

[Send to Printer](#)[<< Back to Article](#)

Local

New Baltimore teachers offered affordable abodes

By AARON MORRISON, The Associated Press

2009-08-26 20:27:03.0

Current rank: # **1,394** of 1,273

BALTIMORE -

A few months ago, elementary school teacher [Andrew Gorby](#) and his wife, Ashley, were sharing a one-room efficiency in [Washington, D.C.](#), that seemed smaller every day.

They now live in one of 40 units at Miller's Court, an affordable housing complex designed for teachers and built by [Baltimore's Seawall Development Corp.](#) Miller's Court, originally a can factory, opened in July.

It features discounted rents for teachers and modern apartments in a historic setting near the urban schools where many start their careers. It also provides a network of neighbors working in the same field.

That's invaluable, said Kait Flecky, Gorby's neighbor, who will start teaching at William Paca Elementary in the fall.

"Creating lesson plans and classroom management skill, these are all new to me," said Flecky, 21. "When I have a bad day, to be able to come home to (other teachers), it's like home is a resource."

Andrew Gorby's one-bedroom apartment features high ceilings, original wooden beams, and large living-room windows set in exposed brick that provide a view of a rear courtyard. Best of all, the complex is about 3 miles from The Arts School at Collington Square, where the 26-year-old will start next week as a fourth-grade teacher.

Miller's Court is profitable because state and local tax credits offset the costs of development and operation. Although a majority of tenants are teachers, Seawall would accept renters outside of the teaching profession, but they would have to pay market rates and could only move in if units were available.

An urban planning and community development expert says both private developers and local governments can reap low-cost benefits from such collaborations.

"What's really interesting and exciting about this, as opposed to getting major subsidies (for developers), is that it's a really unique partnership in terms of marketing," said [Jim Kelly](#), assistant professor and director of the Community Development Clinic at the [University of Baltimore](#).

Developers cater to a niche market of renters, while schools attract and potentially retain a young teaching core, Kelly said.

Seawall's father-and-son team, Donald and Thibault Manekin, said the projects aim to lighten the transition for early-career teachers finishing their studies and starting in the classroom.

"Instead of going back to your apartment in Federal Hill or Fells Point where you are sort of facing the mirror yourself, you can come back to this facility and you've got this camaraderie," [Donald Manekin](#) said.

Seawall is working with several teacher fellowship and recruitment programs, including [Teach for America](#), to publicize the availability of affordable housing for new teachers. They have a waiting list and want to build a second, 54-unit complex in

Baltimore's Hampden neighborhood by 2011.

Rents for one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments range from \$700 to \$1,500 for teachers, Seawall spokesman [Evan Morville](#) said.

Normally, a one-bedroom in the same neighborhood would go for \$1,100 per month, said Thibault Manekin, who crunched the numbers. Two-bedrooms would start at \$1,500.

Baltimore City Public Schools does not keep data on the impact of housing on teacher retention, but [CEO Andres Alonso](#) said he recognizes housing is a burden for young, entry-level teachers.

"This is not just teacher retention, but closing the gap between where teachers live and the student that they teach," Alonso said.

Experts in urban education caution that working conditions, rather than living conditions, remain the primary reason why larger cities have problems keeping teachers teaching in schools. They say the pressures of classroom management, workplace politics and general burnout, on top of low pay, drives young teachers out too soon. In [Maryland](#), entry-level salaries begin at \$42,000, according to the [National Education Association](#).

But for Gorby, the affordable housing helps. In addition to saving \$300 a month in rent compared to his [Washington](#) apartment, "property management is receptive to the challenges and what teachers are going through," Gorby said. "In a lot of respects, it's a huge step up for us."

Copyright 2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.