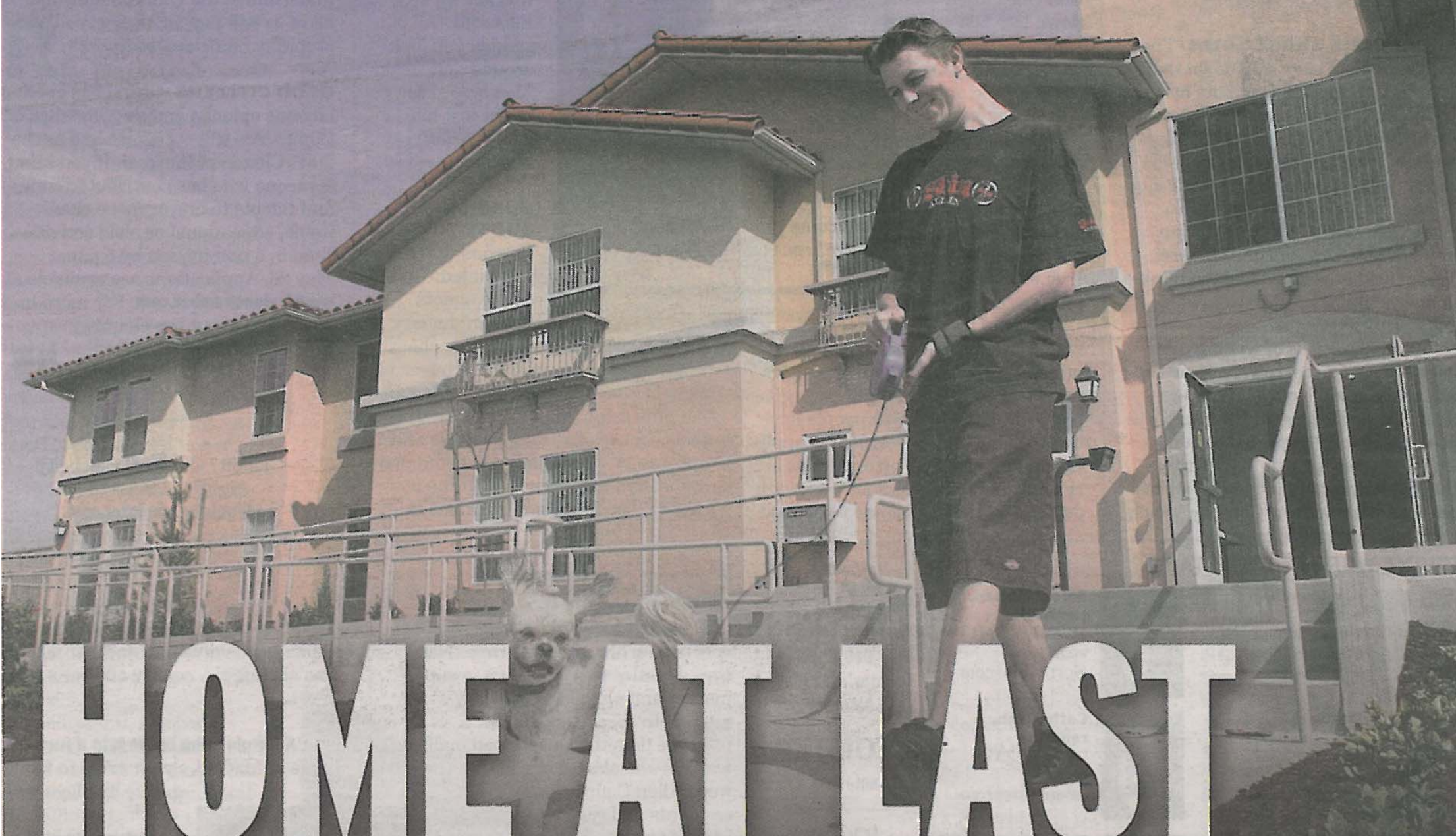


# OC POST IRVINE WORLD NEWS

FREE



## HOME AT LAST

IRVINE APARTMENTS TAILORED FOR DISABLED OPEN THIS WEEK **PAGE 3**

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COMING SATURDAY: MEDICAL TEAMS DONATE SURGERIES FOR UNINSURED PATIENTS

