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Union Place welcomed

Project will feature geothermal energy

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Many of the same players who helped break ground two weeks ago on the North College Marketplace withstood bitter winds Wednesday to welcome the area's first geothermal mixed-use project across the street.

Union Place, just west of the Willox Lane and North College Avenue intersection, will feature 80 homes, 40 percent of which will qualify as affordable housing, and 19,000 square feet of commercial space.

Developed by Donna Merten of Merten Inc., Union Place is the first mixed-use, residential and commercial development to receive tax increment financing help from the city and the North College Urban Renewal Authority.

City officials look at North College Marketplace and Union Place as the beginning of a renaissance for the city's northern gateway, an area many business owners and residents said received little attention until an Urban Renewal Authority was approved in 2004.

The URA earlier this year approved about \$2.2 million in tax increment financing to help Union Place fund its infrastructure.

Grant Sherwood, a member of the North College Citizen's Advisory Group that recommended the TIF financing, said he was impressed with the affordable housing and geothermal components of the project.

"This is a first for Fort Collins relative to it being an innovative use of geothermal," Sherwood said Wednesday.

Heating and cooling of all residential and commercial buildings will be provided through heat stored in the Earth.

Geothermal is considered more energy efficient, more sustainable and cost effective.

It could also help Habitat for Humanity attract energy grants to assist in building up to eight homes on the property, said Candace Mayo, executive director of the nonprofit agency.

Mayo said Union Place developer Donna Merten contacted her six months ago about becoming a partner and help provide low-income housing.

Habitat had originally looked at the 11-acre site but couldn't build on it because it sat in the Dry Creek Floodplain.