

Former Hospital Being Transformed Into Upscale Senior Living Facility

Albrich M Tan of the Northwestern

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Eight years after Mercy Medical Center moved to Oshkosh's west side, the old hospital near Menominee Park will reopen its doors this fall as a luxury senior apartment complex. Community Retirement Living will open Bella Vista, which means "beautiful view" in Italian, this fall, said Jan Rupnick, director of public relations and advertising.

That is long-awaited news, said neighbor Chase Pruitt, 18, who lives with his parents on the 600 block of Grove Street. For the past eight years, the mostly empty hospital building was not something that he looked forward to seeing across the street. Since construction started, Pruitt said, he hears a lot of banging and loud noises early in the morning as Ganther Construction|Architecture, Inc. transforms the building for its opening slated for October. "We're really happy about it," Pruitt said. "This should have been done a long time ago."

When completed, the complex will have 111 independent-living apartments for seniors in the form of studio, one and two-bedroom apartments, Rupnick said. A model apartment opened last week. Some of the units have already been rented out, Rupnick said. Rent starts at \$1700 per month. An assisted living facility with 33 beds will be built on-site, separate from the apartments. There will also be a full-service salon and spa, concierge service, on-site fitness center, fine dining, and a café that is open to public, she said. "It was a great way to revitalize the community," Rupnick said. "It has great water views and a heavily concentrated area of seniors and they want to stay in the area."

CRL, which operates several facilities in Oshkosh and Neenah, agreed last year to assume the responsibility for renovating the hospital complex, about five years after developer Ben Ganther initially proposed a redevelopment plan in 2002. While his company remains the contractor on the project, Ganther no longer has an ownership interest in the property. Funding for the project comes from a Health Care Real Estate Investment Trust and Tax increment financing from the city, Rupnick said.

There will also be 5,000 square feet of retail space reserved for community services such as doctor and optician offices and a pharmacy, she said. Lynn Ehrlich, who lives on the 500 block of Hazel Street, said she likes the idea of the old hospital becoming a facility for older people in a neighborhood with younger families. "It would bring that age diversity," she said.

The renovation has been difficult because the building has had so many additions over the years, said Mark Miller, project manager for Ganther Construction|Architecture, Inc. "Each addition has brought us a new challenge in construction issues and methods of construction," he said. "We are trying to merge everything together into a modern facility."

Construction workers are installing cabinets on the fifth, fourth, and third floors. Carpet installation has begun on the fifth floor. Work on the building's exterior has not started yet, Miller said. The exterior of the building will get a facelift with canopies and Juliette balconies, giving it a more "hotel-esque feel," Rupnick said.