

# “ONE OF THE THINGS WE PRIDE OURSELVES ON IS DESIGNING AND DEVELOPING A MARKET-RATE QUALITY AFFORDABLE PRODUCT.”



et's play a quick game of word association. Take note of the first image that comes to mind. Ready?

Affordable housing.

What did you picture? Did you envision towering, alienated buildings disconnected from the community? Or maybe boxy, unoriginal projects that stand out like a sore thumb on the street?

The truth is that these negative stereotypes regarding affordable housing are not fabrications. They are grounded in the tragically real history of failed or poorly produced affordable housing projects.

It is the mission of Simpson Housing Solutions LLC to prove those stereotypes wrong.

## The other side of the coin

According to a report prepared for Congress in 2003 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 5.1 million American households face “worst-case housing needs.” To clarify, they are renters who receive no government assistance, make less than 50 percent of the area’s median income and pay more than 50 percent of said income on rent and utilities. Of this 5.1 million, 1.6 million were elderly adults.

The need for affordable housing is immense, and it grows everyday. Simpson Housing Solutions LLC, or SHS, a nationwide developer of affordable housing, is one such company striving toward a better future for housing by meeting this need. Though they are not focused

exclusively on affordable senior apartments, their contribution to this field is still daunting. In 2005, The American Seniors Housing Association ranked SHS 15th on its top 50 list of U.S. owner/developers for creating more than 7,300 affordable senior housing units. And that number continues to grow.

“Since then, we’ve actually reached 8,600 senior housing units in 91 national projects as a company,” says Mike Costa, president of SHS. “And that’s just senior housing — we’re now at 27,000 affordable housing projects total nationwide.”

Of the 46 affordable SHS senior housing projects in California, three are particularly noteworthy: Mountain View in Ontario, Calif., Dorado in Ontario, Calif., and Harmony Creek in Orange, Calif.

All feature architecture by KTG Group Inc., an architectural and planning firm based in Irvine, Calif. Though each project is unique in its own right, there are innovative factors that tie each together.

“One of the things we pride ourselves on is designing and developing a market-rate quality affordable product,” Costa says. “First and foremost, most people picture old boxy-looking or high-rise projects when they think of affordable housing. You can walk down the street and point to almost any one of them. They don’t really create a sense of community at all, and they don’t fit into the neighborhood in any way, shape or form. Our top priority is developing communities that are attractive aesthetically, and also avoiding the senior institutional building look. We don’t want to alienate anyone.”

**Above and Right:**  
**The Dorado project in Buena Park, Calif., uses well-planned building massing to better blend with the community.**

## When in Rome...

The Mountain View project in Ontario, Calif., consists of 106 affordable senior housing units overlooking the nearby San Bernardino Mountains. Square footage ranges from 530 to 750 square feet, and residents have access to a 2,600-square-foot clubhouse and a plethora of community amenities. What truly makes Mountain View a work of art, however, is the deep level of planning that was put into the project to properly blend it into Ontario. The reward was an NAHB Pillars of the Industry Award as the nation's best affordable apartment community and a prestigious Gold Nugget Award of Merit.

"Mountain View is a great example of the effort we pour into our projects," Costa says. "We drove the entire community and foothills of Ontario and tried to understand the history of the community from an architectural standpoint. We discovered

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— Keith Labus, AIA

scale as it faces the street," Labus says.

"It's a beautiful project where we did some special design features," Costa notes. "It's a mission-style project conducive to Orange County architecture, but we softened out the edges. We more effectively fit it into the neighborhood while having a lot of fun with the design."

"Affordable housing does not need to look affordable, and we definitely demonstrated that with this project," Labus says.



**Above and Left: Mountain View in Ontario, Calif., mimics the city's architectural history through its use of local river rock in a Craftsman-style architecture.**



that there's a lot of Craftsman-style architecture in that city that used rock from the riverbeds, because that was available for construction from the late 1800s until now. So we designed that particular project using river rock, and it helps it to fit in the community. People accept it more because it's familiar."

## Softening the edges

The Dorado project in Buena Park, Calif., is comprised of 150 senior apartment units on 2.5 acres that once contained a dilapidated retail center the city decided to revitalize. "The project site is just down the street from Knott's Berry Farm, so the city wanted it to have a resort character," says Keith Labus, AIA, an architect with KTG Group who worked on the Dorado project.

The unique location necessitated ingenuity with the layout, and the echelon format that resulted truly speaks to the project's brilliance. "The architecture utilizes two, three and four-story massing and color breaks to reduce the building

and reduced parking requirements give you less intensity than a family project," Costa explains. "We can get 100 units on two and a half acres, whereas with family you're only going to get 40 units. When you see these smaller sites and want to see housing on it, we start talking about developing senior housing rather than family housing because it fits better and we can still create the security, etc., that we need."

## Moving forward

Simpson Housing Solutions is a company not only with a mission to create a better blueprint for America, but with an energy that shows in its work. It is the trademark of a company that attacks every project with vigor and enthusiasm and takes pride in the end result. "We're very fortunate; by word of mouth, we have probably picked up somewhere between 30 to 50 percent of our projects just on the senior housing front," Costa says. "One city talks to another and says they had a great experience working with

us, and we get good recommendations. It's a great feeling." **50**



**SIMPSON HOUSING SOLUTIONS, LLC**