

Multi-million dollar grant to help hearing impaired community

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By: Scott Kilbury

A big boost from the state for the hearing impaired community in Rochester. There are tens of thousands of people who are deaf or hard of hearing living in the Rochester area. Now, a multi-million dollar grant from the state of New York will help make life a little easier for them. The money will be used to build apartments that are equipped with special amenities for people who are hearing impaired.

DePaul is a local agency that's no stranger to finding and funding housing projects for adults in need. After a three year process, it convinced the state of New York that there's a need for a different kind of housing that only few states have.

A lot on East Henrietta Road is vacant now, but by this time next year, the Rochester View Apartments could be ready to open to a select group of the population.

Gillian Conde, DePaul Properties VP, said, "Is there a need for affordable housing for people that are deaf and I was stunned at the response."

This week, the New York State Housing and Community Renewal announced the funding of \$5.7 million to the \$17 million project. The first of its kind in the state.

Conde said, "They really came out in drives and said this is so incredibly needed to have an environment for support and also is visually friendly."

The price tag pays for 61, one and two-bedroom apartments, that will include special accommodations for the hearing impaired.

And DePaul is no stranger to adult assisted living properties. It funded the Halstead Square two years ago and adaptive devices, like flashing lights triggered by the door bell and strobing fire alarms, were installed in some of the units. Even the beds vibrates when the phone, door or alarm goes off. Video phones too, essential adaptations for the deaf, but ones that aren't exactly cheap.

Nodhyia Islam, Residential Service Coordinator, Halstead Square, said, "Some of them want to develop their independent skills. They can call their own medical transportation, schedule appointments, things like that."

Melissa O'Geen, program director, Halstead Square, said, "It's comforting knowing everyone will be safe. DePaul is committed to providing a safe and happy environment for everyone to live in."

More than 40,000 deaf people live in Rochester. So, building a place specifically for the deaf community makes sense.

Islam said, "It's nice to have deaf friends so they can communicate and not feel alone. Networking is very important in the deaf community."

Conde said, "Deaf people would have to lug these things around with them."

The apartments will be open not only to the deaf, but those members of the deaf community who are fluent in American Sign Language, like interpreters, who also work but earn less than \$30,000 annually.

The Rochester View Apartments will open fall of next year.