, CVHC and the County Department of Mental Health celebrated the completion of their first collaboration - La Hacienda, a 36-unit Single Resident Occupancy housing complex in the heart of Indio. In 1999, CVHC developed Casas San Miguel de Allende, a 39-unit Single Resident Occupancy complex in Cathedral City designed for individuals with HIV, AIDS and other chronic illnesses.

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Located in Indio, California, about one hundred miles east of Los Angeles, the Coachella Valley Housing Coalition (CVHC) is an award-winning non-profit housing development corporation dedicated to helping low and very-low income families improve their living conditions through advocacy, research, construction, and operation of housing and community development projects. CVHC has constructed more than 2,400 homes and apartments for low-income

households in Riverside County. In addition, CVHC has developed childcare centers, after-school programs, and two medical clinics. It operates various services for its tenants and others including mariachi classes, English as a Second Language and Citizenship classes, an art program, and tennis and recreational programs. For more information, visit [www.cvhc.org](http://www.cvhc.org)