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Wednesday, December 23, 2009

SMOC showcases haven for homeless



The building at 14 Duxbury Road contains 29 housing units. (T&G Staff Photos / DAN GOULD)

By Bronislaus B. Kush TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

bkush@telegram.com

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WORCESTER — Officials at the South Middlesex

Opportunity Council knew they had picked up a "handyman's special" when they purchased the large 29-unit lodging house at 14 Duxbury Road in 2006 from a family trust for \$600,000.

But they figured that the "fixer-upper," off Lincoln Street near UMass Memorial Medical Center — Hahnemann Campus, was the perfect place to operate a housing program that would link homeless people with educational, job training, medical and other supportive services.

So, they invested an additional \$850,000 to rehabilitate the property.

The improvements included a new roof, windows and fire suppression system.

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"You wouldn't believe what this place looked like when I first walked in the door," said Darlene Assencoa-Mazurek, SMOC's housing director. "There was blood on the walls and the place was really a mess."

Yesterday, SMOC officials held an open house of sorts to showcase the renovations.

Charles E. Gagnon, SMOC's chief operating officer, said that with the exception of some minor work to common areas, the renovations have been completed.

SMOC officials said the building will provide housing for a mix of people, including people from shelters and those already in transitional programs.

The structure also houses 18 people who lived in the building when SMOC bought the property.

Officials at the nonprofit organization said sex offenders, people with violent histories, and those convicted of arson are not allowed to live in the building.

George Spring, a housing coordinator at SMOC, said two managers are living on the premises to assist residents and a third will be hired shortly.

He said those managers are available to help residents with a variety of problems they may be facing, from balancing a checkbook to responding to a maintenance issue.

"We want to provide a good, warm atmosphere for people," said Ms. Assencoa-Mazurek. "When the residents leave a facility like this, they are able to live on their own."

Residents are assigned a bedroom and each floor has its own laundry, kitchen and bathroom. The rent is \$100 weekly and includes utilities.

Residents may take advantage of a number of assistance programs offered by Framingham-based SMOC, the region's largest social service provider.

SMOC officials said facilities such as 14 Duxbury Road are alternatives to larger shelters such as the People in Peril shelter in Main South.

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From left, Mike Comiskey, director of real estate development for the South Middlesex Opportunity Council; Rick DeLoreto, construction engineer for Prism Builders, and Matt Genzale, vice president of Prism Builders, talk during the official opening of 14 Duxbury Road yesterday. [Enlarge photo](#)



T&G Staff/DON LANDGREN JR.

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