

Mental Health project receives new funding

Jean Cole | Posted: Sunday, September 7, 2014 8:00 am

When the Foundation for Mental Health in Decatur learned in April that Athens Police were investigating a possible theft from Athens-Limestone County Habitat for Humanity, they were disheartened.

Habitat had partnered with the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama to build a nine-bed, nine-bath triplex next to the MHC office at 1307 E. Elm St. in Athens. Construction was to begin this year.

But, Habitat told the foundation on April 30 it had become aware of financial irregularities involving a former Habitat employee, said William Giguere, development officer for the foundation, which serves clients in Limestone, Morgan and Lawrence counties. Athens Police have been investigating the alleged theft, but no arrest has been made.

With Habitat unable to fulfill its pledge, the foundation had to find other sources. Giguere told The News Courier the project is back on track thanks to a large donation from an Athens industry, the United Way, help from Athens and Limestone County, Foundation fundraising and a pledge of volunteer labor.

Steelcase recently donated \$140,000 toward the project, he said. The Foundation has raised about \$85,000 through its annual musical review, "Southern Nights and Broadway Lights," and its annual golf tournament, which is Sept. 25 at Canebrake in Athens.

Both the city and county have pledged \$15,000 each. The city will provide water, sewer and electrical service, Giguere said. And, Limestone Building Group, the company that renovated the new Athens-Limestone County Public Library, is working with the Foundation on the project.

"They have been very helpful," Giguere said of Limestone Building Group.

He said the facility would be built with an "all-volunteer labor force" and believes it was meant to happen.

"Some projects have no obstacles but fail," Giguere said. "Some projects just survive."

The housing helps address a shortage of housing at in-house mental facilities. The need for housing became particularly acute as state mental institutions downsized from thousands of inpatient beds to hundreds and community mental health was expected to take care of patients in the community, Giguere told The News Courier last year.

He said the foundation has applied for a 811 HUD grant for \$1.4 million to build the complex, which would be similar to one the foundation built in Moulton with a HUD grant last year.