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Bishop O'Malley blesses affordable housing in Lowell

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LOWELL -- Opening the door to his third-floor apartment at Bruyere Gardens II, 85-year-old Lionel Brunelle was greeted by Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley, who invited himself in.

O'Malley, who moments before had cut the ribbon to the 42-unit affordable-housing facility on Varnum Avenue, entered the apartment, admired Brunelle's homemade furniture and offered a blessing on what is now Brunelle's new home.

A spirit of celebration enveloped the official opening of the \$8.4 million elderly housing community, which will be managed by the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa through the D'Youville Senior Care facility. The one-bedroom apartments are part of a larger initiative at D'Youville to create greater service-enriched housing for the elderly and have been constructed adjacent to D'Youville's Bruyere Gardens I, an independent living community for low-income seniors above the age of 62.

"It's a place where single residents and couples can live in a comfortable, safe environment," said Naomi Prendergast, president and CEO of D'Youville Senior Care. "Many of these individuals are active, independent seniors and have known each other for years and quite a few of them have moved here for the first time, joining family in the area," said Lisa Alberghini, president of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs. "They all share a desire to live in an apartment that is truly their home."

O'Malley, archbishop of the Boston Archdiocese, was about 30 minutes late to the ribbon-cutting ceremony, but that didn't dampen the mood of the 200 or so people who waited patiently for the Catholic spiritual leader.

"Our task is to build a civilization of love. To care for one another. The Sisters of Charity have been doing that for so long, and we are very blessed by their ministry," O'Malley said. "This project is another example of what needs to be done and what can be done when people of good will have a dream and the courage to follow that dream." The cardinal singled out Provincial Superior, Sister Pauline Leblanc, who worked to bring the various entities together throughout the course of the project.

"We sponsored the project and we own the property as a congregation," Leblanc explained, as visitors toured the facility. "It was my job, I guess, to see that our mission was carried out and that it remains a Catholic institution. Not that we only admit Catholics -- we don't -- but that the mission remains true to the Catholic teaching."

The project was spearheaded by the Planning Office of Urban Affairs, a nonprofit real-estate developer established in 1969 by the Archdiocese in Boston. Financing came through a \$5.9 million capital advance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development's Section 202 program, \$750,000 in Housing Stabilization Funds, \$750,000 in Housing Innovations Funds and \$200,000 in community-based housing program funds from the state Department of Housing and Community Development. More than \$1 million came through MassHousing funds, Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston's Affordable Housing Program, Bank of America and the city of Lowell.

"Given the economic backdrop, it's wonderful to be here celebrating a development that has had an immediate positive impact in our community," Lowell Mayor Edward "Bud" Caulfield said. "Did you know that there is only one unit left?"

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