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EDITOR'S PICK

FEATURED

Ribbon cut on mental health housing in Athens

Adam Smith 2 hrs ago



News Courier/Adam Smith

Lisa S. Coleman, executive director of the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama, cuts the ribbon Tuesday on Maple Leaf, a nine-bedroom triplex for mentally ill adults on Elm Street in Athens. Coleman and other MHCNCA employees were joined by officials with city of Athens, Limestone County and local industries, businesses and nonprofit organizations.



Local governmental and nonprofit officials on Tuesday cut the ribbon on a project to provide housing for adults with debilitating mental illnesses.

Dubbed Maple Leaf, the nine-bed triplex housing development is located at 1305 Elm St. in Athens.

The nine residents who will live in the facility will move in around Christmas, according to Bill Giguere, development officer for the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama.

“It will be a great Christmas present for everyone,” he said.

The property isn't yet move-in ready because certificates of occupancy from the city of Athens and state Department of Mental Health have not been issued. Furniture has also not been delivered.

“I'm extremely pleased with the results,” Giguere said of the project. “We built it with durable materials and it's meant to be there for decades to come. It has exceeded all our hopes and it's hard to believe it's actually here.”

The project was funded through private donations from the Steelcase Foundation, the MHCNCA and its foundation, the Daniel Foundation, Limestone County Commission, the Melinda and Virginia Hutson Foundation and federal funds via the Community Reinvestment Act.

Steelcase plant manager John Lucius thanked all those who donated, but noted the one development doesn't solve the region's mental health challenges.

“Seeing the capacity is full, there is still more need,” he said. “We're excited to see those open and hope it inspires other facilities like it.”

Kaye Young McFarlen, director of Athens-Limestone United Way, praised the work of interns who helped develop bid lists and housing needs for the units. She also thanked those who supported the project financially.

“We're thrilled to see this come to fruition,” said McFarlen. “This will provide individuals a safe and secure place to live.”

Athens Mayor Ronnie Marks and Limestone County Commission Chairman Mark Yarbrough praised the spirit of cooperation in helping the project reach fruition. Yarbrough noted Athens and Limestone County have consistently provided funding to the MHCNCA.

“It takes a village, and that's evident by who we have here today,” he said. “As our population grows, mental health is something that we'll have to deal with.”

About the project

The triplex represents a housing improvement for the residents who will reside there. Eligible residents have been living in old FEMA trailers adjacent to the MHCNCA counseling facility.

The project began because the MHCNCA sought to build sustainable housing for adults with illnesses such as schizophrenia and manic-depressive disorder.

The Maple Leaf triplex is one building, but technically three town homes. Each has three bedrooms and three bathrooms with a communal living and kitchen space.

Residents will be able to receive treatment and live in a modern home in close proximity to friends and loved ones.

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