

HIGHWOOD: Fort Sheridan Place project under way

Comments

July 8, 2009

By **KENNETH L R. PATCHEN**

Morningside Group has started a three-year renovation project to create Fort Sheridan Place Luxury Rentals where Northshore Estates is now located in Highwood on Sheridan Road.

President David Strosberg, of Highland Park, said both the inside and outside of the buildings will be altered to create a completely different appearance reinforced by new landscaping that preserves older mature trees. New amenities will be included in the buildings.

Existing residents will have an opportunity to move to the new units or will have plenty of time to find new housing on the North Shore, he said. Monthly rentals in the new units are expected to start in the low \$900 range.

"Most folks in Highwood who know our plans are very enthusiastic about it," Strosberg said. "We feel it's a great location along the North Shore. Highwood has had a great resurgence. We're excited about being able to invest in Highwood. I'm pleased to be involved with it. It's just a few miles from my home."

Highwood Mayor Charles Pecaro said, "I think the community is excited for the change. We're very positive about someone coming in to give it a (substantial) facelift. It will be beautiful."

According to the Interfaith Housing Center of the North Suburbs, existing renters in Northshore Estates may find the move to the new luxury apartments difficult to achieve and alternative housing elsewhere may prove equally elusive.

"It's almost impossible to find something in Highland Park and Highwood," said Alicia De La Cruz, project director for the immigrant integration initiative at Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs in Winnetka. "It is not easy. Not easy. It's really difficult."

Cyclist Strosberg became aware of the Northshore Estates property and its luxury housing potential during many years of his own Sheridan Road bicycle rides. He knew about the improvements to Highwood's business district and nearby beneficial attractions: Proximity to Lake Michigan, downtown growth and new restaurant openings, North Shore District 112 schools, Highland Park High School, two nearby Metra train stations and open space in the area both new and planned.

Morningside Group started renovation work in February to create a model unit. Their 252 residences will feature one, two or three bedrooms, granite countertops for kitchens and bathrooms, Frigidaire appliances, new carpeting and cabinets, new windows and doors, heat and air conditioning for each unit, and some units with patios or balconies with Lake Michigan views.

"The floor plans are very well designed and were modern when they were done (originally). We're planning new fencing, new signage, new outdoor lighting," Strosberg said. "That will dramatically affect the appearance of the property."

Common areas will be redone as will elevator lobbies and interiors. Each building will have a new fitness center with cardiovascular machines, strength training equipment, and flat screen televisions. De La Cruz said one existing amenity, the Nuestro Center, which offers a place for students to gather to do homework, use computers, play with others and hang-out in a supervised place will close in March, 2009.

Strosberg said his company has helped tenants in other residential developments they own find new housing when necessary. People living at Northshore Estates now who can not afford Fort Sheridan Place units will have plenty of notice about the need to find a new home. Monthly rentals for Fort Sheridan Place will start in the low \$900 range.

"We have a list of other rental properties on the North Shore that is available," Strosberg said.

Pecaro said, "Hopefully, (existing tenants) can move back in."

De La Cruz said the changes in store for existing residents of Northshore Estates are very complex even with the help of her staff and their knowledge of the North Shore housing market.

"It's not easy to live at Northshore Estates, but it's easier to afford that than to afford another place," said De La Cruz.

She recently helped relocate a Northshore Estates family who had a three-bedroom home, so she knows the current character of the market, which seems to want about \$1,600 a month elsewhere. People there are earning between \$25,000 and \$35,000 from a combination of two or three jobs, she said.

The typical Northshore Estate rental of about \$1,200 a month is made more bearable because utility costs are included. To move to a new apartment will require a security deposit, one extra month of rent, and moving expenses. For people now affected by job losses because of the current economy, the opportunities are constrained just by those entry requirements.

Pecaro said he is working with Morningside Group to be sure Fort Sheridan Place Luxury Rentals reinforce the character of the town. Both Highwood city officials and Strosberg, he said, want to keep their lines of communication open.

"That's our goal," Pecaro said. "We hope we can all work together."

Morningside Group has residential and commercial properties in Elmhurst, Oak Lawn, Glen Ellyn and Downers Grove. Because of his urban planning and architecture background, Strosberg believes downtown residential development can bring people closer to restaurants and entertainment opportunities without a need for vehicles. This is especially true for young families and people who want smaller places after their children have left home.