

Housing is on the horizon

By: Andrea Koskey

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SAN MATEO — Moneta Fnu needs to find cheaper housing for her family of four.

Fnu and her husband pay \$1,500 a month for a small apartment in Daly City that they can't afford, she said. She's been applying for low-income apartments for more than a year and so far has only been placed on a waiting list with San Mateo County. The family is just scraping by, she said.

"Even [saving] a few hundred dollars a month is better than nothing," she said outside a leasing office for Trestle Glen, a new subsidized apartment complex about to open in the unincorporated area between Daly City and Colma. "We work full time and don't spend time with our children."

Fnu, a Burmese immigrant, is among the thousands who struggle to afford housing in San Mateo County.

The average household in San Mateo County spends \$32,693 annually — or \$2,867 a month — on housing, according to a report released earlier this month by the nonprofit Urban Land Institute. Those who make less find considerably fewer options.

The Housing Authority of San Mateo County opened its application period in July 2008 for Section 8 Housing — vouchers for low-income families to pay rent — and received about 23,000 applications, according to agency statistics. A lottery was established to create a wait list of 3,600 applicants for an estimated three-year turnover period.

There are nearly 10,000 affordable housing units — apartments, condos or single-family homes — in the county, according to Duane Bay, director of the county housing authority. It's not enough, he said.

"Due to the economy more people need housing," Bay said.

The 119-unit Trestle Glen will provide a "in the bucket" in terms of need, Bay said.

Built adjacent to the Colma BART station, Trestle Glen offers below-market-rate rentals for households earning between 20 and 50 percent of the area median income, according to the developer of the project, Bridge Housing Corporation.

"It's a desirable location," Bay said. "But the sad fact is there's going to be way more people that

want those places and there's going to be a waiting list."

Unit rates range from \$403 to \$1,400 per month, depending on the size of the apartment: one, two and three bedroom units are available.

Lyn Hikida, a spokeswoman for the San Francisco-based Bridge Corporation, said the number of people who have expressed interest in renting one of the units has been greater than expected.

About 1,300 families signed up on an "interest" list for the apartments, so far 250 applications have been received. "It just goes to show how high demand is," she said.

Applications will be accepted through Nov. 25; the apartments are expected to open April 2010.

The entire project cost roughly \$44.5 million.

