

A First in South Jersey: Affordable Housing and Medical Campus to Rise in Camden

Virtua Health and The Michaels Organization break ground on \$24 million community, creating 47 homes and a medical office to enhance health care access for neighborhood

(CAMDEN, N.J., Nov. 1, 2023) Today, [Virtua Health](#) and [The Michaels Organization](#) broke ground on a \$24 million housing and health care collaboration in Camden that will integrate beautiful affordable housing with quality health care.

Designed to advance [health equity](#) and provide people with a welcoming place to call home, the 60,000-square-foot, multi-use building will feature 47 apartments and a medical practice. Named **Oliver Station** (see inspiring name history below), it will be the **first community in South Jersey to pair medical offices and affordable homes through the New Jersey Housing and Finance Agency's Hospital Partnership Subsidy Program.**

"We're ecstatic to have The Michaels Organization and Virtua Health bring affordable homes and direct access to high-quality health care within the community," said Camden Mayor Victor Carstarphen. "The Virtua Health facilities will literally be on residents' doorsteps and will also be conveniently located near the PATCO Speedline, allowing easy access for other community members, as well."

"Every South Jerseyan deserves access to affordable, quality housing and health care," said U.S. Representative Donald Norcross. "By recognizing that health outcomes go hand in hand with access to a safe and stable place to live, this partnership between The Michaels Organization and Virtua Health is a holistic solution to the healthcare inequities facing far too many in our community. This development will not only connect more South Jersey seniors with the services they need, but will also pay tribute to Lieutenant Governor Oliver, a tireless advocate for safe housing and sustainable health, and the Reverend Thomas Clement Oliver, who provided refuge for countless enslaved people seeking freedom as part of the Underground Railroad in New Jersey."

About the Community

Oliver Station will be a three-story mixed-use community, built on a long-unused parcel in Camden's Whitman Park neighborhood, at 1800 Davis Street near Station Drive, next to the PATCO Hi-Speedline's Ferry Avenue Station.

Construction will begin imminently, and the campus will be ready for occupancy in late 2024.

Virtua Health will operate a 5,350-square-foot medical practice on the ground floor of the development. Its patients, including Oliver Station residents, will benefit from easier access to Virtua's extensive network of providers, including social workers, behavioral health clinicians, and other specialists.

The second and third floors will contain modern apartment-style homes for individuals 55-and-older and their families, specifically those whose household income is no more than 60% of the area median income. Five units will be set aside for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Each apartment will contain living and dining areas, full kitchens with abundant cabinet space, full baths, and one to two bedrooms. The homes will also offer ample closets and Energy Star-rated appliances, including frost-free refrigerators and dishwashers, as well as energy-efficient heating and cooling

systems that meet Energy Star Program requirements. The building will offer on-site laundry facilities, as well as approximately 5,200 square feet of community space and property management and maintenance team workspace.

Advancing Health Equity, Together

Virtua is South Jersey's largest health system. The Oliver Station campus is about 3/10 miles from [Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital](#), the not-for-profit health system's hub for specialized (tertiary) care, including advanced cardiovascular and organ transplantation services.

"Good, stable housing and good health go hand-in-hand," said Dennis W. Pullin, FACHE, president and CEO of Virtua Health. "We're honored to collaborate with The Michaels Organization to help people live better, healthier lives."

Michaels is the largest owner and one of the most active developers of affordable housing in the United States—managing more than 550 communities across 39 states, [DC](#), and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The organization, which is headquartered in Camden, has been developing and managing housing in Camden for the past two decades.

Michaels was also an early supporter of Virtua's [Eat Well Mobile Grocery Store](#), a "supermarket on wheels" that increases access to healthy, affordable foods in under-resourced communities, including Camden.

"The Michaels Organization is honored to continue its mission of lifting lives here in Camden, this time with Virtua Health at our side," said Nick Cangelosi, senior vice president of development at The Michaels Organization. "We know that many of our residents have experienced adverse life events that can cause chronic health conditions. Our collaboration with Virtua is an effort to meet these residents where they live to quickly and effectively treat existing health issues, as well as work with Virtua to prevent new health-related issues from arising in the future."

