

Welcoming home: Olga Village

Published: May 25, 2011

Milwaukee residential complex offers elderly people new space Olga Village



Photos provided by the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee

Elderly residents at Milwaukee's Olga Village apartment complex are expanding their social circles at the new 37-unit housing facility, but the project nearly didn't happen because of a lack of space. Built on the campus of the United Community Center, a social service agency on the city's south side, Olga Valley combines sustainability, recreation and senior living on limited land.

"One of the toughest challenges was finding a way to fit the project onto just over 1 acre of land," said Warren Jones, director of development for the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee. "The building has a footprint of 13,000 square feet, but we had to be creative to also find room for 30 ground-source wells, a 47,000-gallon underground storm water detention tank and 64 parking spaces."

To fit all that and more, project leaders needed to use land that was designated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development for Section 202 housing, which didn't fit the scope of Olga Village. Altering the designation to fit the project wasn't easy, however. It wasn't until HUD Deputy Secretary Ron Sims visited the site and agreed to help clear hurdles that things started to move forward.

Once the additional land was secured, project crews still had to deal with limited space, however, as the project is tucked between a freeway, an existing community center and another senior housing project.



"This was a challenging site, logistically," said Chris Sauvé of Pewaukee-based VJS Construction Services Inc.

Despite the challenges, he said, the contractors were able to incorporate several environmentally-conscious options, such as a geothermal heating system, solar supplemental hot water and a green roof.

The result is a project that has been submitted for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design gold certification.

"Sustainability and affordability make economic sense over time, both to the community and our bottom line," said Tony Pérez, Housing Authority secretary-executive. "Our design and construction partners have made Olga Village a high-quality addition to our housing portfolio, and we are grateful for the craftsmanship that went into building it."

The building's new residents appreciate the effort that went into the project, as well, because it has provided quality living in a social setting, said Doris Dixon, who moved into Olga Village in January.

"I wouldn't change a thing," she said. "It's a quiet and very pleasant building, even though the freeway is nearby. I'm starting to get to know the other residents, and I'm so happy to be in this community."

- Susan Smith



PROJECT ESSENTIALS

Location: Milwaukee

Submitting agency: Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee

General Contractor: VJS Construction Services Inc., Pewaukee

Architect: Uihlein/Wilson Architects Inc., Milwaukee

Engineer: PSJ Engineering Inc., Glendale

Owner: Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee

Project size: 39,360 square feet

Project cost: \$7.3 million

Start date: Sept. 14, 2009

Completion date: Nov. 1, 2010