

Progress at Webster Place

IN FRANKLIN

Amazing transformation

By ERIN PLUMMER

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Webster Place was once home to an orphanage and later a retreat for Sisters of Holy Cross, finally being abandoned and wrecked by the passage of time and the elements.

Now the building has been given new life as an agricultural, spiritual-based treatment facility for people with substance abuse issues. City officials had a first look of the newly renovated facility on Friday, before its opening.

Alex Ray, owner of the Common Man family of restaurants, founded Webster Place Recovery Center following his own personal experiences with addiction and recognition of the lack of treatment facilities in the state.

"We are a non-medical, non-clinical recovery center, as opposed to a treatment facility," said Webster Place Executive Director John Knowles.

Representatives from the city, school district, and community development groups attended Friday's tour of the facility, which is slated to open in March.

Eligible candidates are over the age of 18 with no history of committing arson or sexual violence. "They have to have a desire to want to be here and they have to show up sober," Knowles said. They will also have to be examined by a physician, as they "have to be reasonably oriented."

Webster Place is one of the few substance abuse treatment facilities in the state, as the number of beds in has dropped low. Knowles said those seeking treatment for alcohol abuse will receive outpatient care and "they go home with a three-days supply of Librium," a drug used for treating symptoms of alcoholism.

"There's also a really good support system in the state of private practice," Knowles said. "This campus really lends itself to that type of service."

Webster Place is a non-licensed, privately funded facility. Residents will pay \$5,600 for a 28-day treatment plus an \$800 incidental fee. Most insurance companies will not cover the treatment, though scholarships and loans may be available for qualified recipi-

ents.

"It's very much a peer-run, democratic, nature-based facility," Knowles said.

The treatment approach will be the 12-Step process in a nonconfrontational approach. Gardening and farm work will be major activities for residents in addition to preparing meals the residents share family-style and other chores around the facility.

Knowles said that, for young people, "they say the biggest deterrent is having meals three times a week with each other" and people from the community will also be welcome to share meals with the residents. "You don't have to be recovering to share some of your strength and hope," Knowles said.

"When you come here, you're going to develop a good work ethic," Knowles said. "We'll scare people off with this [but] I really believe what we have here is worth something."

The gardening program was influenced by British gardener Monty Don who planted a garden with a group of people with hero-

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in addiction as a way to treat their illness. Don recorded his experiences on a BBC show and in his book, "Growing Out of Trouble," which Knowles read and gained inspiration from.

"We're trying to run a homey place," said Ray. "A farm's an environment that's exciting and hopeful."

Residents will also do extensive journaling, including taking part in a large, community-wide journal that will be in an easily accessible place for residents and visitors to share thoughts. Lectures and demonstrations on various activities and areas of interest for the residents will also be held, another way for the facility to work with the community.

The facility will have a 1:10 ratio of residents to staff with nearly 60 percent of residents expected to be male. Men and women will reside on different floors and the building's existing classroom



space could allow for parents to reside in the facility with their children, if necessary.

Each room is furnished in a country style with restored antique furniture with inspirational sayings painted on each wall. Each resident will have access to a computer, but not to cell phones. A television will be available in a common room, though Knowles said residents will usually be too busy working to watch TV.

Residents will be awakened by a bell on the third floor and the bell will also be rung once a resident completes the program.

