

ELIZABETH BANKS

Agency providing a home life



Greater Marlboro Programs Inc. has some exciting news.

First, the agency, which provides services for people with developmental disabilities and their families, moved from its old offices in the Walker Building

into new offices in the old post office building on Mechanic Street in Marlborough.

I know that because my office is right upstairs. I watched GMPI staff move in and just this week toured their new suite of offices.

But the agency has more exciting news. In September, it will celebrate its 35th anniversary. And, for the first time in 30 years, a new residential home will open.

This home is different from the other three houses operated by GMPI. Those houses, said Executive Director Carol Manne, are group homes that accommodate up to 13 people and are located within Marlborough's downtown area.

But the new house is a residential home that will accommodate up to five young men and is located in a residential neighborhood on Sunset Circle near the Marlborough Country Club.

And Manne and Denise Vojackova-Karami, director of residential, family and individual services, are excited.

The house, Vojackova-Karami said, is scheduled to open Aug. 1. An open house for elected officials, the board of directors and neighbors is scheduled for July 30. Some residents may be on hand to meet their new neighbors.

The agency purchased the house through fundraising efforts and grant money. A decline in real estate prices also helped, Manne said.

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Denise Vojackova-Karami
GMPI director of residential, family and individual services

Residents, who have not yet been selected, will be men about 22 or a little older. They will be transitioning from educational facilities or from their family homes. They all

have some form of mental retardation or autism, Manne said, and are considered "high functioning."

The house will also accommodate a manager, supervisor and residential counselors. There will also be overnight staff who, Vojackova-Karami stressed, will be awake throughout the night.

During the day, she said, the men will be at work.

Staff spent time talking to neighbors explaining who will live in the house and what the residents hope to accomplish by living independently. For the most part, Vojackova-Karami said, the neighbors were supportive.

Vojackova-Karami said she has been with the agency for 15 years and in that time there has never been a problem with a GMPI group home.

Although the house, when purchased, was in move-in condition, GMPI made improvements such as creating a second egress from the second floor, improving the landscaping, building a patio and furnishing the home with new furniture, Manne said.

"Neighbors should be very pleased with the way it looks," she said.

But most importantly, the house will provide the residents with independence, Vojackova-Karami said. "The men will be proud. They will have the normalization we strive for." They will have independence and respect.

Living independently, she said, will allow them to grow, provide them with dignity and eventually they will integrate into the community.

"It is our responsibility to see that everything runs as smoothly as possible," Manne said.

And it is a good feeling for their parents, Manne said, who often worry what will happen to developmentally disabled children when they become too old to care for them.

Manne said it's important that families prepare early for their children's futures. If they wait too long, she said, they may not have choices.

The men who will live in the new residential home will decide if this is a place where they want to live and if they will be compatible with the other residents.

GMPI is a small agency that provides social, recreational and transportation services right here in Marlborough for people in the MetroWest area. A new residential home is a big deal and Manne describes the house as "the perfect home."

"We're thrilled and the board and staff are thrilled to have the fourth home open," she said.

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