

## Truck Driver Excited about the “Long Haul” at Zilker Studios

In late May, construction crews put the finishing touches on Zilker Studios and the process of moving residents into the beautiful seven-story apartment building started at a pace of about a half-dozen every week. Supportive services began immediately for them. Resident Johnnie Miller said as he inspected the spread at the free Healthy Food Pantry,

**“Tomatoes, strawberries, sourdough breads... things that I can’t afford living on a budget. If somebody don’t want it, I’ll be happy to eat if for you.”**

Zilker Studios is welcoming home 110 residents, many of whom have experienced homelessness. Johnnie is one such resident. A veteran, former horse trainer and truck driver, he broke his back during a delivery in 2019, which left him unable to work. Then in 2020, the relative he was sharing a duplex apartment with in Georgetown died from COVID-19. Johnnie couldn’t pay the rent alone and after several months of notices, his landlord evicted him. He lived in his car for two weeks in a Walmart parking lot before moving into a motel with help from a church. Johnnie then shared a house

owned by the Department of Veterans Affairs with other veterans. He was really hoping to find a place he could afford where he could live independently.



**“Just having your own place where you don’t have to clean up anyone else’s mess,” said Johnnie. “I like things neat.”**

Johnnie’s VA case manager added him to the interested list for Zilker Studios, and out of more than 3,000 people on that list, Johnnie’s name was selected. He was one of the first to move in. His studio apartment came with a bed and a Welcome Home Basket

containing kitchen utensils, all of which he needed. He describes living in his new home as “... just joy, joy, joy!”

Besides the food pantry, Johnnie is also enjoying the Zilker Studios fitness room. Partially paralyzed from his back injury, he loves the way program manager Norman Thompson lets him work out at his own pace. He’s now a regular at Lady Bird Gardens and is looking forward to rafting in the lake and swimming in Barton Springs Pool. Welcome home Johnnie!

## Building Zilker Studios: Seizing Opportunities, Overcoming Challenges

Foundation Communities’ decision to build Zilker Studios was truly a “no-brainer.” It brought 110 affordable homes to the public transit and opportunity-rich South Lamar corridor. It did, however, take a great deal of ingenuity, hard work and cooperation to make the beautiful, supportive housing community a reality.

While the location of Zilker Studios is certainly a plus, the community had to be built on just a half-acre of land. To get the desired number of units it was necessary to build more vertically than Foundation Communities has before, seven stories high. The half-acre included two heritage live oak trees which Foundation Communities and the design and construction teams worked to preserve. And, adjacent to the property is Planet K’s Wall of Fame, a treasured part of Austin’s history. Efforts were made through design and construction to make sure the wall was not destroyed.

Then there was timing. The design of Zilker Studios had just begun when the pandemic hit and lockdowns started in March of 2020. That made it difficult to plan for construction, and it greatly affected access to, and the cost of building materials. You can learn how our development team and contractors overcame these challenges and more at [foundcom.org/blog](http://foundcom.org/blog).



*Cutting the ribbon for Zilker Studios on May 19*

## Set Students Up for Success!

Did you know the kids in our 15 on-site Learning Centers score an average GPA of 3.6 in school? Their teachers often say they're doing better since they started participating in our Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs.

By donating to our annual Back to School Drive, you can ensure that 772 students have the resources they need when they head back to school in the fall. We need new backpacks filled with school supplies, more supplies on our shelves, the funds to purchase healthy meals and technology to support our STEM initiatives. Please donate today at [foundcom.org/btsd](https://foundcom.org/btsd).



## Requests for Rent Assistance Still Soaring

For the months of January through July of 2023, **146** Foundation Communities households have been approved for rent assistance totaling more than **\$130,000** through our Rent Assistance Program. Increasing expenses, loss of employment income and loss of other income are the main reasons residents are citing on their applications.

You can help us support our residents during difficult financial times at [foundcom.org/give](https://foundcom.org/give).

## Gaining Opportunity, Independence through ESL Classes



In a recent English as a Second Language (ESL) class at Trails at Vintage Creek Learning Center, one student said he wanted to gain more certification to work as an electrician. Another wants to pursue his dream of working as a chef. All the adult students said they are looking forward to enhancing their success in the United States through communicating better in English.

ESL Classes resumed at two Foundation Communities Learning Centers in August, and the demand for the classes has been tremendous. The students come from a wide variety of countries, situations and educational backgrounds. Plus, they don't all speak English at the same level. This poses some challenges. Find out how staff meets those challenges by scrolling down our blog at [foundcom.org/blog](https://foundcom.org/blog).



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Foundation Communities provides attractive, affordable homes and free onsite support services for thousands of working families with kids, as well as veterans, seniors and individuals with disabilities. We offer an innovative, proven model that empowers our residents and neighbors to achieve educational success, financial stability and healthier lifestyles. We own and operate 27 properties in Austin and North Texas.



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