

Ground to be broken on new mental health triplex home

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With state mental health care centers becoming fewer and far between, the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama is preparing to be a part of the future of Athens and Limestone County with a new nine-bed triplex home.

Groundbreaking for the facility is scheduled for 1 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 17, at 1307 E. Elm St. with a wide variety of project partner organizations represented, including the city of Athens, the Limestone County Commission, United Way and the Steelcase Foundation.

The project began in 2008 when MHCNCA sought to build sustainable housing for adults with debilitating mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and manic-depressive disorder, according to MHCNCA Development Officer Bill Giguere.

What's different about the Athens complex is it's the first MHCNCA facility constructed without federal dollars, Giguere said. All money is coming from community partners interested in seeing people with mental health disabilities get help. That fact bolsters Giguere one the heels of news of more mental health facilities closing in Alabama.

"This housing project has become a much bigger deal," he said.

Inside the new home

The facility is one building, but technically three townhomes, Giguere said. 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.

"I mean, who wants to have to go to Tuscaloosa or someplace when they don't have to?" Giguere said.

Each group and government entity Giguere pitched the project to was willing to lend their resources to getting the home built, he said. The County Commission at the time pledged \$15,000 and United Way of Athens-Limestone County is in the process of procuring skilled volunteers. Athens city officials have also pledged support with utilities.

"It's very heartening," he said. "It helps you remember what's really important."



New mental health triplex home

This artist's rendition shows what residents of a new triplex at the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama can expect their home to look like. MHCNCA will break ground on the Elm Street complex on Feb. 17.

While construction will begin in February, the home will not be finished this year unless a donor comes forth with labor and building supplies. What will be accomplished so far is the structure and walls — basically, something they can lock up and secure, Giguere said.

Some of the mobile homes currently adjacent to the lot will be removed since only 10 are occupied. Giguere said MHCNCA got the homes from FEMA after Hurricane Katrina and the buildings were never meant to be a long-term housing complex.

After the first triplex is built, Giguere said the plan is to eventually build at least three more and permanently remove the trailers.

“This is a good thing,” he said.