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Braddock Welcomes 24 New Apartments All will have views of the valley and the borough's commercial district

By Len Barcousky

Twenty-four apartments built on the site of UPMC Braddock are symbols of beauty rising from ashes, the Rev. Richard Wingfield said Friday.

Rev. Wingfield offered that observation as part of his invocation at the formal opening of a new neighborhood in Braddock called The Overlook.

All of the dwellings have views of the Monongahela River valley and the borough's commercial district. They adjoin what eventually will be a community park.

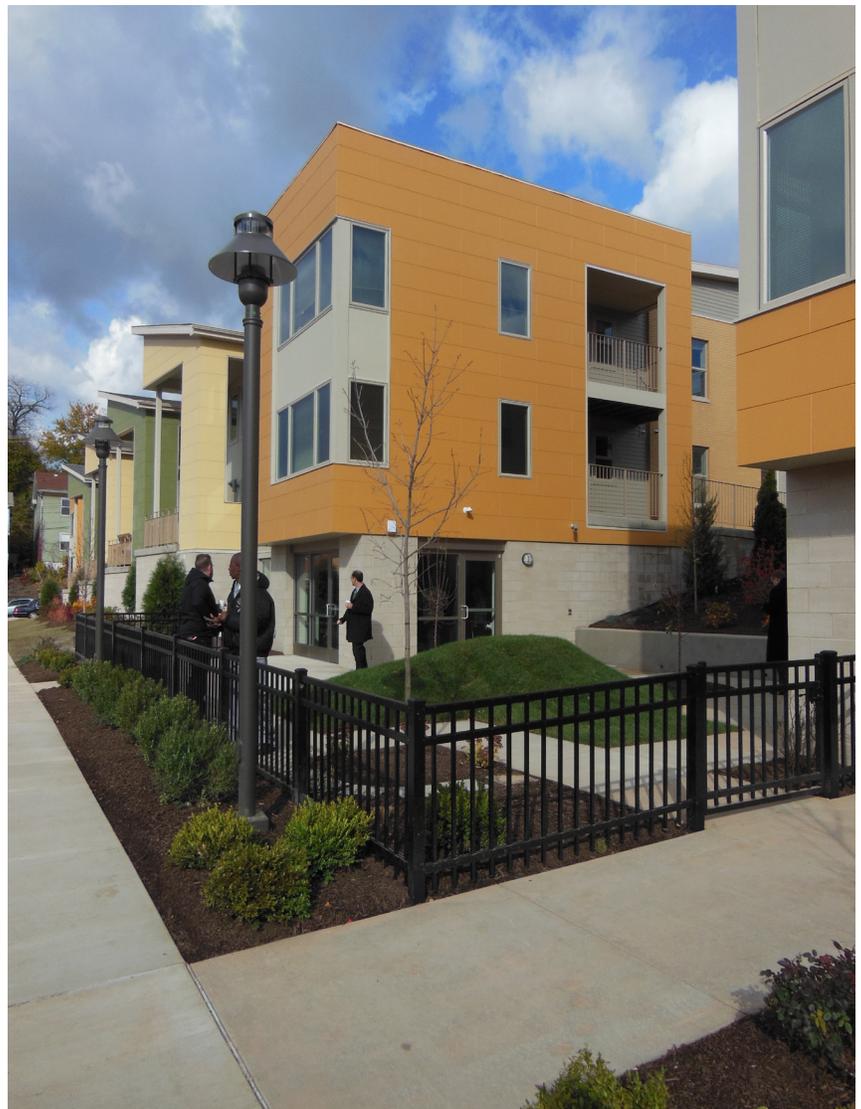
County Executive Rich Fitzgerald described the \$9.5 million apartment project as a victory for intergovernmental cooperation. He had special praise for his predecessor in office, Dan Onorato, and U.S. Rep. Mike Doyle, D-Forest Hills. The two men kept pressure on UPMC, which operated and then demolished its Braddock hospital, to fast-track and support redevelopment efforts, he said.

UPMC provided \$3 million that made the site eligible for \$3 million in state aid.

"It was amazing to see how fast these apartments went up," Braddock resident Pat Morgan said before the ribbon-cutting.

William J. Gatti Jr., president of TREK Development Group, agreed. "A year ago, this was a pile of dirt," he said. "Today we have 24 homes."

TREK partnered with architects



at Rothschild Doyno Collaborative and Mistick Construction as the development team for the project. The Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County, working with

Braddock Borough and Braddock Hospital Working Group, picked TREK for the project.

The next stage of the redevelopment effort will be a

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commercial building that will become home to an urgent-care center. That facility will offer some of the medical services that had been available at UPMC Braddock.

The urgent-care center will be open to Medicaid patients in addition to people with most private health insurance plans. Medicaid is a state and federal health insurance program serving low-income residents. Braddock and many of its neighboring municipalities are among the poorest in the county.

Municipal officials said they hoped that The Overlook project would serve as an indicator of rebirth for Braddock.

The community has been losing population for decades and has seen its downtown deteriorate.

"There is a waiting list for people who want to live here,"

Mr. Fitzgerald said at the outdoor dedication ceremony. "What a great day for Braddock."

About 300 individuals and families applied to live in the 24-unit subsidized apartment complex, Laura Zinski said. She is CEO of the Mon Valley Initiative, a nonprofit community and economic development group.

Tina Doose, president of borough council, said she and her colleagues wanted to congratulate community leaders for working together to build what she called a new village in Braddock.

"Thank you for giving families a place they can be proud to call home," she said. She called on the new residents to get involved in the community as volunteers.

The apartment project was funded primarily through the sale of low-income housing tax credits,

allocated through the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. They were purchased by Fifth Third Bank and Huntington Bank through City Real Estate Advisors.

Jeff Nelson, senior acquisitions analyst for City Real Estate, said he was gratified to watch tax credits turn into actual residences. "Seeing projects like this come to life is the best part of my job," he said.

Buyers of tax credits, which are often banks, make upfront payments that provide multiyear federal income tax breaks.

The overall budget for the redevelopment project is \$20 million. It includes single-family homes in addition to the apartments, commercial building and the community park.