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Tiger Bay has grand opening

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The face of east Gainesville is changing, and more than 50 people, including local politicians and a congresswoman, along with the vice president of a large bank, helped celebrate the grand opening of an affordable housing development that is being billed as the standard for affordable housing construction in the area.

Ed Jennings Jr., president of Jennings Development Group Inc., was joined on Sunday by his partners, Howard and Ann Wallace, the owners of HKW Enterprises, and others who helped build Tiger Bay Court Apartment Homes to give a tour of the development and to talk about what the project means to the community.

Tiger Bay is located at 2415 SE 4th Lane across the street from Food Lion on Hawthorne Road. Its features include an on-site child care facility, basketball and volleyball courts, pool, covered patio area, computer station, fitness center, clubhouse, playground, picnic area with grills, and after-school programs.

"This is the third time we have done this," said Jennings, adding that he and his partners have built two other affordable housing communities in the area, Lewis Place on NE 15th Street near 39th Avenue and Eden Place, a short distance away from Lewis Place on NE 39th Avenue.

He recognized the major players who helped Tiger Bay, a \$12.5 million project, become a reality, including Alliant Capital, CitiBank and Davis & Sons Construction, to name a few. He also thanked the Gainesville/Duval Heights Front Porch Community Inc. for its support.

Tiger Bay has 96 units of two- and three-bedroom apartments. Jennings said 35 of them have been leased. He said in order to qualify to move in, applicants must pass credit and criminal background checks.

"This is going to be a safe and secure place for people to live," Jennings said. "We want the best that this community has to offer."

Angel Muhammad, 45, said she is glad to be living in Tiger Bay. She said she was the first tenant to move into the complex.

"I love it here, and I know they are committed to keeping it a quality place to live," said Muhammad, an assistant branch manager at AmSouth Bank. "The Lord led me here, and it has been a blessing."

Jennings said when he first told community leaders about his desire to build an affordable housing complex, they imagined another Kennedy Homes, a dilapidated housing project in southeast Gainesville that was closed down several years ago because of numerous code violations.

"Take a look around, this is not another Kennedy Homes," Jennings said.

Jennings said it takes a lot for a project like Tiger Bay to come together, and he thanked Gilbert Means, the chairman of Front Porch, and other Front Porch members for "keeping me honest."

Jennings also said that offices for Front Porch will be built adjacent to Tiger Bay.

"I just want to say I am privileged to be standing here this afternoon representing Front Porch, and we are thrilled to have this fine place in our community," Means said. "We will be working with Mr. Jennings to make living conditions better for people who need help in this area."

Nancy Griffin, a vice president and relationship manager in the community development division of CitiBank, said her company sees the need for quality affordable housing.

"We have a very large commitment to workforce affordable housing," said Griffin, who drove up from Tampa for the ceremony. "This development team is special because all of them are local."

Gainesville City Commissioner Scherwin Henry, whose district Tiger Bay is located in, said he is glad the complex is in his district.

"This complex represents quality housing," Henry said. "Anyone that decides to move in here should be pleased with the amenities."

With her newborn baby boy in tow, Gainesville Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan said she appreciates the efforts of everyone involved in making Tiger Bay a reality.

"I'm just here to give my thanks to everyone who made this happen," Hanrahan said. "It takes a long time to change the face of an area that has been underinvested in and neglected for so long."

U.S. Congresswoman Corrine Brown, D-Florida, whose district includes east Gainesville, also was at the ceremony.

She said she will be beginning a program at Tiger Bay that will allow students to receive free computers if they read 25 books and do book reports on all of them. The students must have a mentor to verify that the work has been done.

"The purpose of the program is to get kids to read more," Brown said.
