

Valley Cares celebrates \$2.8 million addition

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TOWNSHEND -- Having built 12 new apartments, West River Valley Assisted Living administrators are wasting no time filling them.

The first new residents are expected to move into those apartments this weekend, just days after officials and dignitaries gathered in Townshend to cut a ceremonial ribbon on a \$2.8 million addition.

Executive Director Susanne Shapiro said the success of the Grafton Road facility, which opened in 2007, was evidence that more such units were needed.

"It has given us an opportunity to get people in who are not quite able to live on their own anymore independently," Shapiro told a crowd gathered Wednesday afternoon for an open house.

She added that selecting new residents "has been an amazing process."

"There are people coming from several other states -- they are coming to be closer to their family members," Shapiro said.

Administrators with the non-profit Valley Cares Inc., which operates the Townshend complex, teamed with Housing Vermont, a Burlington-based nonprofit, to build the assisted-living addition.

Designed to address a growing waiting list, the two-story, 9,930-square-foot wing features a dozen apartments that include a kitchen area, a living room, a bedroom and a bathroom with a shower.

Six of the units are priced at market-rate levels, while the other six are available at reduced prices for individuals with annual incomes under \$26,450.

Renovations also included new administrative office space, new common areas, new laundry facilities and an expanded kitchen and dining area.

Assisted living allows residents to reside in their own apartments while also giving them access to 24-hour staffing and help with medications, meals, housekeeping, laundry and transportation.

Nancy Owens, Housing Vermont president, said the project is a "response to community need" in Windham County.

"It's been a really great success," she said.

Both Owens and Gus Seelig, executive director of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, said private, for-profit developers may not have built an assisted-living facility in Townshend.

"A demographer might have said, 'Let's go to Brattleboro, let's go to Springfield,'" Seelig said. "This community really knows what it needed."

Seelig's organization loaned money for the expansion. Other sources of funding included Housing

Vermont's Green Mountain Housing Equity Fund, Valley Cares, Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, Vermont Community Loan Fund, the town of Townshend, the Holt Fund and private donors.

Construction of the addition began in February; Wright Construction of Mount Holly was the general contractor. During the project, administrators provided weekly updates to residents.

At Wednesday's ceremony, Shapiro praised those residents and staff members for their patience during the project.

The facility's staff has "moved through these months like regular, routine business," she said.

The new wing is named for Bob and Virginia Barrett, Valley Cares supporters who also resided at the facility in the final years of their lives. Bob Crego, former Valley Cares director, said the Barretts were "the poster people for what this project was about."

The Barretts' daughter, Lynn Barrett, was among the family members on hand for Wednesday's event and had high praise for West River Valley Assisted Living.

"This was the most wonderful experience, I think, for both of them," she said of her parents. "If this facility wouldn't have been here, I don't know what we would have done."

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