



New group home takes shape

By Robin Thomas

Correspondent

July 06, 2009 03:50 am

MERRIMAC — Drivers heading down Church Street might notice a new house under construction at the corner of Prospect Street. When complete, this building will be home to five developmentally disabled residents through a Bridgewell program. The agency provides services to adults with developmental and psychiatric disabilities and substance dependency, the homeless and children with special needs. Bridgewell has owned the property for 11 years but had to demolish the old building. Company spokeswoman Marjorie Arons-Barron of Barron Associates Worldwide, Inc., said, "They started from the ground up. It had been quite an eyesore. They paid a lot of attention to an exterior design that would maintain the neighborhood appearance." She added that the company wanted to make sure the new design fits in with the neighborhood.

According to Arons-Barron, the old house was "inadequate" because it did not fully comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The new home will have features such as wide doorways for wheelchairs and outlets at certain levels, as well as an oversized garage to protect residents from inclement weather and reduce traffic on the residential street.

The residents who lived in the home before it was torn down have been permanently relocated. The new residents will be in their 20s with developmental disabilities, and some may also have physical handicaps. They will be selected through referrals from the state's Department of Developmental Services (formerly the Department of Mental Retardation). "In order to achieve their full potential, they do best in a community-based setting," Arons-Barron said. "They're participants in the neighborhood."

Merrimac HOME Consortium money in the amount of \$10,000 helped fund this project. Arons-Barron said this money will be used only for repairs related to handicapped accessibility. HOME is a federal block grant to state and local governments to create affordable housing for low-income households. "The new units will count towards the town's Chapter 40B inventory," Arons-Barron said.

Before approving the HOME funds for this project, selectmen looked into issues that neighbors had with previous residents of the group home. Arons-Barron said these were noise complaints, such as loud music from staff's cars at the evening shift change. She said these were "dealt with" and selectmen were assured by Bridgewell that such problems will not continue.

Construction should be complete by the second week in July, and residents are expected to move in by the end of August or early September. Bridgewell plans an open house for the public after the new residents have settled in.

Copyright © 1999-2008 cnhi, inc.