



Mural makes an impact at Spring Lake housing

When Saul Meneses moved into Mutual Housing at Spring Lake, he had no idea he would be one of 15 residents who helped create a mural for the community room.

“It was definitely a surprise,” said the 73-year-old member of the Spring Lake Community. “It was great to be able to talk about my experience as a farm worker. And I liked the idea of the mural representing the stories of the families and workers who live here.”



The community room mural at the Mutual Housing complex in Spring Lake features some of the local residents. *Photo courtesy Izzy Schwartz.*

Born in Acapulco, Meneses picked grapes and other fruits and vegetables for labor contractors between Bakersfield and Woodland for many years.

Because of failing eyesight, he retired a few years ago.

Students from the Chicana/o Studies mural workshop of Maceo Montoya, and assistant professor at UC Davis, talked to residents about their aspirations and dreams – as well as their struggles and challenges.

“Many of my students come from immigrant and farm working backgrounds,” said Montoya. “The conversations were heartfelt – the mother

in the fields worrying about her children, wanting a safe space for them and their families to come home to.

“While the university can become a bubble, this type of research takes them back into the community.”

The students chose the imagery – farm worker and fields, mother and child, the cornucopia of fruits and vegetables from the laborers’ work, the butterflies that migrate from Mexico to California and back over many generations – from stories the residents told of their lives.

The mural also has the dreams – homes and students on graduation day with their mortar boards.

The nonprofit developer started buying art for its communities in 2010.

Mutual Housing California develops housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.

continued on back

Prior to that, they had partnered with artists funded by the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission who worked with Mutual Housing residents to design and paint murals on concrete walls at various properties.

“Gertie,” a found-art metal giraffe sculpture by Steve Cook that welcomes people to Mutual Housing at the Highlands was the first art Mutual Housing actually commissioned.

Another sculpture by Cook, one by Rebecca Portney and a mural next to the garden by Carlo Stowers were chosen for New Harmony Mutual Housing Community in Davis.

“We try to incorporate as much art as we can in all our communities,” said Rachel Iskow, chief executive officer of the Sacramento-based nonprofit. “It’s very important for art to be part of our daily lives, especially for the children so they grow up feeling comfortable with it and inspired to create art on their own because of it.

“Having art in apartment complexes, shopping centers, office building and city streets makes it much more accessible to everyone.”

Iskow also wants to support the local art community by using local artists.

The mural at Spring Lake is part of this “Buy Local” approach.

“I knew Maceo Montoya through friends,” said Vanessa Guerra, Mutual Housing project manager who oversaw the creation of the development. “I thought a mural would be perfect for our population and give special meaning to our property here.”



Though his eyesight is failing, resident Saul Meneses is still proud of the mural in Mutual Housing at Spring Lake. *Photo courtesy Iliana Chevez.*

Resident Saul Meneses agrees.

“It has our families and a sense of community, our stories, and our migration in the butterfly.”

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops, operates and advocates for sustainable rental housing for the diversity of the region’s households. It acquired the 5.14 acres at 2170 Farmers Central Road in 2010. It broke ground on 3.28 acres in December 2013 and officially opened in late-June 2015. The remaining acres will be built when the nonprofit receives funding.

It is one of the first rental properties in the nation certified as Zero Energy Ready Homes by the Department of Energy. There are 62 apartments and townhomes.

Woodland was chosen as a place to build housing for agricultural workers because of its central location to farming in the region.

A member of NeighborWorks America – a congressionally chartered nonprofit organization that supports community development nationwide – Mutual Housing has more than 3,000 residents, nearly half of whom are children.

Through its focus on community, the nonprofit also provides training and mentoring as well as educational programs, leadership-building activities and services for residents and neighbors.

Mutual Housing California develops housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.