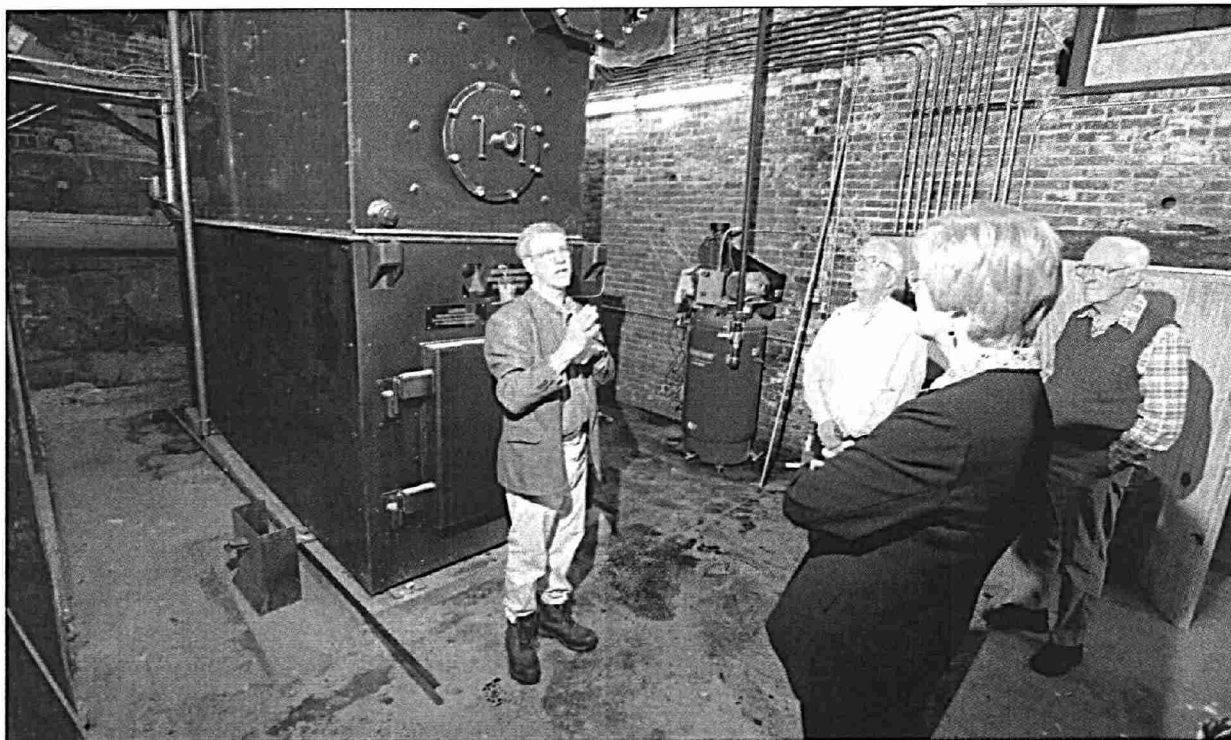
Heating of the facility is done

by a furnace powered by a wood chip boiler, which has saved the building owners much in energy costs.

Ray said eight people have expressed interest in joining the program, though there are no reservations yet.

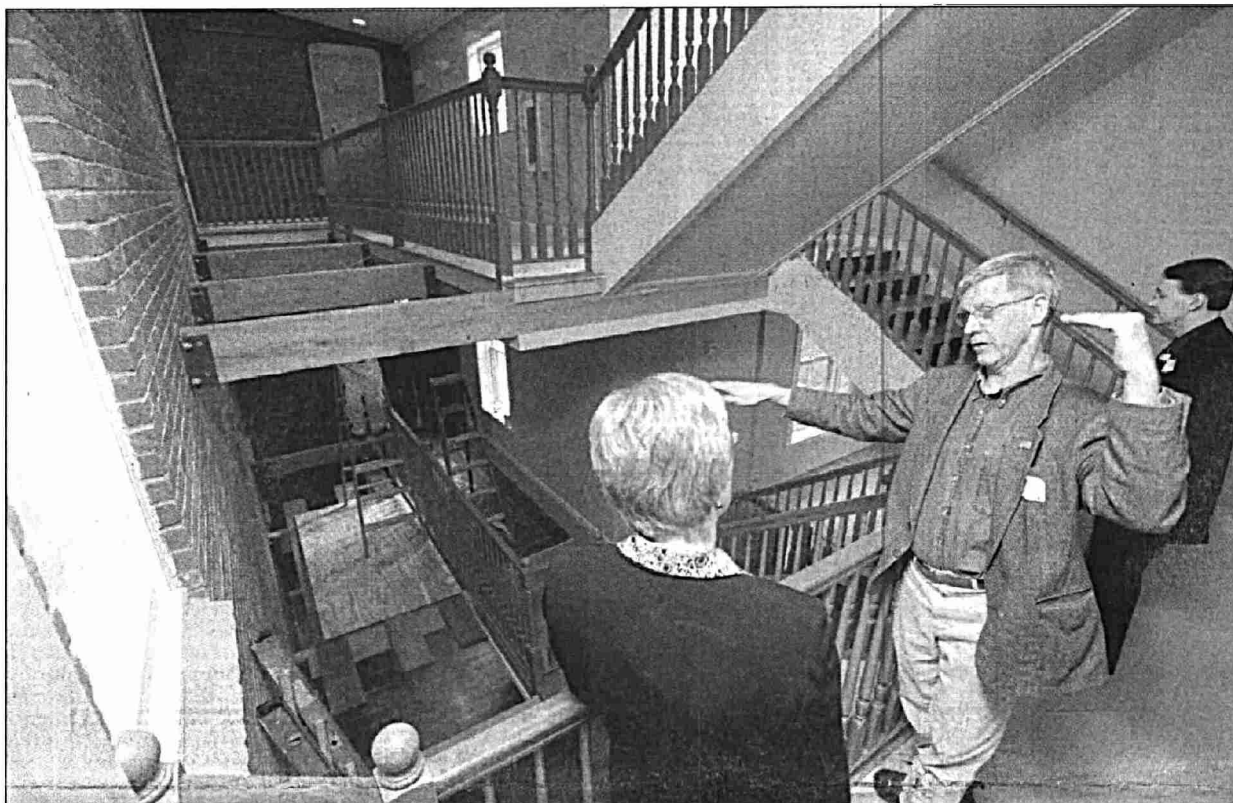
"This is tremendous," said Franklin Mayor Ken Merrifield, who said the project represents great progress in a building that had sat empty for too long.

"Now we're going to have a viable center in the community. Alex has just done amazing work here."



ALAN MACRAE/FOR THE CITIZEN

ALEX RAY explains the operation of a central, wood chip burning boiler during a tour of Webster Place on Friday.



ALAN MACRAE/FOR THE CITIZEN

ALEX RAY describes some of the work done to prepare Webster Place in Franklin during a tour on Friday.

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