

Kensington

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has made it unrecognizable even to those who lived there during the apartment's lean and mean years.

Now with about 50 swanky units in the remodeled community, now known as Kensington Village, ready for rental, the biggest reconstruction project yet has begun: convincing would-be residents that Forest Ridge is dead and buried.

"This is by far the best rental property on the East side," bragged Property Manager Robin Carpenter. "Everything here is new, from the plumbing to the electrical systems."

There was a coming out party over the weekend for the new complex featuring free food, music, games for kids and guided tours of the new units, which boast such amenities as marble kitchen countertops and wall-to-wall carpeting. Dozens of people applied for units in the community, which will welcome its first residents next month. Several more phases of the community are still under construction. By the end of the year, the complex will offer 142 one, two and three bedroom apartments that will flank a community center which will offer amenities such as a fitness center, swimming pool and a lounge with a flat-screen television. Units range from \$470 a month to \$725.

The Finch Group, a Boca Raton, Fla.-based property development and management company, was given the reigns of Forest Ridge Apartments by the City of Winston-Salem three years ago. The complex had become so dilapidated and problem-plagued that it was shut down in the summer of 2005. The city contracted with The Finch Group with the understanding that the compa-



Photo by Kevin Walker
Kim Hamilton, Joe Eldridge and kids Kion and Kayla were among the families that toured the new complex over the weekend. Here the family enjoys some of the free food that was available during the open house.

ny, using a combination of public and private funds, would provide a 180-degree turnaround for the complex.

Samuel Fast, a regional property manager for Finch, said the company has had similar challenges before and passed with flying colors. He pointed to one of the company's biggest success: the conversion of a notorious Cleveland, Ohio apartment complex into Arbor Park, a community of chic townhomes, flats and apartments.

"We are very excited about what is going to happen here (at Kensington)," said Fast.

Each applicant will have to go through a stern screening process, which includes criminal background and credit checks. Unlike Forest Ridge, which was once a Housing Authority of Winston-Salem property, Section 8 or other rental subsidies will not be accepted. The Finch Group envisions a complex filled with teachers, public safety officers and other professionals. The new Atkins High School and Petree Elementary School are but a hop, skip and jump from the complex.

"We had several teachers come over and fill out applications," Carpenter said. "One of them said that moving here would save her \$200 a month on gas."

Aleshia Archie stopped by to tour the complex after she left church on Sunday. Archie had passed by Forest Ridge many times over the years.

"They looked nothing like this!" she said, comparing the old with the new.

Archie is in the market for a better community in which to raise her children, and Kensington Village looked like a place that could fulfill that desire.

"I want a place that is safe for them, a place where they can play outside," she said.

Carpenter, a city native who too was familiar with the

old Forest Ridge, says she is not worried that the old complex's negative reputation will hinder her in trying to fill Kensington Village.

"Any type of negative perceptions or doubts that people have had change the minute they walk through that door," she said, motioning to the entrance of the complex's model unit.

More information about Kensington Village is available at www.kensingtonvillageapts.com or by calling the complex office at 336-734-1776.

Thompson will step in for retiring Brewington

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University Chancellor Stanley F. Battle announced Tuesday the appointment of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences Dean Alton Thompson as interim provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs. Thompson will become the institution's second highest official July 1, replacing Dr. Janice G. Brewington, who retires June 30.



Thompson

"Dr. Alton Thompson's outstanding performance as dean of our award-winning School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences has certainly prepared him for this important new leadership role as chief academic officer for N.C. A&T," Battle said.

From his start as dean and executive director for agricultural

programs in the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at A&T in 2000, Thompson

has focused his energies on raising the School's academic and administrative performance to the next level. His collaborative, energetic, and enthusiastic style of leadership has advanced the School's student enrollment, public and private financial support, and service to local, national and international communities. He has also forged several successful partnerships between the School and other university units.

Thompson's academic specialty is in the interface of statistics, research methods, demography, and rural sociology.

He received his bachelor's degree from North Carolina Central University and his master's and Ph.D. from The Ohio State University.

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Gathering

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capital, and we believe this type of interaction is critical for the sustainability of Winston-Salem. A vibrant Downtown Arts Center will be a great venue for continued collaboration from all members of the community," said Keith Grandberry, President of the Urban League.

There is no charge for the

event, and detailed plans will be unveiled showcasing the new Downtown Arts Center which will include the current Sawtooth Building, the AC Delco building, and adjacent property. Construction is scheduled to begin in November. There will be a cash bar with light hors d'oeuvres and jazz music provided by NCSA students. This event is for guests 21 and over.



Stock Photo

Gas prices in the Triad have been near \$4 for the past several weeks and there is no relief in sight.

Drivers

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week. Moving to Winston was never an option, she said, because she wants to be near her family. Van pooling is the answer, Barker believes. She uses a van owned by the Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART), which is best known for its bus service. But PART also provides vans for people looking to do van pools. Those using the van pay a fee to PART that covers the vehicle's gas and maintenance. For Barker's van, which will transport six passengers and herself, the cost is \$103 per person per month. That's less than a fourth of what she paid for gas.

"I'm very happy about that," said Barker.

She is just one of thousands of commuters registered online at Share the Ride NC. The Web site lets people quickly find other commuters looking for shared rides. Commuters enter their location, work schedule and contact information. They can also indicate various preferences, such as if they prefer to ride with a certain gender or if they only want to commute with people who work at the same site as they do. Once reg-

istered, the site lists the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of compatible commuters.

Last year, the free site helped form an estimated 1,784 car and van pools. The N.C. Department of Transportation's Public Transportation Division funded the site's development in 2005 and continues to support it. Miriam Perry, the division's director, said the site has grown in popularity as gas prices have risen.

Perry said the site even provides an alternative to public transportation, which many have turned to as of late. She says it has been a mixed blessing for some transit systems, as they pay more and more for gas in order to keep up with the higher demand.

"While it's a great time for (public) transit, it also puts a strain on the budgets of the transit systems with the increase of service or increase in capacity they're having to provide for their customers," said Perry.

Share the Ride continues to grow as people rethink the way they travel. This year, it has seen a 22.7 percent increase in registration. Perry expects the site to keep growing as more people continue to search for shared commutes and relief from the pumps.

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