THE NEXT FEW DAYS	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
	Coast: 70° Inland: 70° Partly Sunny	Coast: 66° Inland: 65° Partly Sunny	Coast: 63° Inland: 66° Partly Sunny	Coast: 65° Inland: 65° Cloudy	Coast: 63° Inland: 68° Sunny

### TOP STORY

## A comfortable home for residents

BY CATHY TRAN  
STAFF WRITER

**R**ita Henson has waited more than four years for the chance to cook in her own kitchen.

The 56-year-old, who has scoliosis and knee pain, is unable to work. She lives in one room with a shared kitchen and bath in L.A.

She has been to Irvine just once in the past decade, but she's happy to be moving here.

With today's opening of the 24-unit AbilityFirst apartment complex at Harvard Avenue and Walnut Avenue, Henson will get an apartment tailored to her needs.

"This will be a wonderful move for me," Henson said. "It's a blessing to be selected to move into one of the units."

Her apartment will have a bathtub for her water therapy; other residents who use wheelchairs will have roll-in showers.

AbilityFirst, a private, nonprofit organization, provides services for those with physical and developmental disabilities.

It has 10 apartment complexes in the state, including the one in Irvine - its first in O.C.

What makes the Irvine apartment complex different may seem subtle, but it's a big deal to its residents.

For example, doors have lever handles rather than knobs.

"Anyone can open it whether you use your shoulder, butt or even a cane," said maintenance manager Roger Minnicks, who will be living at the complex with his 24-year-old son, Keith, who lost the use of his arm in a motorcycle accident.

A lower keypad at the entrance is reachable by the half-dozen residents in



Keith Minnicks, who does not have the use of his left arm, demonstrates the door equipped with "panic bars" that can be opened with a push at AbilityFirst apartments in Irvine. > oc post



Ability First apartments come with a personal alert device and emergency pull cords that can alert staff or firefighters.

**WAITING LIST**  
 The AbilityFirst apartments in Irvine have a waiting list of about 100. Those who are interested should call 626-396-1010, ext. 308

wheelchairs. The closely woven carpet makes rolling easier, and the toilets, light switches and a second front-door peep hole are at wheel-

chair height. Rails and Braille signs line the halls, and each room has two or three pull cords for emergencies.

"It's exciting to see it finally come up from the ground and actually open for people to move into," said Irvine City Housing Manager Mark Asturias. "It was such a complicated project."

The project was approved in 1997 after the Irvine Co. donated the land. But AbilityFirst faced several delays and costs kept rising. Construction finally began in 2006.

The \$5.2 million project was funded with a federal grant, and state, county and city loans, said AbilityFirst housing director Neomia Phillips.

The apartment complex will be the second in Irvine that is exclusively for the disabled, Asturias said.

The first is the 40-unit Mariposa Villas, on University Drive near Harvard Avenue, which opened in 1994, Asturias said.

**2** Number of floors  
**\$5.3 million** Construction cost

**11** Roll-in showers for wheelchair users

**24** One- and two-bedroom units

**58** Emergency pull cords inside units

#### History

AbilityFirst was established in 1926 as the Crippled Children's Society of Southern California at the Rotary International Convention.

Lawrence Frank and Paul Dietrich, both Rotarians, were two of the founders.

The organization provides programs for adults, as well as children, and has broadened the mission to meet the needs of those with developmental disabilities, as well as those with physical disabilities. Development disabilities include autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and epilepsy.

In 1999, the organization adopted the name AbilityFirst to better reflect its mission.

#### Monthly rent

The apartments are for residents with disabilities and an annual income of \$19,000 to \$41,000. The monthly rent is \$554, which is paid in part by the resident. Subsidies from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development cover the rest.

Source: Neomia Phillips, AbilityFirst housing director

#### ONLINE EXTRAS

For more photos of the AbilityFirst apartments and to comment, go to [www.irvineworldnews.com](http://www.irvineworldnews.com)