

# Halstead Danvers holds grand re-opening

BY ETHAN FORMAN STAFF WRITER Apr 19, 2015



DANVERS — It was June 2008 when a massive new apartment complex opened at what was the former Danvers State Hospital.

The redevelopment of the former psychiatric hospital on Hawthorne Hill features a portion of the main Gothic revival Kirkbride Building as its centerpiece. This towering 1870s brick building features 61 apartments and a clubhouse.

The redevelopment by AvalonBay Communities took years of effort and an \$80 million investment.

The 433-apartment project with its manicured grounds opened with amenities like a heated swimming pool and fitness club.

Fast forward seven years. The complex's new owner, the Waltham-based multifamily real estate investment firm DSF Group held another grand re-opening last Saturday, to showcase new amenities at what is now called Halstead Danvers. Rents range from \$1,500 to \$2,100, depending on the size of the apartment, according to the general manager.

The amenities in the Kirkbride Building are unique to apartment complexes on the North Shore, says Josh Solomon, DSF Group's president. A subsidiary of DSF Group acquired the property for \$108.5 million in the July 2014, according to the deed.

DSF Group's strategy is to acquire under-utilized multifamily properties in places where there is not only growth but constraints on the supply of new apartment buildings. This is DSF's third asset in Massachusetts, with the others being in Tewksbury and Westborough.

The company conducts focus groups to get an understanding about what a customer might want, Solomon said.

The apartment's former WiFi Cafe at the front of the Kirkbride Building has been transformed into The Halstead Club where you can get a cup of Starbucks coffee, watch TV, jump on an Apple iMac computer or spend time taking selfies on an iPad.

The former Tower Club has been transformed into a fitness club. Company officials say there is no need to have a gym membership while living there. The center includes an array of cardio machines, and boxing, spinning and yoga studios. There are group exercise classes, or you can participate along with a virtual instructor in the spinning and yoga studios.

The existing basketball court got a new coat of paint, and there are pickup games on Thursday nights. The new owners also installed an outdoor fitness challenge and a 1 1/2-mile running trail on the grounds.

Downstairs, where there were once storage lockers, there's a movie screening room with couch-like seating, a children's play area, a sports lounge with a billiard table and widescreen TVs. There's even a high-definition virtual golf studio, where up to four people can play a round of golf at the world's most famous courses or just swing away at a driving range, all by hitting a ball into a screen.

The place even has a mobile app, so residents can figure out if they have a package, get announcements, or request a maintenance call.

"It's like having a virtual concierge," Solomon said.

It's all part of an attempt to create a community, said General Manager Fred Colberg about events the apartment complex announces through its online app.

"We really want people to get out and meet the neighbors and enjoy the place that they live," Colberg said.

Gail Stabile of DSF Group said the new amenities have been well received, and the complex's retention rate has gone up. Stabile and Colberg said the complex closed 14 leases in one week. Out of 433 apartments, there are five left to lease.