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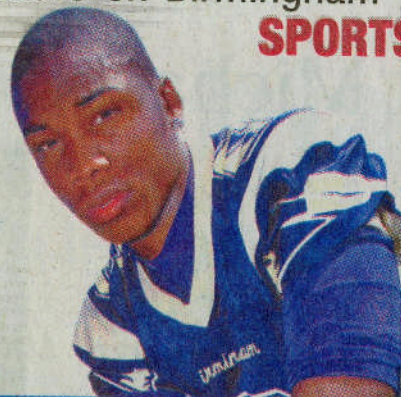
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CSUN unveils 'village' project

Housing targeted at faculty, staffers

BY CONNIE LLANOS

Staff Writer

NORTHRIDGE — CSUN unveiled plans Wednesday for a 30-acre, multimillion-dollar "urban village" that will eventually include 400 town homes and rental units dedicated for faculty and staffers.

The \$60 million first phase of the development, called Devonshire Downs, is expected to cover 15 acres and will include 159 town homes, tree-lined walkways, bike paths and parks.

The project should break ground next fall, with homes available for purchase for about 20 percent below market rate as early as 2009. The rest of the project, on land already owned by the university, will be developed over the next decade to 15 years.

The announcement comes after years of college officials' complaints that high housing costs in the area have made it difficult to recruit and retain top-notch professors and staffers.

"This should be a pretty big morale booster for the faculty," said Harry Hellenbrand, CSUN's provost and vice president of academic affairs. "It shows that the campus is trying to step up to the

CSUN: 'Urban village' proposed as home for faculty, staffers

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plate and solve a living condition for folks."

Hellenbrand said the project also will help establish a sense of community, something the commuter campus has lacked for decades.

Currently, the only faculty housing is 31 rental units in the College Court Townhomes on Plummer Street. The units rent for \$1,600 a month but can be leased for a maximum of only three years.

"We're glad to have them, but we hired close to 300 people in the last seven years," Hellenbrand said. "Those 31 units are like going to Las Vegas and playing roulette."

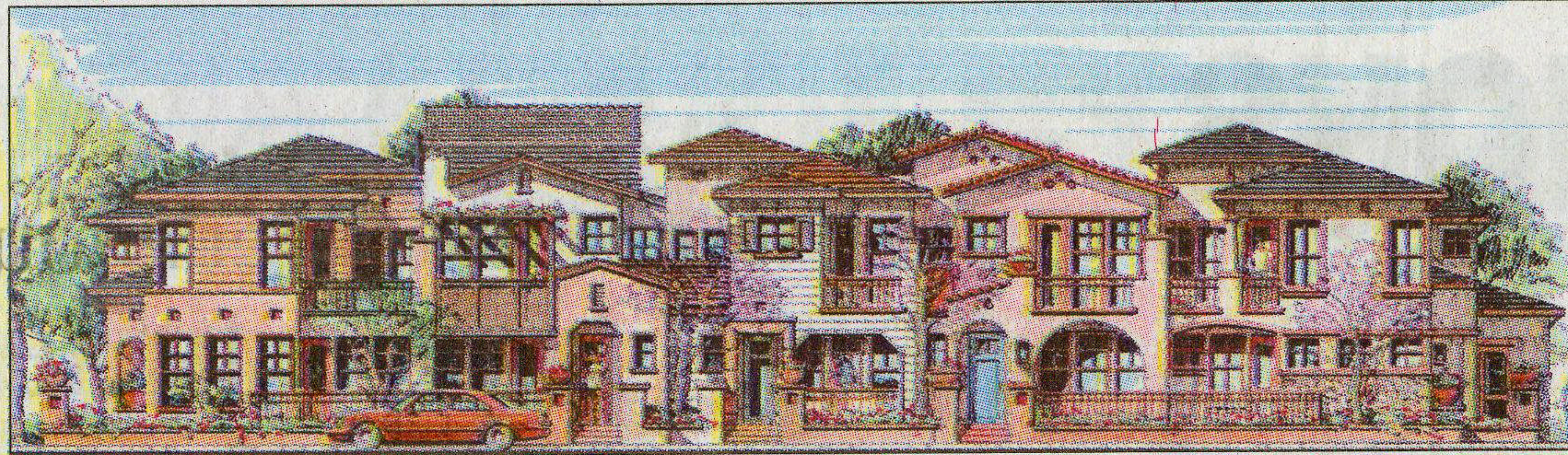
The new units will primarily be three-bedroom town homes — about 1,300 to 1,900 square feet — and are expected to sell from the upper \$300,000s to the lower \$500,000s.

