

Auction benefits Valley Cares expansion

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TOWNSHEND -- With a waiting list of more than 80 people, there's little doubt about the demand for an assisted-living expansion at West River Valley Senior Housing.

And administrators say they now are pursuing the last few pieces of funding needed before embarking on a \$2.8-million project to add 12 new assisted living apartments at the facility, 457 Grafton Road.

A Sunday fundraiser is a key part of that effort: Local artists have donated more than 60 pieces that will be auctioned at the assisted-living complex starting at 3 p.m.

"We've gotten an amazing response," said Robert Crego, executive director of Valley Cares, a nonprofit that manages the senior-housing campus.

Sunday's event features items including paintings, drawings, etchings, prints, photographs, pottery and fiber art. Contributing artists include Bobbi Angell, Homer Johnson, J. Mark Littlehales, Matthew Peake, Janet Picard, Bill Schommer, Matthew Tell, Lydia Thomson, Chris Triebert and Malcolm Wright.

A silent auction is scheduled from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., with a live auction to follow from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. A local physician, Dr. Timothy Shafer, will serve as a guest auctioneer.

In planning the assisted-living project, which also includes expanded dining, kitchen, laundry and nursing facilities, Valley Cares administrators had budgeted for a significant contribution from the community.

But Crego noted that, as the project was tweaked, that fundraising goal has been a "moving target."

"We have gotten some really strong support from the community over the years. One of the challenges of this project, as we worked our way through the permitting, was that we had various things we had to add to our budget," Crego said.

"As things started to get more clear in the last month or two, we went back to the community . . . to ask for their support this time around," he added. "And we've gotten some really nice gifts."

Sunday's event, which is free and open to the public, is a "big part" of a final fundraising push, Crego said. Also, administrators are awaiting word on two grant applications totaling \$200,000.

Construction of the new assisted-living units had been expected to begin in September. That's been pushed back to January, and administrators anticipate completion by fall, which typically is a busy time for Valley Cares.

"We see this as a really important project to enhance our viability," Crego said. "There continues to be a real need here. We're really, really anxious to get going with the project."

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