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Mental health housing to be complete by fall

Adam Smith Jul 27, 2016



News Courier/Jonathan Deal

A triplex housing development at 1307 E. Elm St., Athens, should be ready for residents by November. The project was spearheaded by the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama as a way to build more permanent housing for those suffering from debilitating mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and manic-depressive disorder.

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An official with the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama said a nine-bed triplex group

home being built on Elm Street in Athens should be ready for residents by fall.

MHCNCA Development Officer Bill Giguere said the third and final construction phase was recently awarded to Limestone Building Group, the low bidder. The contract stipulates Phase 3 be completed within 90 days, or by mid-October.

The third phase includes everything but the final furnishings, Giguere said. That covers interior painting, paving the parking lot, landscaping and the installation of the sprinkler system and heating and cooling system.

“After this, it's just a matter of furnishing it,” Giguere said. “We've been looking at furnishings right now.”

The MHCNCA has had a little help in this arena, however, from a couple of teen interns from the Athens-Limestone United Way. Giguere said the volunteers have saved his agency time by researching furniture options and comparing costs.

It's important to find furnishings that are going to be durable and hold up over a period of years, Giguere said. When it comes to wood furniture, the volunteers were tasked with finding out if it was constructed from treated wood. In terms of choosing the twin beds, Giguere explained it was important to find mattresses that were resistant to bedbugs.

“Those are things most people don't think about (when choosing furniture), but we may have folks coming and going,” Giguere. “We have six housing programs right now, and we've dealt with bedbugs; they're making a resurgence.”

Before the triplex officially opens, it will require a final inspection from the state Department of Mental Health. If that proceeds smoothly, Giguere said an open house will be held in early November and residents will then begin moving in.

About the project

The triplex represents a housing improvement for the residents who will reside there. Eligible residents have been living in old FEMA trailers, which Giguere described as a useful alternative.

The project began because the MHCNCA sought to build sustainable housing for adults with debilitating mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and manic-depressive disorder.

The facility is one building, but technically three town homes. Each has three bedrooms and three bathrooms with a communal living and kitchen space. It will be built on a lot adjoining the Elm Street

counseling facility. Residents will be able to receive treatment and live in a modern home in close proximity to friends and loved ones.

The project is being built without the benefit of federal dollars. All money is coming from community partners interested in seeing people with mental health disabilities get help. Some of those contributors include the Steelcase Foundation, the MHCNCA and its foundation, the Daniel Foundation, Limestone County Commission and the Melinda and Virginia Hutson Foundation.

“So many people have helped with this project,” Giguere said. “It could not have happened without support from the community.”

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