

Industry unites to help Toronto's homeless with affordable apartment project

Grant Cameron July 10, 2020



CITY OF TORONTO — Built on a small strip of land that was formerly a parking lot next to an existing 77-unit affordable housing building, the affordable housing project at 25 Leonard Ave. in Toronto features laser-cut, steel railing panels that were created based on art from local artists Margaux Smith and Leo Krukowski.

Twenty-two homeless people are now moving into brand new affordable apartments near Kensington Market in Toronto, thanks in large part to the collaborative efforts of the residential building industry.

Home and condo builders, heavy civil contractors and unions who are part of the **Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON)** joined forces to raise \$1 million to help pay for an intensification project at 25 Leonard Ave. that is owned and managed by the St. Clare's Multifaith Housing Society.

Cost of the project was about \$5.4 million. St. Clare's is contributing \$3.8 million. The City of Toronto assisted with a \$500,000 capital grant through its Open Door program and a \$150,000 grant.

“I am delighted to see this project come to fruition and I am especially proud that residential builders and developers, construction associations and labour unions were able to come together with St. Clare’s to make this work and help tackle homelessness in Toronto,” said Phil Rubinoff, chairman emeritus of RESCON, who initially spearheaded the fundraising initiative for the new build.

Members of RESCON were looking to give back to the community and were partnered with St. Clare’s by longtime housing advocate Simon Liston. St. Clare’s has a solid track record in assisted housing and is known throughout the city for taking a compassionate and caring approach to housing those in need.

“By contributing to this project, we are helping 22 people living on the streets get into appropriate affordable housing,” said Rubinoff. “Often, people living on the streets can only find temporary congregate shelter, but this will provide a permanent residence for those who have experienced long term chronic homelessness.”

RESCON president Richard Lyall said the project is important because it helps to address the housing crisis.



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The success of this project demonstrates what can be achieved when the non-profit, private and public sectors come together to address the crisis of homelessness in our city. This project will change the lives of 22 people, giving them safe and permanent homes. It is certainly a step in the right direction.”

St. Clare's executive director Andrea Adams said the project would not have been possible without the support of the private sector donors.

“We appreciate the support and trust of RESCON and the contractors and unions for contributing to a tangible response to homelessness, and we hope this sets the stage for future collaborations.

“We are relieved that our construction team was able to get the structure finished in spite of the COVID crisis. This is a time when it is particularly clear just how important housing is for vulnerable populations.”

The three-storey structure has been erected on a small strip of land that was formerly a parking lot, just east of Bathurst Street and across from Toronto Western Hospital. The apartments are next to an existing 77-unit building owned and managed by St. Clare's. Tenants are moving in this month.

Mayor John Tory was at the site July 10 for a morning ceremony to mark the opening with Deputy Mayor Ana Bailao and Toronto councillor Mike Layton.

“The success of this project demonstrates what can be achieved when we come together to address housing in our city,” Tory said. “Housing is vitally important, but we can't do it alone, which is why the HousingTO Action Plan commits to implementation through partnerships and collaboration – exactly as what we see here with St. Clare's, RESCON and the City of Toronto.”

Construction on the building began in spring 2018 and work continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The new rental units are owned and operated by St. Clare's and are purpose-built to support people experiencing homelessness.

A key highlight of the structure is the laser-cut, steel railing panels that were created based on art from local artists Margaux Smith and Leo Krukowski. The art installation reflects the strong connection the community has with the tenants of the existing building and their desire to welcome their new neighbours.

“This is a stunning building that we are proud to contribute to the Kensington neighbourhood,” said Adams. “It reflects the flavour of its thoughtful, welcoming and artistic community.”

Donors to the project included: Aspen Ridge; Brown Group; Carpenters' Local 27; Carpenters' Local 675; Empire; Great Gulf; Greenpark Homes; the Heavy Construction Association of Toronto; Hullmark; Laurier Homes; Liberty Development; Lifetime; Lindvest; LiUNA Local

183; LiUNA Ontario Provincial District Council; Mattamy Homes; Menkes; the Ontario Formwork Association; RESCON; Silvercore Properties; Sorbara Group; Tridel; and Yorkwood.

The St. Clare's venture is now inspiring developers and landlords in other communities. The model has been replicated in Vancouver and Belleville, Ont.