

Gini's House supportive housing for women slated for completion next June

By ROBERT KOCH

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NORWALK -- Liberation Programs, Inc., on Monday was reminded why it's moving forward with a \$7.2 million project on Elmcrest Terrace to create supportive housing for women who need a temporary hand.

"I found myself done. I couldn't go on anymore. Something had to give. It was life and death," said Karen, recalling her substance addiction.

After completing a detoxification program in 2009, Karen was provided an apartment in Stamford through Liberation Programs, a Norwalk-based behavioral health organization, and allowed to stay, along with her young daughter, in that apartment for 13 months as she got back on her feet.

On Monday, Karen and her daughter, now a first-grader, joined officials, including Gov. Dannel P. Malloy and Mayor Richard A. Moccia, to mark a midpoint in construction of "Gini's House" at 4 Elmcrest Terrace in Norwalk.

Six months under way and set for completion in June 2014, "Gini's House" will provide 18 one and two-bedroom apartments for women and mothers who are following Karen's path toward recovery.

Alan J. Mathis, Liberation Programs president and CEO, on Monday showcased a completed and already appointed apartment on the third floor of the former nursing facility.

New appliances and wooden cabinets stand ready in the kitchen. Framed prints and paintings adorn the freshly painted walls. A bowl of fresh apples sits on the dining table.

Elsewhere, much work remains. Spaces remain separated by skeletal joists where walls have yet to go up. New wiring and other utilities are being installed.

But for Mathis and others, the progress is remarkable.

"We started this project with, I would say, a nickel and a concept paper that was two pages long," Mathis said. "And we understood that there are as many as 20,000 to 25,000 women in Connecticut who need residential treatment for alcohol and drug problems, and that only one out of four ever gets help."

Of those that do get help, half go homeless after receiving such help, he said.

When complete, "Gini's House" will offer such women and their children a roof over their heads, on-

site staff with case management experience, a vocational room, fitness center and laundry facilities in a building with state-of-art security.

The building will be called "Gini's House" in honor of benefactors Virginia "Gini" Bantle and her late husband, Lou, who committed themselves to helping women with children.

Lou Bantle died in 2010, days short of having lived sober for 32 years, according to his son.

Mathis thanked partners in the project, including New Neighborhoods, Inc., a Stamford-based developer, as well as Malloy, Moccia and other elected officials for helping advance "Gini's House."

Malloy, former mayor of Stamford and a past board member of Liberation Programs, described the project as "yet another iteration of a wonderful organization and project."

"Building supportive housing is something that I've been a big supporter of in all of my public life," Malloy said.

The governor counted a \$2 million loan for "Gini's House" through the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development as part of a half-billion dollar commitment toward rebuilding the state's housing stock.

Malloy thanked corporate partners in the project for properly taking advantage of tax credits.

UnitedHealthcare, through a partnership with Enterprise Community Investment, is providing \$5.2 million in equity for the project through low-income housing tax credits.