

# Optimism fills new Hialeah complex

## Plan mixes tenants of varying incomes

By STEPHEN SMITH  
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Out west of the Palmetto Expressway, there's a bumper crop of apartments this building season.

Everywhere, as far as the eye can see, rise amber and white and peach waves of stucco. In one of those waves, there's a social experiment going on.

In Villa Hialeah Apartments, the poor will live alongside the not-so-poor, but there will be no sign on the doors saying this tenant makes that much or this-tenant pays less rent.

And that's the way they mean it to be, a place where income lines blur and differences become muted.

"Our company's been around for 14 years, and we've developed thousands of units of housing," said Armand Brachman, vice president of Dominion Group, the Minneapolis company that is building the apartments.

"This is one way, working with the government, we're able to give back some of what we've taken."

The government they're working with is the city of Hialeah.

"I think the concept is that it is not used as a low-income project," said Frederick Marinelli, assistant to Hialeah Mayor Raul Martinez. "That's the key. The problem is, there's too many negative connotations when you say low-income."

"You can get an idea of what this is like — I'd live there. That's the whole idea: to have a nice building



PETER ANDREW BOSCH / Miami Herald Staff  
**Howard Steinholz, part-owner of Villa Hialeah Apartments, where 62 of 245 units will be set aside for tenants with lower incomes.**

with nice amenities in a nice area."

Amid plumes of dust, hulking construction machines churn through Villa Hialeah, 2500 W. 56th St. Already, 39 townhouses are filled with tenants. The bulk of the complex, which will have 245 apartments and is costing \$13.4 million to build, will be finished this spring.

Dominion got a \$4.8 million loan from Hialeah for the apartments. The city got that money from the U.S. government as part of a program that has since died. It worked this way: Cities could lend the money to developers if they promised to lease apartments to tenants who couldn't afford the

rent on a first-class apartment. Dominion set aside 62 apartments.

The loan is paid back with about 3 percent interest 20 years later. And the city gets to keep the money. "It's a very win-win situation for the city," Marinelli said.

Dominion has rented the 39 townhouses for \$327 a month. Typically, Brachman said, they rent for \$600 to \$700.

And these aren't concrete shoe boxes growing in the West Dade fields. There are roofs with peaks and apartments with washers and dryers.

With a swimming pool and sauna and weight room, this doesn't look

much like public housing.

"It could be said that's why we're doing it," Brachman said.

So that's the idea: to give a good, safe home to the haves and the have-nots, to get them living alongside each other.

Does it work? A study by a Northwestern University sociologist shows it can.

"Generally, what we find is that families are well-received, they are accepted," said Professor James Rosenbaum, who did the study of a similar program in Chicago and its suburbs with Leonard Rubinstein, a law professor. "Sometimes, friendships actually develop."

Tenants are being drawn, in part, from the bulging waiting lists of the Hialeah Housing Authority. Some of them, in about two years, will move into the second tower of the downtown Hialeah Palm Centre.

The city is lending Munder Development \$2.8 million of the \$10.5 million it will cost to build the tower. Of the 192 apartments, 39 will be rented to low- and moderate-income families.

"Not everybody can afford to pay \$575 a month for an apartment," said Xiomara Wiltz, Munder's office manager. "It's good they're giving them a chance to live a little better."