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Millennium Place start of public-housing transformation

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Construction on the first 21 buildings will be finished next month.

MUNCIE -- Inside, the rooms are a little smaller than average, and the flooring is all vinyl composition tile, no carpet. But with their gables, dormers, covered front porches, brick facades and old-fashioned street lights, the new homes nearing completion in the first phase of Millennium Place look just as attractive as any other new housing addition in Muncie.

That's the idea.

The project is trying to change the fabric of the predominantly black community formerly known as Munsyana Homes, a 63-year-old, inner-city public housing project that in years past has been plagued by drugs, violence and prostitution. Munsyana Homes, a group of 279 apartments in a number of long, two-story, concrete block buildings, is being demolished. It is the oldest public housing project in the state. Millennium Place is taking its place.

The first 21 buildings, some of which are duplexes, offer 1, 2, 3 and 4 bedrooms. Construction on those buildings will be finished next month. Several more phases are planned. One major difference between Munsyana and Millennium is that the latter will provide a mixture of public housing, rental housing and owner-occupied housing, according to Duane Miller and Gordon Benner of Indianapolis-based Flaherty and Collins, the developer. The project is being financed by both private and public investment.

Another difference between Munsyana and Millennium is that federal regulations require a diversity of incomes among the residents of Millennium, said Charles Weatherly, director of Muncie Housing Authority. 'If we don't diversify, the area will continue to be known as a low-income area,' Weatherly said. 'Pockets of poverty hold back the whole city.' The project is being funded in part by the Hope VI program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The program hopes to transform public housing in several ways, including the demolition of severely distressed public housing like Munsyana; the forging of partnerships with non-profits, businesses and local government; the lessening of concentrations of poverty, and the creation of incentives for self-sufficiency.

Of the 120 families continuing to live in the remainder of Munsyana Homes, 74 are black, 32 are white, and 14 are of other races. Weatherly expects a similar racial composition in Millennium Place.

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