The New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency's (NJHMFA) Hospital Partnership Subsidy Program (HPP) supports the construction of mixed-use communities near hospitals – creating safe, stable housing with convenient access to health care services. Through this program, the agency matches funding contributions from participating hospitals. Virtua has pledged \$4 million in support of Oliver Station.

Lifting Local Voices

Young musicians from the P.A.C.E. (Preparing Artists for College Entrance) Band of the Camden Repertory Theater performed at the Nov. 1 groundbreaking celebration. They provided a dramatic crescendo as a 20-foot-wide rendering of Oliver Station – suspended by scissor lifts – was publicly unveiled for the first time.

Prior to the big reveal, published poet Shawn Regina Jones recited her [original poem "I See You,"](#) inspired by the plans and hopes for Oliver Station. Jones lived in Camden – her father's hometown – as a young adult. There, she earned two degrees from Rutgers University–Camden and raised two children.

"Of the places I've lived, Camden had the strongest sense of community," Jones said. "There is so much to celebrate in the city, especially its people. I am delighted to be part of this event to commemorate new opportunities for my former neighbors."

Oliver Station: Honoring Inspirational New Jersey Leaders

The name Oliver Station pays homage to the **Reverend Thomas Clement Oliver** (1818 -1900), a conductor on the Underground Railroad who briefly lived in Camden. He once presided over the Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal Church, Camden's oldest African American institution and a refuge for freedom seekers, according to the State of New Jersey.¹

His "eyewitness accounts provide the most detailed information on how the Underground Railroad operated in South Jersey," according to Salem County Culture and Heritage.²

Rowan University's Campbell Library website states:

"New Jersey was intimately associated with Philadelphia and the adjoining section in the underground system, and afforded at least three important outlets for runaways from the territory west of the Delaware River. Our knowledge of these outlets is derived solely from the testimony of the Rev. Thomas Clement Oliver, who, like his father, traveled the New Jersey routes many times as a guide and conductor."³

The name Oliver Station acquired a second meaning in August, following the death of New Jersey **Lieutenant Governor Sheila Y. Oliver** (unrelated to the Rev. Oliver). Elected in 2017 alongside Gov. Phil Murphy, she previously served in the N.J. General Assembly for more than 15 years.

As lieutenant governor, Oliver served as commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs and board chair of the NJHMFA. Oliver spoke about the importance of the HPP:

"This groundbreaking public and private partnership is the latest in the State's efforts to collaborate with New Jersey hospitals to provide affordable, safe housing with supportive services for those most in need in our communities. It is innovative new partnerships and projects like this that give us long-term solutions for reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness in New Jersey while improving quality of life."⁴

"Lieutenant Governor Oliver recognized the link between safe housing and sustainable health, and she advocated for those who encounter barriers to achieving both," said Mayor Carstarphen. "We are grateful for the opportunity to pay tribute to her – and the Reverend Thomas Clement Oliver – with this beautiful addition to Camden's Whitman Park neighborhood."

Opening Doors, Lifting Lives

"At Virtua Health, we challenge ourselves to approach health and wellness in non-traditional ways," said Virtua president and CEO Pullin. "Having a safe and structured place to call home is a fundamental need that speaks to our shared humanity. By working with The Michaels Organization, we can make a meaningful difference in people's lives."

"Each Michaels property presents an opportunity to bring people together to build lives and community," said Michaels' VP Cangelosi. "Through this collaboration with Virtua Health, we are demonstrating how housing also builds good health."

To learn more about Oliver Station and watch for updates, visit go.virtua.org/Oliver-Station.

References

1. Visit New Jersey's "[New Jersey's Underground Railroad](#)"
2. 7 Steps to Freedom, "[Thomas Clement Oliver, Underground Railroad conductor](#)"
3. Rowan University's "[The Underground Railroad in NJ](#)"

4. New Jersey Business Magazine, [“Hospitals to Invest in Affordable Housing”](#)