

# Art Lofts lets low-income artists own a home and studio in Lake Worth

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By **Kevin D. Thompson**



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LAKE WORTH -- Joshua Diaz has been a musician longer than he can remember.

“I’ve been that before anything else,” said Diaz, 34.

He’s still a musician playing indie/alternative/folk, but now he’s a [Lake Worth-based musician](#) -- and a homeowner.

Diaz, who is moving from Ft. Lauderdale, was one of five people who bought a townhome at the new Art Lofts of West Village, a \$3.3 million project on the northeast corner of Lucerne Avenue and North F Street. The Art Lofts consist of eight homes that have a ground floor studio space and an upstairs living space.

Thanks to help from the city, the Lake Worth Community Redevelopment Agency and the county, low-income working artists like Diaz were able to buy into the Art Lofts.

“Lake Worth has gone above and beyond to help artists like myself to set up for success and to plant roots,” Diaz said Tuesday during the Art Lofts’ grand opening ceremony. “Other cities are putting together these programs but none that sets us up as well as Lake Worth has promised to.”

All five homeowners are scheduled to move in by the end of the month, said Terri Murray, executive director of Neighborhood Renaissance, an economic development agency that has managed the project and was given a \$500,000 grant from NeighborhoodWorks Project Reinvest to build in the community.

Palm Beach County’s Department of Housing awarded \$532,000 to Art Lofts so four low-income working artists can afford the homes. The project is being partially paid for by the Lake Worth Community Redevelopment Agency, through

a grant from the National Stabilization Program. Lake Worth donated the land and provided \$700,000 through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program 2.

Four of the homes sell for \$245,000, while the other four vary from \$120,000 to \$150,000, depending on the resident's income.

The 21,000-square-foot Art Lofts site, which once housed a Palm Beach County Health Department building, also will include a 2,000 square foot commercial space that can fit up to three businesses.

The site hasn't been rented yet, but Murray thinks they'll be leased in a couple of months.

There are requirements to buy the townhomes.

A candidate must be someone who makes a living off the arts – a painter, orchestra conductor, sculptor, for example. That candidate's work is then reviewed by a selection committee.

There are also income requirements. According to Michael Pecar, director of real estate development for Neighborhood Renaissance, one person can't earn more than \$60,480 per year. For a two-person household, that figure is \$69,120, and for three people it's \$77,760.

Pecar said the project was a challenge because of design changes and finding it hard to get subcontractors on the job, but in the end it was worth it.

"I like building things and this is a special thing to build – a place where artists can afford to live and get some stability in their lives," he said.

Mayor Pam Triolo said arts have been a catalyst for the renaissance in Lake Worth.

"This has become a beacon of hope, a beacon of new beginnings, a beacon of the arts and a beacon that shows much good will and good fortune," she said. "Other cities may be where great art is sold, but Lake Worth is where it's created."

Across the street from the Art Lofts is the five-year-old Urban Lofts, a \$3.5 million project which consists of 12 live-work lofts.

New homeowner Phil Fung, a 39-year-old traveling artist, said he performs all over the state, but he can't wait to move into his new Art Lofts home.

"I'm looking forward to having a space where I can live and work at the same time," Fung said. "It'll be the first time. I'm a little nervous, but I'm ready for it."

So is Diaz.

“It’s amazing to be able to be an artist and go from not owning anything to being able to own where you live and work,” he said. “It will set me up for success in the future.”