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## Camillus House opens new digs for the formerly homeless

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PATRICK FARRELL / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Maryanne Bryceland, 67, flops on her bed at the new Camillus House campus, which will replace the cramped downtown homeless shelter.

The Camillus House shelter, slated to move out of its cramped, antiquated downtown home next year, has completed the first phase of its planned \$80 million new campus-- a gleaming, eco-friendly and energy-efficient apartment building that will provide permanent housing for 80 formerly homeless people.

The first residents are now moving into Shepherd's Court -- named after the Brothers of the Good Shepherd, the religious order that sponsors Camillus House -- even as construction proceeds on the next phase of the new campus, near Jackson Memorial Hospital. The complex eventually will encompass seven buildings around an enclosed, secure courtyard.

"It's a lovely apartment, very cute," said Maryanne Bryceland, 67, whose previous residence was a shelter, of

the fully furnished one-bedroom into which she moved last week. "I'm looking forward to resting. I'm looking forward to saving some money. And I'm glad to be in a place where I can soak in the bathtub and walk around with a towel on my head."

The seven-story Shepherd's Court, built for Camillus by affordable housing developer Biscayne Housing Group using public financing, includes a range of eco-friendly, energy-saving features unusual for a low-cost project. They include high-efficiency air conditioning systems, lights that turn themselves off when people leave a room, and a rooftop array of photovoltaic panels that will feed power into the electrical grid.

Its designers, Coral Gables architectural firm Wolfberg Alvarez and consultants Sequil Systems, say it qualifies for LEED Gold certification, the second-highest stamp of approval from the U.S. Green Building Council. Biscayne Housing officials say they believe it will be the first apartment building in South Florida to win gold certification.

Camillus House administrators and its consultants say the environmentally friendly measures will not only make operating the building cheaper, but also lower electrical costs for tenants, who pay rent and are responsible for utility bills.

"It's better lighting, a better environment and better comfort for the occupants," said Sequil principal Jeff Conley. "And it will lower electrical bills for tenants, making it even more affordable."

Also completed in time for the Shepherd's Court opening is a 200-car garage to serve the entire campus, which will include an in-house substance-abuse treatment program, a new emergency shelter, medical

clinic, kitchen and dining rooms, a wellness center and an auditorium, in addition to administrative offices.

The residential treatment building and the building housing the dining, activities and office space should be done within a year.

Camillus is tentatively slated to vacate its downtown building around July, said executive director Paul Ahr. By then he expects work on the new emergency shelter building to be well underway.

Unlike the 50-year-old shelter building downtown, the new campus, which occupies three acres wedged between Interstate 96 and Northwest Seventh Avenue, has been designed to provide comprehensive support services and a range of housing to attack chronic homelessness. Though it will have more shelter beds than the old facility, allowing Camillus house to serve more women, as well as courtyard space reserved for long-term homeless people who often initially refuse to sleep indoors, the new Camillus House will not include a soup kitchen.

Some critics say that long-controversial component contributed to downtown blight by attracting crowds.

Following years of negotiation, Camillus administrators agreed to forgo the soup kitchen, under an agreement with the city of Miami that paved the way for the new campus.

The campus, financed through a package of public grants and loans and \$35 million in private donations, will triple Camillus House's capacity to 340 beds. The larger facility will allow the facility to serve an estimated 4,000 people a year.

Shepherd's Court illustrates Camillus' administrators' broad-based approach. Apartments are being rented to chronically homeless people, many of them with physical or mental disabilities, who have sources of income -- government checks or, in some cases, jobs. The average rent is under \$200.

The program includes activities and amenities to keep residents engaged and build a sense of community, and includes counseling as necessary to ensure they stay housed. The building, managed by affordable-housing nonprofit Carrfour, also houses a computer and exercise rooms, library and classroom space.

Many of those moving into the apartments are among the hard-core homeless who now sleep outdoors in the courtyard of Camillus House's downtown shelter and have gone through some of the shelter's treatment and counseling programs. All have been homeless for years.

"Thank God for Camillus House," said Dudley Armstrong, 56, settled into a sofa in his bright living room, with windows out to a ground-floor balcony overlooking Seventh Avenue. "Being out on the streets is not fit for a human. But I did what I was supposed to do, stayed clean, stayed focused, and this is one of the benefits."