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## 'This is home': Officials celebrate opening of Joseph Allen Apartments

Affordable housing complex seen as transformative for Hamilton Hill neighborhood

Brett Samuels | October 5, 2017



Christina Serrano, who was among the first tenants to move in.

PHOTOGRAPHER: MARC SCHULTZ

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SCHENECTADY — Standing inside the building that bears her father's name, Lakeia Allen Bowman imagined how her father would react to the newest housing development in Hamilton Hill.

"He would be proud. He would be humbled, and he would shed a few tears," she said of her father, Joseph Allen, the city's first African American councilman.

Allen died in 2015, and the apartments at 780 Albany St. are named after him, a reminder to his family and the city at large of his lasting impact on the community.

"Every time I pass the building, it reminds me of how great my (grandpa) was," said Lakeia's young son, Raymond.



Local officials gathered Thursday in the new complex at the corner of Albany and Hulet streets to celebrate the development. The \$18 million project will provide 51 affordable housing units, numerous amenities and on-site social services.



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Of the 51 units, 46 are one-bedroom apartments, four are two-bedroom units and one is a studio apartment. The complex is not yet full, and management is accepting applications, said Gillian Conde, vice president of DePaul Properties, the Rochester-based developer on the project.

The building is smoke-free and includes free community laundry facilities, a computer lab and Wi-Fi access, community rooms, cable television, and heating and air conditioning. In addition, officials highlighted the availability of on-site social services through a partnership with the Schenectady Community Action Program or SCAP.



City leaders have suggested the quality of the development should reverberate throughout the whole community. Mark Fuller, president of DePaul Properties, assured those gathered that the facility would do just that.

"We've been in Rochester and Buffalo in similar kinds of neighborhoods, and in every instance, the next five or six years, you see other people make investments in their property," he said. "If you look at our projects that are 15 to 20 years old, they look as good as the day they opened."

Fuller emphasized DePaul's focus on being part of the community and pointed out that the community is reflected throughout the new building.

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Vivid photos depicting different parts of the city hang in the hallways. Images of recognizable locales, like City Hall and Veterans' Park, are a few steps away from a close-up shot of a fire hydrant in Hamilton Hill and another of the sign at Jerry Burrell Park.



Around the corner from the front desk, just past residents' mailboxes, are portraits of Councilwoman Marion Porterfield and her mother, and another of Lakeia Allen Bowman with her husband and son.

Porterfield, a Hamilton Hill resident and key supporter of the project, said she hopes naming the building after Allen will encourage others in the area to take pride in their neighborhood.

State Sen. Jim Tedisco and county Legislator Karen Johnson, who served on the City Council with Allen, said the development is a fitting tribute. The apartment complex will serve the same neighborhood and the same residents Allen fought to represent on the council, they said.

One of those residents is Christina Serrano, who was among the first tenants to move in. Serrano has lived in Schenectady for about 12 years, she said, and her social services case manager helped her apply for a unit in the new facility.

She acknowledged Hamilton Hill has a rough reputation, but said she's hopeful the new apartments will help change that. The complex is beautiful, she said, praising its amenities and on-site services.

"I have everything I need right here," she said. "This is home."

#### **FAST FACTS**

Almost 17 months to the day after breaking ground on the project, the Joseph L. Allen Apartments are open. Here are some features:

- Fifty-one units, including one studio unit and four two-bedroom units. Some are furnished, others aren't.
- Six full-time staffers
- On-site social services
- Wi-Fi, cable, air conditioning, heating, laundry, storage and community spaces included
- Named after Joseph Allen, Schenectady's first African-American City Council member
- Studio apartments: \$575/month for one person
- One-bedroom apartments: \$650/month for one or two people
- Two-bedroom apartments: \$800/month for two to four people

Depending on how many people live in the apartment, gross income limits are as follows:

- **One person:** \$34,920
- **Two people:** \$39,900
- **Three people:** \$44,880
- **Four people:** \$49,860