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Former convent becomes elderly housing

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She has buried three sons, weathered breast cancer and bankruptcy, and spent the last decade caring for her mother.

At 70, Norma Moylan is, if nothing else, a survivor. But with a monthly income of only \$612 in social security, she knew she would be dangerously close to homelessness whenever her mother died.

"Where would you go for \$612?" Moylan said. "I had to do something. I just couldn't make ends meet."

She is one of the lucky few, one of 40 people who will move in next month to Riley House, a former convent that the Planning Office for Urban Affairs, a not-for-profit agency created by the Boston archdiocese, dedicated as housing yesterday in Hyde Park.

The Planning Office bought the vacant building from the Archdiocese in 2003 and expanded it, using more than \$4.9 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

There, Moylan and her new neighbors will pay 30 percent of their incomes for one-bedroom apartments they obtained by entering a lottery for senior citizens who earn 50 percent or less of Boston's median income.

"For us and for the archdiocese, the building was the perfect place to provide affordable housing because it's carrying on the mission of the church, just in a different way," said Lisa Alberghini, the Office's executive director.

Because the office's aim is to serve the poor rather than to make a profit, Alberghini said, it has been able to do what private developers have been reluctant to, creating 2,200 of affordable and mixed-income units housing some nearly 10,000 people, including about 1,000 units for the elderly, since 1968.

"It's been a tough road, but I made it," Moylan said as she waited for her first glimpse of her new home. "Here I am. And I'm so excited."

Caption: HAIL: Archbishop Sean O'Malley meets Jack Shaughnessy at Riley House.
Staff photo by David Goldman

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