

# REAL ESTATE WEEKLY

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## Design team serving nation's veterans with supportive community development

By REW Staff

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Recognizing the challenges facing veterans returning home from overseas tours of duty — disability, depression, post-traumatic stress, lack of employment, and homelessness — experts from the affordable housing industry have been collaborating with veterans' advocacy groups to provide supportive residential communities for returning servicemen and women.

The most recent example, Valley Brook Village in Lyons, N.J., designed by The Architectural Team in a continuing partnership with developer and property manager Peabody Properties, will open its doors to residents this month.

With the development nearing completion, 62 veterans who might otherwise find themselves homeless and without vital support services are scheduled to take up residency upon the project's opening.

Unlike transitional homes, Valley Brook Village is a permanent housing model, designed to address veterans' physical, wellness and emotional needs, addressing the complex requirements of this diverse resident population.

Its turnkey delivery has been led by The Architectural Team, Peabody Properties, Windover Construction, and the not-for-profit Affordable Housing & Services Collaborative (AHSC), which will oversee the property's operations.

The group of companies is building four such communities for the VA Supportive Housing (VASH) program led by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

"These new residential housing models are unique in that they are providing a combination of healthcare principles for both physical and emotional trauma with new concepts in design, creating a sense of community, collaboration and cohesiveness," said Michael D. Binette, AIA, principal at The Architectural Team.



*Valley Brook Village will open this month.*

“Today, unlike in years past, servicemen and women have a higher survival rate which results in their returning home with myriad physical and emotional challenges that need to be addressed.

“Our aim is to design an engaging environment where each individual enjoys a sense of belonging, has community support, and has access to the services they require to aid in their recovery.”

Valley Brook Village includes a number of design and planning innovations — the project is anticipating Silver level certification under the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED for Homes program — and also represents a unique arrangement of partnerships among private, public and not-for-profit stakeholders.

The project will be the subject of a documentary short film by North Carolina-based Susie Films.

The Architectural Team is responsible for the design of three additional veteran supportive housing developments in Massachusetts.

These HUD-VASH sponsored projects include the historic adaptation of a building in the town of Beverly, which opened to residents in June. Pleasant Street Apartments, as the project is now known, provides 32 units of permanent supportive housing, similar in concept to Valley Brook Village, and developed in partnership with Windover Construction of Manchester, Mass.

“It has been proven how effective permanent supportive housing is in ending homelessness for persons with multiple barriers to housing stability,” said Betsy Collins, senior project manager, Peabody Properties.

Peabody will staff and manage on-site counselors to aid veterans with programs such as crisis intervention, job training, work readiness programs, physical health care, and community building activities, making the development more than mere housing.

Binette pointed out that the master plan of the property creates a non-institutional, “village-style” setting, so the residents feel less isolated, and have the opportunity to feel part of a larger community.

The design of the residences themselves incorporate plentiful daylighting and exterior views — clinically proven to improve recovery from trauma and anxiety — plus residential-looking solutions and highly integrated universal design techniques that support health care delivery while avoiding the “institutional” quality associated with hospitals and post-acute care centers.

The population of applicants for the residences include recently deployed Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, career servicemen (some of whom served in Vietnam), and approximately 5% female service members — indicative of the recent increase in women veterans needing supportive services and/or housing.