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Dalton

Senior center set for opening

Valentine's Day will end 12 years of town efforts

By Scott Stafford

Berkshire Eagle Staff

DALTON — For more than 12 years they have waited. Next Monday, the wait will be over.

On Valentine's Day, the Dalton Senior Center will hold a 'soft opening' at its new location — a 5,000 square-foot building on High Street behind the old Dalton High School.

"We're really happy to be opening on Valentine's Day," said Susan Jacobs, executive director of the Dalton Council On Aging. "It'll be a real sweetheart of a day."

The one-story building features the "big room," a large L-shaped room that can be divided into three smaller rooms using fold-out walls. It also features a full commercial kitchen, handicapped-accessible bathrooms, a conference room, two offices, a reception area and a health/wellness counseling room. The big room has several flat-panel TVs and there is free Wi-Fi available throughout the structure. Its maximum seating capacity is 120 people.

Dennis Adler, an architect with Hill Engineers, Architects & Planners, designed the nearly \$1.3 million building for maximum versatility, with interior windows to maximize the feeling of openness and togetherness.

"From most rooms, the interior sight lines go all the way across the building," he said.

Jacobs said that about 27 percent of Dalton's population, or about 1,600 people, are over 60 years old. And many of them have been driving by the site, checking out the progress, she said.

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After 12 years of effort, Dalton Senior Center finally ready to open its doors

SENIOR from A1

"You can see them driving by and looking in," Jacobs said.

One new neighbor, Libby Levers, moved into a house directly across the street in August. On Friday she popped in to get a look at the inside.

"I'm ready to cry, I'm so happy," she said. "This place is awesome. It's one of the reasons I bought my house."

Current quarters for the COA in the Dalton Community House are somewhat cramped, restricting the number of people

that can serve at any given time. Jacobs was certain that the new building will result in a rapid growth in the number of people taking advantage of Council On Aging programming, such as gardening, quilting, oil painting, bridge, Tai Chi, dancing, and wellness presentations.

Already scheduled for its first week of operating are 21 events, meetings and informational sessions of one sort or another, including a Sweetheart Lunch on Valentine's Day.

Dalton voters approved the project during a special town meeting in September 2009, then approved the financing during a special town election in November 2009.

Allegrone Construction started work on the senior center in July. A grand opening celebration is being planned for May 21.

A senior housing project proposed for the old high school by Elder Services of the Berkshires could complement the goals and programs planned for the new senior center.

The town financed the construction project, but private donations were needed to furnish the structure. A fundraising campaign by the Friends of the Senior Center directed at both residents and local businesses has raised about \$138,000 so far, with the goal being \$150,000. A total of 387 donors contributed from \$5 to \$50,000. The money has already been used to buy chairs and tables for the big meeting room, the conference room, and desks and office equipment. More furnishings and kitchen equipment will also be obtained with the funding.

"This has been a grassroots, community project," Jacobs said. "Our goal has been to foster a sense of ownership of the center among the town's people, which is why, when the naming of the building was discussed, the unanimous decision was to call it the Dalton Senior Center."

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The Dalton Senior Center grand opening is slated for May, but the soft opening is planned for Valentine's Day.

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