

Unity Place, new Acre housing, touted

By Michael Wurm, Sun Correspondent
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Looking over one of the new apartments at the Coalition for a Better Acre's Unity Place is Kimberly Glenn, left, with her niece, Desiree Kenney, 16, and nephew Darnell Kenney, 17. Glenn will be moving in with her own two children. SUN/David H. Brow

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LOWELL -- Unity Place Apartments debuted Thursday for a large audience of guests invited from the political, government and financial partners of the Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA), the neighborhood revitalization organization.

The CBA is touting Unity Place with its 23 affordable rental apartments at 482 Moody St. as the "crowning achievement" of its redevelopment of the Moody Street corridor that started in 1989 with its acquisition and renovation of the North Canal Apartments complex.

The speakers at the ribbon-cutting ceremony who drew the most interest were two residents with dramatic life stories that led them to these shining new apartments.

Kimberly Glenn, a young single mother, moved to Texas two years ago after losing a baby during childbirth. She lived with her father until his wife suddenly died. So she returned to Lowell with her two toddlers but without the hope of a job or place to live.

Describing her return to Lowell, she said, "To protect my sons and keep them safe, I entered a shelter program. It was the hardest thing I'd ever done. As we lived in transitional housing, I prayed that God would give us a miracle and find us a home. When I was selected in the lottery at Unity Place, I knew my prayers were answered."

Glenn said, however, that the decision to live in the Acre was not easy for her. "This neighborhood was the source of great pain for my family. Fourteen years ago, my aunt was only 23 years old when she was shot



to death by her ex-boyfriend in front of her three young children only a block from here. A lot has changed since then. Today, we see families moving back into the neighborhood to start new lives. As I am healing in my life, this neighborhood is healing as well.

"Today, I am working as an administrative assistant at the Boys and Girls Club in Lowell. I am ready to move into our beautiful new home and start our beautiful new life. At the darkest times, I always had faith that God would open the right doors at the right time in my life. And He did, by opening the doors of Unity Place."

The second resident who spoke, Jose Morales, lives with his young family in the St. Joseph apartments across the street. Appearing in his Lowell firefighter uniform, Morales said, "Growing up here in the Acre, I loved it, but it wasn't always a great place to be." He noted, as a number of other speakers did, that Moody Street was known as dangerous. But he and his wife saw his neighborhood transforming into a safe and healthy place to live.

CBA Executive Director Emily Rosenbaum said that the new apartments and Moody Street transformation that her organization is leading with a lot of help from partners is making "the difference between hopelessness and hope, darkness and light" for neighborhood residents.

State Senator Eileen Donoghue, state Rep. Kevin Murphy and Mayor James Milinazzo were among others who spoke. They applauded CBA for leading the neighborhood revitalization, with each having some personal history and thoughts to share relating to the pride they have in having played some part in supporting the change.

Murphy, in particular, spoke with the history of having represented the Acre for 15 years in the Legislature. He said, "I'm really sorry for my colleagues from Andover and other towns who don't get to experience such positive stories of diversity and revitalization as he does. I get so passionate about the work the CBA has gotten done."

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