

Three more buildings now open in Encore

By Elisabeth Parker, Times Staff Writer

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TAMPA — Music resonates from a low-lying plot of land on the fringe of downtown, once known as the Scrub.

Earlier this week it was a trumpeter, playing as guests toured apartments at a grand opening for the Trio, the second project completed within Encore.

Mechelle Arnold appreciated ample closets as she explored a two-bedroom unit with a view of the city skyline she called beautiful.

First residents moved in last month. These 49 households are the newest additions to an ambitious mixed housing redevelopment plan. Find them at 1101 Ray Charles Blvd., named for the legendary music artist who recorded his first song near here, back when the area was known as Harlem South.

They mingled outside where a tent sheltered guests near the spot where the Cotton Club once stood, where jazz artists Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington performed in the 1940s and where teens did a new dance later called the twist.

Naturally, when it came to designing the 28-acre project, architects sought the soul of the music.

Robert Ledford, principal at Baker Barrios Architects, pointed out rows of offset windows in the Ella, the first Encore building, which opened for residents 62 and older in 2012.

"It's a simple rhythm, just like in music," said Ledford, whose father was a music teacher. Eventually, two more buildings will complete Encore. The Reed is under construction and the Tempo is being designed. In total, Encore will house about 700 family units, Ledford said.

The Trio, a \$29 million project with 207,583 square feet of mixed housing, was the result of a public-private partnership between Banc of America Community Development Corp. and the Tampa Housing Authority. There were 14 funding sources, including Bank of America and the Tampa Housing Authority.

All together, Encore is a \$425 million project expected to be complete in seven years. Its goal, Ledford said, is to reestablish the city grid between the central business district of downtown and Ybor City.

All buildings aim to be certified silver by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. Water for its air conditioner comes from a chiller plant that eliminates rooftop air conditioning, allowing solar panels to cover roofs.

The Trio includes 141 one- to four-bedroom units and is currently 35 percent occupied and 72 percent leased — some just haven't moved in yet, said Eileen Pope, developer at the community development corporation. There's a mix of incomes with renters paying market rate, using Section 8, or qualifying for public housing and paying 30 percent of their income. Rates range from \$359 to \$1,397.

And a pool on top of a parking garage will open any day now, she said.

So far, Encore has not signed any retail or commercial tenants.

The project's first public art adorns a brick wall on the Trio facing Perry Harvey Sr. Park: three large hand-carved tile murals depicting earlier days. Community advocate Fred Hearn talked to visitors by the murals, which he said captured the essence of the time.

Freed slaves settled in this area in the late 1800s. They built wood shacks in the low lands known as the Bottoms, later called the Scrub because of the brush that flourished there.

A thriving African-American society flourished here, too. Then in the 1950s, the city razed the shacks and built public housing. In 2007, the Tampa Housing Authority demolished the 483 apartments of Central Park Village.

The only original structure still standing is the 1921 St. James Church, with boarded windows, alongside the Trio. Eventually, plans include opening a computer lab inside the structure, and later, an African-American history museum.

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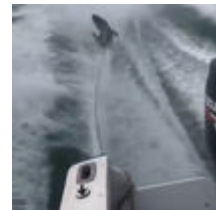
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