



The Viridian: Sadowski Funds Aid in Preservation

Section 8 Housing Serving Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

Built in 1971, the Viridian, formerly known as the Columbian Apartments, is an 11 story high-rise located in the heart of downtown St. Petersburg. The 188-unit building is in the process of substantial rehabilitation by Sage Partners.

The Florida Housing Coalition interviewed Debra Koehler, president of Sage Partners.



Debra Koehler

FHC: What's behind the name change from Columbian Apartments to Viridian?

DK: Viridian is Latin for green. It's the same reason we chose the name Sage for our company- because sage is a shade of green and a primary focus for our company is to build as green as

possible. We think this is a wise way to do business; in addition to "green", the word "sage" means experienced and wise. Substantial rehabilitation of an at-risk project in an area rich with public transit, medical services, and shopping, using as many green designs and products as possible earns the name Viridian.

FHC: Why did you choose this property?

DK: We were introduced to the property by a local broker. The property was owned by Columbian Knights, Ltd., who had owned the property for 30 years. We purchased the property in June 2009. Sage saw this as an opportunity to preserve much needed

senior housing. The building is located in a premier location. It had the potential to be a high end building, and potentially would have sold with views of the bay from the upper floors. If the property sold to a market rate developer, the federal Section 8 subsidy would have been lost- those affordable units would never have been recovered- so it was imperative for us to save this property.

FHC: How were you able to preserve this property?

DK: We pieced together numerous federal, state, and local funding sources; approximately 30% of the funding came from the Sadowski state and local housing trust funds and the Pinellas County Housing Trust Fund dollars. We could not have preserved this property without our government and private sector partners.

FHC: Tell us about the people who live in the Viridian.

DK: The Viridian's population consists of seniors and disabled residents, and 70 percent of the units are on project-based Section 8 Contract. The typical resident



- Pleasantly surprised on how smoothly construction has gone
- “The nicest place I’ve lived in to accommodate the wheelchair”
- Very happy with the removal of the carpeting. Enhances ability to maneuver in unit.

Carl

- Lived at Columbian for 3 years
- Disabled since 1984, on SSI since 1996
- Paraplegic
- Salesman, 5 years with Merrill Lynch

pays \$187 out of their social security check to cover rent and utilities. We have very vulnerable, extremely low income residents. We have 10 full ADA units and four units that are specially equipped for sight and hearing impaired individuals.

FHC: How will the rehabilitation process affect the residents? And what types of building upgrades should be expected?

DK: A few residents left when we instituted a No Smoking policy, but we will have no displacement, even during construction/rehabilitation. We are doing one floor at a time, and moving the residents to different floors as we complete renovations of the apartments. We will be finished by July 2010.

Each residential unit will be renovated with environmentally friendly flooring, Energy Star appliances and light fixtures; bathrooms will be upgraded with grab bars; and each apartment will be painted with no VOC paint.

FHC: What has been the response from the residents?

DK: This transformation is not only to the units but to the community. We have added a new computer lab, a library, a fitness center and a community garden. Our community garden is the first to be approved by the Florida Housing Finance Corporation. We will grow edible foods, herbs and flowers. The food will be used for community meals. We will also receive a Florida Yards and Neighborhood Certification for new landscaping. In addition, we are installing an emergency call service and resident check-in system. The residents are extremely appreciative—they love their renovated apartments, and they are already starting to enjoy the new community environment.

HNN



- “I love my new apartment.”
- “It’s so spacious and easy to keep up.”
- “The kitchen is wonderful.”

Opal

- Lived at Columbian for 10 years
- Varied careers – Telemarketing, sales for Olan Mills, manufacturing



- “This is my home.”
- “This has raised my standard of living.”
- Regarding rehab changes – “It’s all to the ease of the tenant”
- “You run your business like a family.”

Richard

- Lived at Columbian for 12 years
- Worked in local manufacturing /carpentry



- “I love my apartment.”
- “Removing the carpeting has made me healthier.”
- Regarding no-smoking policy – “Best thing that could have been done.”
- “New kitchen is awesome – the big refrigerator and the big stove, that’s a big plus.”

Linda

- Lived at Columbian for 4 years
- Disabled since 1999
- Worked in electronics manufacturing
- Linda suffers from emphysema