But some noted that those prices still might be too high. Louis Rubino, an associate professor of health sciences, said entry-level faculty hires make about \$45,000 a year. On that kind of salary, even a \$400,000 home could be beyond reach.

The 159 new units in the Devonshire Downs project will sit between Lindley and Zelzah avenues, north of Lassen Street. Plans for the project include pedestrian-friendly walkways, bike paths, parks and athletic courts.

The 30-acre lot has been home to racetracks, fairgrounds and even an infamous 1969 rock 'n' roll festival. By 1963, California State University, Northridge, owned the entire site, which most recently housed a seven-story CSUN dormitory that was demolished after the 1994 Northridge Earthquake.

"This is not only filling the uni-



The planned Devonshire Downs project will provide housing for CSUN faculty and staffers.



Tom Mendoza/Staff Photographer

Housing for CSUN faculty and staffers is planned for this site north of Lassen Street between Lindley Avenue and Zelzah Avenue in Northridge. It's being called an "urban village."

versity mission of recruiting and retaining top quality faculty, but it's also creating a community of quality town homes that the university and the Valley can be proud of," said Thomas McCarron, executive director of CSUN's University Corp.

McCarron also is executive director and president of North Campus Development Corp., which is handling the project.

The first phase will be funded by short- and long-term loans from the CSU system. Funding for the other phases has not yet been

determined.

Judy Nutter, the university's director of community relations and a Northridge East Neighborhood Council board member, said there have been some community meetings and the council has been briefed on the project.

"They're curious at this point as to what (it will) look like, and about parking, access and how they'll affect surrounding neighborhoods," Nutter said.

Neighbors have long wanted the Devonshire Downs area to be spruced up, she said. The univer-

sity so far has had no organized opposition from the community.

"We tried to get to people right at the beginning and let them know what was going on," Nutter said. "The university will make additional presentations as it moves forward. ... We'll keep them informed and they'll be able to state their positions."

She said the university hopes the new housing will draw talented academics from around the country.

"We think it will help us attract really exceptional faculty," Nutter said. "With the market in Southern California being what it is, we've had occasion to have faculty visit from another part of the country and they don't see any hope of ever buying in."

But Kelly Lord, president of the Northridge East Neighborhood Council, said neighborhoods around the campus are "jittery" about the project.

"We had mixed reviews on it," Lord said of meetings on the project a year and a half ago. "The initial visceral response is no change in the community."

Lord said university officials agreed to make the project look more appealing — designing it more like homes rather than dormitories — and also to improve traffic flow.

