



# Take a number

*A new affordable housing complex is met with high demand*

PHOTO BY JOSEPH GLODE

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It is 6:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 31, and close to two dozen people wait outside the doors of Catholic Charities' main Portland office on the corner of Southeast Powell Boulevard and 28th Avenue.

They are young, old, white, of African descent, Hispanic, homeless and living in shelters. Some are case managers standing in line on behalf of their clients. They are accompanied by friends, family, or in some cases, their dogs.

They wear scarves, hats, hoods over their heads, gloves, coats and layers beneath their coats. Their breath forms small clouds in the cold air as they stand or sit in walkers, which, with their brakes on, are immobile and thus unable to careen down 28th Avenue, which drops steeply down the block from Powell.

They carry backpacks or manila envelopes thick from the amount of paperwork – the rental application, financial paperwork and other necessary documentation – held inside.

They are all filled with high hopes and anxiety.

The people are all potential tenants of the St. Francis Apartments and they are lined up outside Catholic Charities for the organization's "lease-up event," the first time applications opened for people to apply to live in the St. Francis Apartments.

The St. Francis Apartments will be a new,

102-unit building scheduled to open this April. Located in inner southeast Portland on the ground that was once St. Francis Park, it will be the first apartment building affordable to the lowest-income Portlanders to open since the Fern Grove apartments, a 33-unit building located in outer east Portland, opened in June 2016.

This past year, Portland had the fastest rising rents in the country. In the past month, news of two affordable buildings in North Portland facing a 100 percent rent increase and a mass eviction ricocheted throughout the city, amplifying the fact that the region's affordable housing and homelessness crisis is not over by a long shot.

Catholic Charities will accept applications for the St. Francis Apartments through early April, but the people waiting in line before the sun rose on Jan. 31 stand the best chance of being accepted. Completed applications are being considered on a first-come-first-serve basis.

While Catholic Charities has gone to great lengths to create an application system to help people interested in applying, the initial requirement – to show up in person, on a Tuesday morning – led some housing and social service advocates to question how fair a first-come-first-serve process is, given the vulnerability and barriers many homeless and low-income people face.

Deborah K., who declined to give her full last name, was among the first dozen people standing outside of Catholic Charities. Her gray hair was neatly pulled back in a ponytail, and she clutched a coffee-filled thermos to her chest with both hands.

"I wanted to be somewhere near the front to make sure that I had a chance at one of the apartments," she said.

Deborah, 64, moved to Portland this past August from San Bernardino, Calif. One month later, she became homeless.

"It was poor planning," she said.

She camped, along with her grown son, who moved with her.

"It wasn't too bad at first," she said. "It was kind of fun. Then the weather changed."

She's been staying at a shelter since fall, but she didn't say which one. She said many of the women staying in the shelter are escaping abusive domestic situations.

Ten of the 102 units at St. Francis will be reserved for people earning less than 30 percent of Portland's median family income, which amounts to \$14,300 per year for a single

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**DEBORAH K.**  
WOMAN IN NEED OF SHELTER  
APPLYING FOR AN APARTMENT AT ST. FRANCIS

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