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Nadya Nataly/Herald

FREEPORTER MARIA BELTREZ, left, helped her daughter Claribel Baez organize the furniture in Baez's bedroom in their new apartment in the Moxey Rigby on Dec. 10.

Residents moving in to new Moxey Rigby in time for holidays

By **NADYA NATALY**
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Freeporter Maria Beltrez, 53, a single mother and a native of the Dominican Republic, discretely wiped away her tears. She has lived in the Moxey Rigby, at 25 Buffalo Ave., for the past five years. On Dec. 10, she and her 19-year-old daughter Claribel Baez a 2019 Freeport High School graduate, made their way to their second-floor apartment in the brand

new Moxey Rigby on Merrick Road, on the west side of Buffalo Avenue.

Finishing touches on the new Moxey Rigby, a public housing complex owned and operated by the Freeport Housing Authority, were still being made at press time, but tenants were already moving in. All 100 families living in the old building are now moving into their new, modern apartments, and all were expected to make the move by Christmas.

Beltrez stood in her new kitchen, talking to her daughters, Baez and Ibelissa Fernandez, 25, while Men on the Move workers unloaded their belongings.

"We have an elevator," Beltrez said with a sigh in her native Spanish. "I'm so happy." In the old building, there wasn't one. Nor was there a modern sprinkler system or burglar alarm.

Fernandez, Beltrez's oldest daughter, said she was

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Move-in to the Moxey Rigby under way

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grateful to see her mom settle into a new, clean living space, with the same amenities as any other modern apartment.

"In the old building, she didn't have an elevator and had to walk up the stairs," Fernandez said of her mother, who lived on the third floor. "We were her superheroes because we'd fill our arms with grocery bags so that we can make one trip up the flights of stairs."

Beltrez tried to contain her emotion, but as the movers brought in her couches, she couldn't when she realized that she had a dishwasher in her apartment. Her old apartment didn't have one of those either.

"I can't believe it," Beltrez gushed in excitement. "This is so great. I don't have to go up the stairs or go down to the laundry. I have everything I need." Each floor of the new Moxey Rigby has two laundry rooms on each floor.

According to the Freeport Housing Authority's director, John Hrvatin, the new complex is at capacity, and had a live-in superintendent and new property manager, Edgar Ortiz, to manage the day-to-day operations.

Ortiz has experience working with low-income housing and comes to Freeport from Brooklyn. "This is great and a beautiful building," he said. "Everyone is really proud of the Moxey Rigby."

The new complex features a New England shingle-style design, sits on 2.44 acres and has a footprint of 34,634 square feet. It has apartments from one to four bedrooms, which are 25 percent larger than the units in the old complex. The five-story structure is also elevated above the flood plain — apartments start on the second floor, where Beltrez and her daughter live.

The new building also features a new playground, 100 parking spots, a basketball court, two trash rooms on each floor, community rooms, individually controlled heating and air conditioning in each unit, key fob entry and an intercom system.

The total cost of the project was \$42 million, funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and a number of New York state agencies, with the support of local elected leaders, Hrvatin said.

The old Moxey Rigby was built 70 years ago and named for Nassau County's first African-American elected official, Judge Moxey Rigby (1894-1962). Rigby, who was raised in Freeport and graduated from Freeport High School, also served as vice chairman of the FHA.

After Hurricane Sandy caused millions of dollars in damage to the old Moxey Rigby, residents needed a new place to live.

FHA is also covering residents' moving costs. Once they are settled, Hrvatin said, he plans to partner with the Freeport Memorial Library and Freeport Public Schools to bring tutors to the community rooms to help students with schoolwork and provide adult and bilingual education.

"I feel more motivated to live here," Baez said. "I feel so clear and happy. Everything is new, and we're the first people to use everything. It's like a fresh start for us."



MARIA BELTREZ, ABOVE right, talked with Bryan Coombs of Men on the Move while he unpacked her living room furniture.



THE NEW MOXEY RIGBY property manager, Edgar Ortiz, left, walked through one of the new apartments with the Freeport Housing Authority director, John Hrvatin on Dec. 10

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