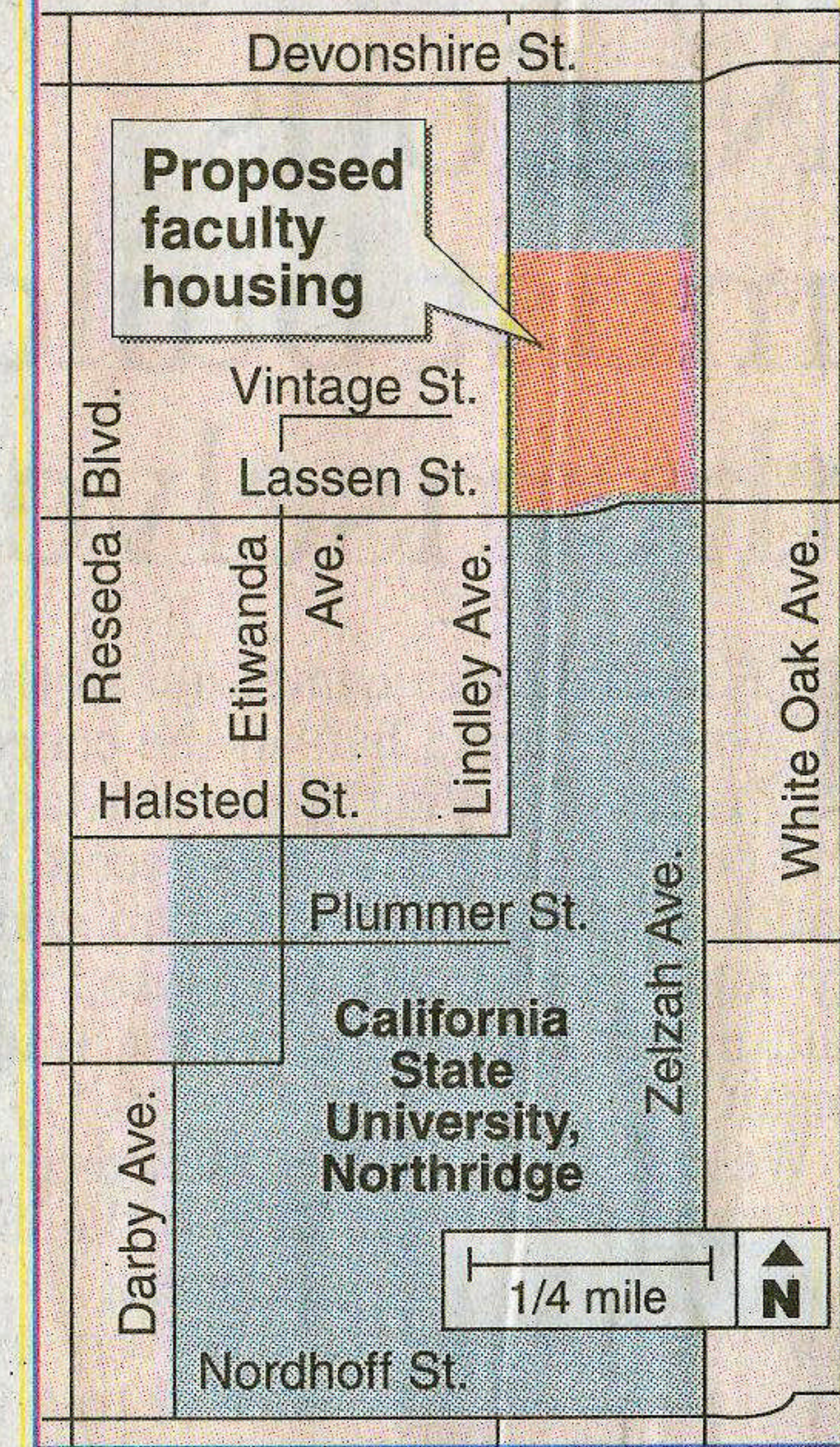
"The question in the local community is, 'Is the university capable of following through with what they say they'll do?'"

Pat Lo Presti, who lives just west of the campus and has been active for years in the neighborhood, said that while the project renderings look beautiful, issues remain for the community.

"It will add congestion and more people to the area," Lo Presti said.

CSUN project

Next year, Cal State Northridge will break ground on a 30-acre project that, when completed, will provide 400 faculty and staff housing units.



Daily News

Concerns include whether there will be adequate guest parking to prevent cars from spilling into neighborhoods and whether there will be safeguards for pedestrians on Lassen.

Still, she said university officials have been more sensitive to the community in recent years.

"I think if it's well-built, and well-maintained and they listen to the neighborhood," she said, "it could be a nice asset to the university."

Staff Writer Beth Barrett contributed to this report.

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