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AFFORDABLE HOUSING FINANCE

Groundbreaking Development for Deaf Residents Opens

DePaul Rochester View Apartments is the first of its kind in New York.

By [Donna Kimura](#)

DePaul Rochester View Apartments is the first development of its kind in New York.

Located in the town of Henrietta, the new 61-unit affordable housing project by DePaul Properties was designed and implemented with members of the deaf and hard of hearing community.

"The goal was to promote the well-being of individuals in a welcoming environment that is affordable, accessible, and focused on resident safety," says developer Gillian Conde, vice president of DePaul. "DePaul desired to create a setting that truly fostered a sense of community, an element that is vital to persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, and using American Sign Language, as they often experience feelings of isolation and disconnection in other settings."



The \$17.6 million DePaul Rochester View Apartments is designed for deaf and hard of hearing residents in Henrietta, N.Y.

Henrietta is located near Rochester, which has one of the largest and youngest deaf populations in the nation. There's an estimated 42,000 to 50,000 people who are deaf or hard of hearing living among the metropolitan area's 1.1 million residents.

The Rochester School for the Deaf, the Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), and the National Center for Deaf Health Research are all located in the area.

DePaul, a longtime nonprofit organization, has had deaf individuals living at its various housing developments, but it wanted to go a step further and create an

entire deaf-friendly environment.

DePaul Rochester View provides needed affordable housing and helps alleviate the isolation that deaf people often feel. The average deaf person earns roughly \$20,000 less than a hearing person regardless of education, according to Conde.



Designed by SWBR Architects, the development has one- and two-bedroom apartments that have open floor plans with high levels of visibility and strategic lighting to help residents.

Thirty-three units are for residents earning no more than 50% of the area median income (AMI), and 28 units are for those earning no more than 60% of the AMI.

The new community features state-of-the-art communication equipment and high-contrast visual design. Designed by SWBR Architects, the development has open floor plans and strategic lighting to enhance visibility. The bedrooms are wired to allow for bed shakers in case of fire or other emergencies, strobe lighting for fire alarms, lighted door alarms, video phone and video conferencing capability, controlled secure access, security cameras throughout the campus, signage with Braille markings, and an on-site manager fluent in sign language. DePaul has partnered with local artists as well as the NTID to display artwork in the building.

Residents have access to a community room, an activity room, a terrace, a sunroom, and a computer room.

All of the apartments are enhanced for deaf and hard-of-hearing households, but the team made the development open to other residents. Still, more than half of the residents are deaf.

Many of the hearing residents are taking part in sign language classes. About 70 members of DePaul's staff have also been inspired to learn sign language, says Conde.



Each apartment features lights and other equipment to let residents know if there is an emergency or someone is at the door.

The \$17.6 million development was financed with \$6.6 million in low-income housing tax credit equity from First Sterling. The housing credits were awarded by New York State Homes and Community Renewal. Additional financing included a \$4.9 million award from the New York State Housing Trust Fund Corp.; a State of New York Mortgage Agency-insured \$5.4 million pension fund permanent loan from the Community Preservation Corp.; and a \$200,000 award of Urban Initiative Funding. Approximately 200 construction jobs and 30 long-term positions were created as a result of the DePaul Rochester View Apartments.

Donna Kimura is deputy editor of Affordable Housing Finance. She has covered the industry for more than a decade. Before that, she worked at an internet company and several daily newspapers. Connect with Donna at dkimura@hanleywood.com or follow her [@DKimura_AHF](#).