

A Community for All Ages

Bridge
Meadows
mentors
foster kids

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A new housing community in north Portland is dedicated to changing the face of the foster care system by bringing back intergenerational living, where older residents are mentors to young people recently adopted or awaiting legal guardianship.

Bridge Meadows is the only urban housing community of its kind throughout the nation. It provides 27 affordable housing units for "elders" who help care for foster youth, who live in one of the nine homes reserved for adoptive families.

According to Amanda Davenport, Bridge Meadows development director, there are currently more than 8,000 children in Oregon who are part of the foster care program.

"A lot of kids end up aging out of the system," she said. "So we are looking for creative innovative solutions to get these kids permanent placement by adoption or legal guardianship."

Although planning began in 2004, Bridge Meadows opened its doors in April 2011, founded on the belief that a community of caring, connected and empowered individuals can heal and enrich the lives of each other.

Tenants come from a variety of backgrounds before moving onto the property, said Bridge Meadows Executive Director and psychologist Dr. Derenda Schubert.

"The expectation of the families who move in here is that they will adopt, or have adopted, at least three to four children over a four year period," she said.

The two-acre complex is located on land that once housed the former John Ball Elementary School in the Portsmouth neighborhood. While designated as affordable housing for elders, there isn't an income restriction for the families who wish to live within the community.

Adoptive families are often referred by the Department of



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A young boy and his mentor enjoy from a recent holiday celebration at north Portland's intergenerational housing community Bridge Meadows. Opened since last April, the affordable housing community provides support for both the elderly and foster and adoptive youth.

Human Services, where they learn about Bridge Meadows through their case workers.

"We explain this is a community, and there is a lot of interaction with one another," Schubert said.

The elderly, who must be 55-

years or older, are expected to become part of the Bridge Meadows living environment.

All tenants living in the units are required in their leases to volunteer at least 10 hours each week to support the lives of the

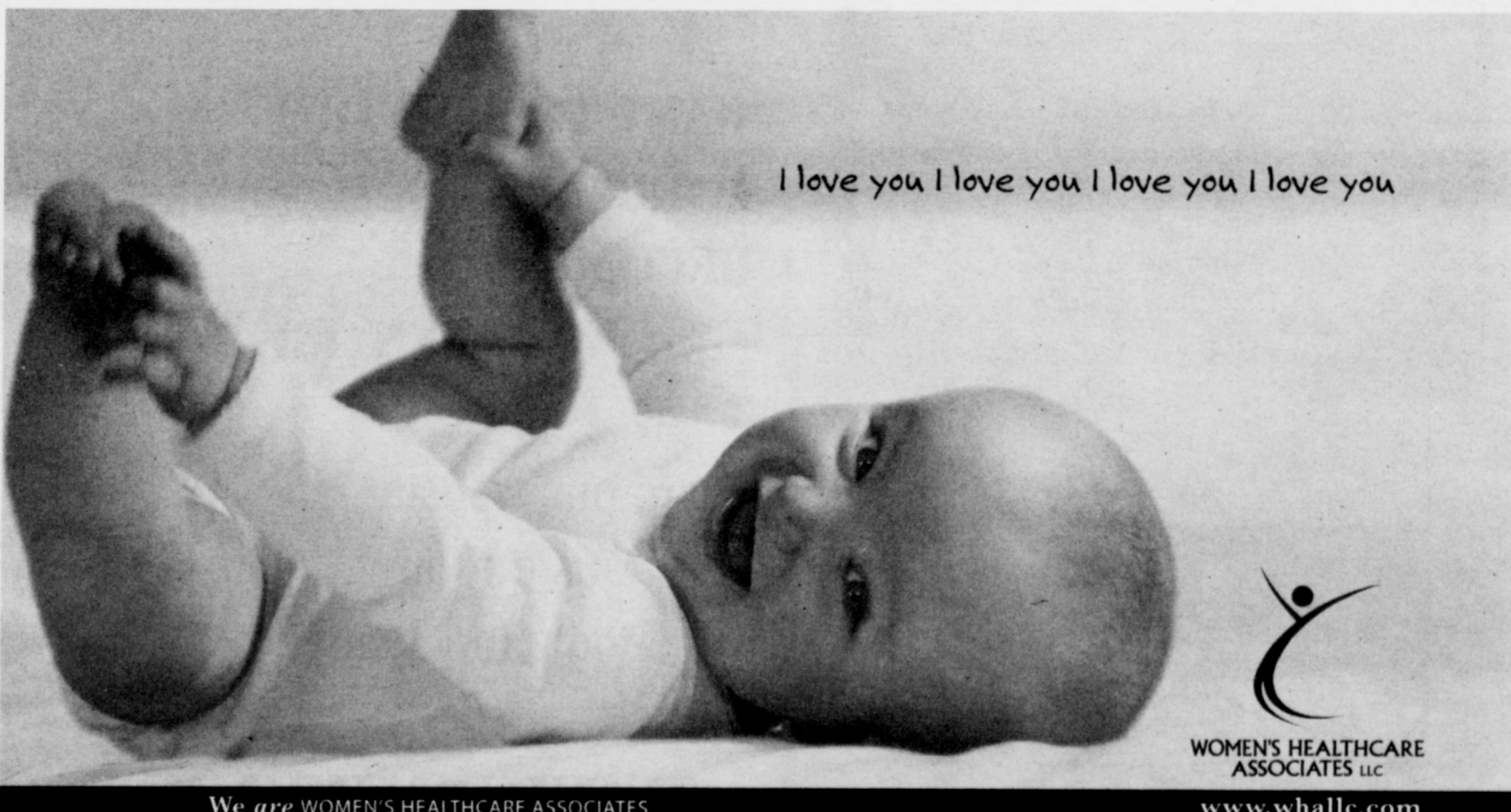
youth and their families.

"Building the community begins before people come to live here," Schubert said. "As we interview them, we explain what it means to be a member of this community, and there are ex-

pectations of involvement and support for the children and their families."

Davenport said Bridge Meadows elders are very vibrant and

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