

San Diego's Riverwalk Apartments: A Creek Runs through It

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By Jeffrey Steele, Contributing Writer

The efforts of Affirmed Housing Group have helped turn a dilapidated area along a trash-strewn creek bed in San Diego into the sparkling new 50-unit Riverwalk Apartments, an affordable apartment community unveiled in late July.

Riverwalk Apartments features 19 one-bedroom, 10 two-bedroom and 21 three-bedroom homes in five two- and three-story buildings along both sides of Nestor Creek. It was developed by San Diego-based affordable housing developer Affirmed Housing Group in partnership with the San Diego Housing Commission. Riverwalk Apartments was designed by Studio E Architects with landscape architect Darsono Design, and built by Allgire General Contractors.

"The location was interesting in that the site was somewhat blighted, was underutilized and included some dilapidated buildings," James Silverwood, Affirmed Housing Group president, tells *MHN*. "It was the perfect redevelopment opportunity. We had done some previous work next to Nestor Creek. That was another affordable housing development directly to the west of, and visible from, Riverwalk Apartments. We loved the interaction between the creek and the housing. This isn't our largest development, but it's one of the most sensitive."

A prime challenge was ensuring the development remained respectful of the creek itself, while providing the kind of housing density that would enable the project to go forward, Silverwood adds. "We had to deal with the California Fish and Game Agency," he says. "When you deal with an agency like that, you have to prove to them you will be sensitive to the habitat and the creek, and adhere not only to state but federal regulations governing protected streams."



The result was a development that is considerate of the creek's ecology, while also doing much to celebrate the waterway. Riverwalk Apartments includes a stunning pedestrian bridge that spans Nestor Creek and connects buildings on both creek banks. In creating this setting, workers combed debris out of the creek bed and also carved out a walking trail that extends along one side of the creek, crosses the bridge, and meanders on along the other bank.

The walking path is not only, as Silverwood says, "quite scenic." It also plays a functional role, giving children living in Riverwalk Apartments a convenient shortcut to their elementary and middle schools.

Additional amenities include a tot lot, barbecue areas, on-site laundry, community room and computer lab. Environmentally conscientious elements include energy-efficient appliances, solar water heating for laundry facilities, bio-filtering of rainwater runoff, increased window size and quantity to decrease demand for lighting, cross-ventilation design elements to eliminate need for mechanical cooling, and drought-tolerant landscaping.

Silverwood regards Riverwalk Apartments as one of the most rewarding projects to date for Affirmed Housing Group. "Not only do 50 families now have quality, affordable housing, we have made environmental improvements that will have a lasting, neighborhood-wide impact," he says.

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