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CHELSEA: UMRC to partner with Henry Ford Health System and Presbyterian Village to launch Detroit senior living project

Wednesday, March 2, 2011

By Sean Dalton
Heritage Media

Chelsea-based United Methodist Retirement Communities continues its growth and success this year after successfully launching the Cedars of Dexter retirement community in Dexter Village.

Next June UMRC in partnership with Henry Ford Health System and Presbyterian Villages of Michigan will break ground on the first phase of the East Jefferson Neighborhood Project, which is scheduled to commence operation this summer.

The project is intended to redevelop a neighborhood, create jobs and fill important health care and living needs for seniors in Detroit.

UMRC staff will operate the 80 apartments built into the renovated building that will house the project on East Jefferson.

John Thorhauer, president and CEO of UMRC, said that he is no stranger to senior living development and operating in Detroit.

"We actually had a facility in Detroit that we ran for four years, but we sold it in late 2009 to focus on affordable assisted living," Thorhauer said. "The need for this is tremendous all over the state; however, it is certainly greater in the Detroit area."

The East Jefferson Neighborhood Project has been awarded a \$2 million grant from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, which will be applicable over a two-year development period. The funding was made possible through the Detroit Neighborhood Fund.

The project came about when the state government sent out of request for proposals for affordable assisted living in 2006.

UMRC and its partners at Henry Ford Health System and Presbyterian Villages were one of five developers selected in Michigan and the only one selected to pilot a project in Detroit.

"There is one other facility that opened in Grand Rapids in April that was the first assisted living facility similar to what we're doing," Thorhauer said. "It has 15 apartments, while ours will have 75 in the same market rate."

The East Jefferson Neighborhood Project is the only one of the five selected projects that is currently moving forward, according to Thorhauer.

The Michigan State Housing Authority was the original funding source for the project. The authority also issued the RFP's, but the authority's funding dried up due to state budget cuts, according to Thorhauer.

"When they awarded the pilots they said we had been awarded, but (that they) don't have the funding, which is where the Community Foundation for Southeast Detroit came in."

The Community Foundation has invested nearly \$14 million in total into Detroit's near eastside neighborhoods where the East Jefferson Neighborhood Project will be implemented.

The foundation's grant money was used to purchase the property and begin marketing efforts for further fundraising.

In addition to the grant, the partners are working to finalize funding commitments for an initial \$24.6 million community investment that includes tax credit allocations, loans, and grants from the state, Wayne County and Detroit, in addition to investment from UMRC and its partners.

The first phase of the project will also include a second location for Henry Ford Health System's Center for Senior Independence, in addition to the affordable assisted living option.

The United Methodist Retirement Community's stake in the project does not include the Center for Senior Independence side of the project.

Initially the project will create 183 ongoing healthcare jobs, as well as 350 needed construction jobs.

Thorhauer said that eventually the affordable living side of the project will be expanded with hospital beds and nursing, and a "full continuum" of services if the project is successful.

For people of limited means who have exhausted their financial resources, affordable assisted living allows them to receive services in their home as a much less expensive alternative to a nursing facility.

"It will not be unlike what we have in Chelsea, but at rates that are very affordable for a neighborhood where there is compelling need," he said. "UMRC works hard to tailor what we do in a particular community to really fit the needs of that community."

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