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Demolition set to begin for new Grace Place

By *editor*

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By Larry McGuire

lmcguire@punxsutawneyspirit.com [1]

 [Grace Place fence 9782.jpg](#) [2]

Preparations for the demolition of this house and the former Parente's Recreation on North Gilpin Street have begun with the placement of a fence surrounding the property. (Photo by Larry McGuire/The Punxsutawney Spirit)

PUNXSUTAWNEY — The fences are up, funding has been approved, and the demolition of the existing buildings is set to make way for the construction of Grace Place, a 24-unit housing complex for moderate-income seniors.

Tim Spence, a member of the Jefferson Area Lutheran Social Ministry (JALSM), said the \$6.5 million project will be constructed at the corner of Pine and Gilpin streets on the site of the former Parente's Pool Hall, directly across from First English Lutheran Church.

JALSM is constructing the apartment complex in partnership with TREK Development of Pittsburgh.

Spence said demolition of the former pool hall and the adjacent apartment house is expected to begin within two weeks.

"The reason we had the fence put up early is so we can show the public that work is ready to begin on the site now that all of our financing is in place," he said.

Demolition represents the culmination of four years of organization and planning by JALSM, a non-profit, church related organization formed in 2007 to address the housing shortage for moderate-income seniors in Punxsutawney.

Spence said JALSM's 2010 partnership with TREK, a developer specializing in creating quality affordable housing, enabled the project to move forward.

The new apartment facility is for those over 62 whose income is under 60 percent of the Jefferson County median income.

Construction is expected to be completed this fall, with occupancy before the end of the year.

Spence said the project is funded by a package of loans and tax credits through the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency and S & T Bank will also be an investor in the project.

The new building was designed by Tom Harley, AIA, of Upstreet Architects of Indiana, and has design elements that blend with both the former hospital building and the Banker Tudor house located across the street, Spence said.

Grace Place will feature 24 one- and two-bedroom units. Four of the units will be fully handicapped accessible.

JALSM also owns the former Grube Hospital building at the corner of Gilpin Street and Cranberry Alley.

As part of the project, a portion of the two-story section of the former hospital will be torn down to make way for the new apartments, Spence said, adding that the three-story portion of the hospital will be retained and eventually restored.

Spence said the Pine Street Senior Center, currently housed in the two-story section of the building, will move into a newly-renovated and expanded space in the three-story part of the building.

He said the new senior center space will include a patio with an al fresco, European café feel to the site. Space between the two buildings will contain a new play area for Punxsutawney Head Start No. 4 and gardens for residents, seniors and children.

"I'm excited about the huge difference that this project is going to make in the neighborhood," Spence said, adding that the existing building has been renamed Grace Place Community Resources Center.

In addition to the Pine Street Senior Center, current tenants remaining in the building include counselor Bill Young; attorney Jamie Stello; the Punxsutawney Theatre Arts Guild; Pathstone Senior Services; the Evangelical Lutheran Coalition for Mission in Appalachia; Jefferson County Veterans' Affairs; and Dottie's Reading Center.

JALSM also plans to keep its main office at the Punxsutawney location.

Spence said a few office spaces remain available for rent in the existing building.

Non-profit organizations looking for office space and agencies serving the public are encouraged to consider moving into what is hoped will be a "one stop center" for community services, Spence said.

This is the first of what is expected to be many similar projects throughout the seven-county area served by Jefferson Area Lutheran Social Ministry.

Spence said Grace Place represents a philosophy in senior housing that involves helping seniors age in their own communities by creating a number of smaller transitional housing

facilities located adjacent to town centers, with apartments placed within walking distance of drug stores, shopping, churches, and social activities.

In addition to the Punxsutawney project, other sites for Grace Place housing are being evaluated in Clarion, Elk and Forest Counties.

Spence said for more information, or to have someone come and talk to your church or organization about Grace Place, Punxsutawney and the Grace Place concept, call Jefferson Area Lutheran Social Ministry at 938-3200.

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Punxsutawney, PA
Staff Writer
Punxsutawney Spirit
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