

VMRC To Expand Rehabilitation

\$8.2 Million Project Will Be Renovation, Addition

By VIC BRADSHAW

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HARRISONBURG — The Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community has begun an \$8.2 million project mainly aimed at its short-term rehabilitation offerings. Maureen Pearson, the community's director of public relations and outreach, said 48,762 square feet in the Oak Lea building will be renovated and 3,600 square feet will be added to the structure. Site and foundation work has begun on the side of the building facing Virginia Avenue, and demolition has commenced inside. Harrisonburg's Nielsen Builders has been contracted to lead construction. The project is expected to be completed in 16 months.

The addition will be a new physical and occupational therapy suite with the latest equipment for patients recovering from a surgery or injury, Pearson said. An outdoor multiterrain walking track also will be built to help patients prepare for the different surfaces they'll encounter once they go home.

"A lot of people are coming into transitional care after they've had hip or knee replacements," she said. "It's important to be able to live safely at home again. They'll be able to practice their walking and mobility."

that allows patients to practice transferring to and from a vehicle.

When the project is completed, 35 private patient rooms with private bathrooms will be on the first floor, each one about 225 square feet. Oak Lea currently has 33 private and semiprivate rooms for short-term rehabilitation patients.

Training Space, Too

The first floor also will have a cafe where patients and their visitors can have meals or snacks.

"That," Pearson said, "will help with the social engagement. Patients will be able to have people come see them in an environment that's designed to welcome visitors."

"It's a friendly environment designed with the mindset of helping people successfully gain their independence and transition back home."

Additional first-floor space for the project was created, she said, when some VMRC long-term care residents living in Oak Lea moved into Woodland Park houses when they were completed.

Daniel Shickel, admissions manager for transitional care, said the first-floor work is slated to be finished next spring.

Short-term rehabilitation patients stay on the second floor now, Kleist said. They'll be moved to the new rooms, all on the ground floor, once the work is complete.

Construction then will shift to Oak Lea's second floor. Pearson said space used for clinical training and organizational development will be renovated to accommodate modern learning spaces, including a 50-seat classroom and a 25-station computer lab.

Shickel said the trend in health care is to have shorter rehabilitation stays, so VMRC will need to lure more patients to keep its rooms filled. That's part of the reason for the project.

"We want," he said, "to be the place to be."

The short-term rehab patient rooms, Pearson said, could be used by VMRC residents and non-residents who need physical and occupational therapy.

The retirement community collected \$1.3 million in a fundraising campaign for the project, she said. The remainder will be paid for with cash and investment reserves.

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Physical therapy assistant Jessica Calvi (left) works with Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community resident Roger

Scott Kleist, VMRC's vice president of technology and facilities, said the new therapy suite will include additional equipment, such as a car simulator

Thomas in the therapy room at Oak Lea on Thursday.

Daniel Lin / DN-R