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Boynton area’s In the Pines now a ‘green’ community

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In the Pines recently was awarded a LEED certificate for its many environmental friendly features. The complex uses reclaimed water to irrigate native plants. (Allen Eyestone/The Palm Beach Post) *Palm Beach Post*

A 30-unit affordable housing community west of Boynton Beach left in shambles several years ago because of damage caused by severe hurricanes is now being honored as a model “green” community.

In the Pines, a rental townhome neighborhood on Hagen Ranch Road, was awarded the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Platinum certification, the highest rating given by the U.S. Green Building Council.

The designation, announced to In the Pines management in July, recognizes In the Pines’ use of energy-efficient plumbing and air conditioning systems, impact-resistant windows and doors, Energy Star appliances and carpeting and paint considered environmentally friendly.

“It’s a historic accomplishment on a national level,” said In the Pines volunteer president Jerry Goray. “There are very few private non-profits that have achieved platinum certification.”

Goray said it’s common for high-end houses and buildings to achieve platinum certification because they have the money to spend on trend-setting technology. But a small community of town homes for low-income workers to have such a designation is something to be proud of, Goray added.



From a community standpoint, Goray said, In the Pines should serve as an example for others to create environmentally friendly neighborhoods for those who otherwise could not afford it.

This award is the latest achievement for In the Pines, a community built in the 1950s which has tried to bounce back after a damaging 2005 hurricane season. As Hurricane Wilma swept through the area, it severely damaged many of the units, occupied mostly by agricultural workers and low-income families.

Through a public/private partnership with Palm Beach County, the non-profit In the Pines and GL Redevelopment refurbished the one and two-story townhouses in a \$5.4 million project. Most of the funding came from the county’s allocations of Disaster Recovery Initiative programs, which was established in 2005 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and provided grant funds to the state as a way to address damages caused by hurricanes.

The homes are reserved for low-income families earning no more than 80 percent of the area median income, which for a family of four totals \$64,000.

Edward Lowery, director of the county’s Department of Economic Sustainability, said one of the requirements of the DRI grant was “super efficiency.”

Having a “green” community with energy-efficient appliances and other features available for low-income families, Lowery said, ends up benefiting needy residents the most.

“It means that for the residents or the beneficiaries, their payments for utilities would be a lot less,” Lowery said.

The county, Lowery said, paid for the demolition of close to 35 units severely damaged by the storm.

“They were in extremely poor condition. It was absolutely critical that we replace those units out there for the agricultural workers, to provide them with decent, safe, affordable housing,” he said.

Goray said most families at In the Pines pay \$700 to \$900, for town homes that in the private market go for \$1,300 to \$1,400. Also, management sets aside 5 percent of each renter’s monthly payment for the down payment on a future home.

“We want them to become homeowners,” Goray said.

In addition, the neighborhood offers classes for residents and children, including an after-school homework help program that last year saw four students graduate high school and move on to college.

“It’s not just about housing, it’s about enhancing the quality of life of our residents,” Goray said.

