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# Creativity to Be Big Draw at Senior Colony

A \$22-million housing project underway in Burbank is designed to appeal to Southern California's many aging artistic types.

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As a youngster in upstate New York, Tim Carpenter was fascinated by the creative electricity of the nearby artists colony called Yaddo.

Five years ago, the Burbank writer asked himself, "Why can't we do that with seniors?"

As a result, what may be the nation's first senior artists colony is under construction on a once-shabby block in Burbank, at San Fernando Boulevard and Verdugo Avenue.

The \$22-million project will provide 141 one- and two-bedroom apartments for those 55 and older. But the art-enhancing amenities are what will make the project special.

Intended to attract members of Southern California's large and aging creative community, the artists colony will house a senior theater group with a 45-seat theater and screening room; and a senior fine arts collective, with gallery spaces and two studios, one a "wet space" for sculpture and other messy arts.

Also planned is an independent film company to make and market members' films. Digital editing equipment will be close at hand.

Explained Carpenter, executive director of the nonprofit More Than Shelter for Seniors: In other senior housing, residents might go next door to borrow a cup of sugar — "Here they can get script notes."

The colony has been lauded by the National Assn. of Home Builders as "best project on the boards," said Sean Clark, senior vice president of the developer, Meta Housing Corp. of Los Angeles.



BRYAN CHAN Los Angeles Times

**IDEA MAN:** Tim Carpenter, executive director of More Than Shelter for Seniors, is guiding what may be the nation's first 55-and-older artists colony.

Designed by Scheurer Architects of Newport Beach, the 1.5-acre complex will have parking at ground level and public areas with a pool and health club, fireplaces, a library and a sculpture garden. Residents will have a grassy area for tai chi. And, in addition to a community laundry room, 20% of the units will have washers and dryers.

But Carpenter and others think it's the opportunity to create with other artists that will be the big draw.

The development is being built next to Miller Kindergarten and near Miller Elementary School, both part of the Burbank Unified School District. An "intergenerational creativity program" will encourage collaboration between students and colony residents.

Burbank lent the developer \$3.5 million to jump-start the project, the first in the city's South San Fernando Redevelopment area. The remaining financing came from low-income housing bonds and conventional loans, Carpenter said.

Redevelopment official Jack Lynch said the project was a natural for Burbank, given its wealth of artists and creative businesses.

The city was also taken with the idea of residents serving as artistic mentors to Burbank youngsters, he said.

Thirty percent of the units will be reserved for low-income seniors. The rest will rent at market rates, the developer said.

Based in North Hollywood,

More Than Shelter for Seniors "provides life-enhancing programs for low-income seniors living in affordable apartment communities," according to its literature.

"I don't want us ever compared to another senior services organization," said Carpenter.

He compares aging with going to college: Done right, it is an opportunity to do what you have always wanted to do.

Carpenter, who will have an office in the new complex, said his organization tries to create activities that seniors want and need, including wellness programs. "We're good at motivating people," he said.

In his five years programming senior complexes, Carpenter has seen art transform the lives of older residents. He cited a Latino who reinvented himself as a writer. The man has little money and is not in the best of health, but he has turned the storage area on his balcony into an office where he writes every day.

He recently told Carpenter that aging was the best thing that had ever happened to him.

The senior artists colony will be filled with people "doing real art, not just playing at it," Carpenter predicted.

To help shape the program, the unfinished complex has an advisory committee of artists in half a dozen media.

Richard Erdman, 79, an actor, writer and director, has been helping plan the theater. One of his suggestions was that the complex be wired so residents could watch productions from their rooms.

The building is expected to open in December.