

# Disabled get chance to live independently

## Affordable housing project helps meet 'enormous' need

By **ANDREA ALEXANDER**  
STAFF WRITER

PEQUANNOCK — About a dozen people recovering from mental illness or who have other disabilities will soon get a chance to live on their own in the recently completed Evans Place affordable housing development.

The \$2.9 million project, paid for with a mix of state and local funds, provides 11 apartments, including one two-bedroom family unit. The apartments are available to people who have developmental or physical disabilities, are blind or are recovering from mental illness, said Robert Parker, executive director of NewBridge Services, the township-based nonprofit that built the project at the site of its former headquarters.

"People with special needs have a desire to have their own space, where they can close the door, cook a meal, take a shower, entertain and sleep," Parker said during a recent tour of the apartments.

Residents are expected to move in during January, once they receive final state approvals. The apartments will be rented to people considered very low income — earning \$18,441 or less a year.

The need for affordable housing for the disabled and mentally ill is difficult to quantify, but has

as NewBridge keep individual lists. Or project developers can reach out to agencies that serve people with special needs for referrals. The state Division of Developmental Disabilities has a priority waiting list of 4,800 people who need services, including housing.

More than 150 people are on NewBridge's waiting list, and the tenants expected to move into Evans Place have been waiting for housing for about a year. The prospective residents may come from a variety of housing including living with relatives or in residential health care facilities, or sharing a residence with another person, but none currently lives on his or her own, Parker said.

The project will help NewBridge meet its goal of building 100 new units of affordable housing, which reflects national and statewide strategies to provide opportunities for the disabled and people with mental illness to live more independent lives.

The state's Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services also has a plan to provide 1,065 new units for people recovering from mental illness, the majority serving people coming out of state hospitals. But Deputy Human Services Commissioner Kevin Martone said the new housing is "still a drop in the bucket" com-



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Nina McCormack, director of development and marketing for NewBridge Services, and Robert Parker, executive director, surveying an apartment at the Evans Place housing development.

### Fast facts

For more information on all the states Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency programs — including the Special Needs Housing Trust Fund — call 800-NJHOUSE (800-654-6873) or 609-278-7400, or visit [nj-hmfa.com](http://nj-hmfa.com).

tal, not on the street, but obviously in an apartment like you or I," Martone said.

Progress is being made: By the spring, NewBridge expects to be nearly two-thirds of the way to its 100-unit goal.

"Under the advancements of treatments and education, people are very able to live independently," Parker said.

All that's been needed is opportunity.

"This provides them an opportunity to live independently and to

to be gathered up in an institution or a group home or a rehab center," Parker said.

The majority of funding for Evans Place came from the state's Special Needs Housing Trust Fund, which contributed \$2.4 million. The trust fund, administered through the state's Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, was set up to provide \$200 million toward affordable housing projects for people with mental illness, the disabled, homeless and disabled veterans, people with HIV/AIDS and youth aging out of the foster care system. About \$160 million has been committed to build 1,500 housing units divided among 181 projects, said Pamela McCrory, director of supported housing and special needs at HMFA.

More than half of those projects are complete, and \$50 million is left in the trust fund, including \$10 million in interest. The trust

disabled adults. The fund may also contribute toward Allendale's planned Crescent Commons, which will provide housing for developmentally disabled adults and people with multiple sclerosis, and will make affordable units available for purchase.

In Pequannock, the local government also contributed \$100,000 toward Evans Place from its Affordable Housing Trust Fund and received credit toward its court-mandated obligation to provide housing opportunities for people of modest incomes.

Mayor Ed Engelbart said residents in other NewBridge communities in the township have always been good neighbors, and he credited the latest development with improving a run-down neighborhood.

"It's contributed to fixing up the whole street," Engelbart said, noting that the project included new sidewalks and lighting for the street. "It really improved the