



School's out but comfortable living is in at the Parkesburg School Apartments.

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'Homework' assignment

Lancaster organizations turn Parkesburg School into senior housing

By Paula Wolf
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After living in a Parkesburg row house for many years, Sarah and William McGinnis were ready to move someplace smaller.

The retired couple didn't have to look far.

A few blocks away the 95-year old Parkesburg School, which McGinnis attended as a youth, was being converted into one-bedroom apartments for senior citizens.

"We saw the ad in the paper and decided to come," McGinnis said.

Their application was approved, and the McGinnises were among the first residents to move in, arriving Nov. 4.

"We're comfortable here," Mrs. McGinnis said. "Here there's no snow to shovel or grass to mow."

Parkesburg School Apartments, on a hill overlooking much of Parkesburg, should reach full occupancy by the end of the year. Many of the tenants have past links to the school, which once housed all grades.

The 35 apartments, for moderate-income people age 55 and over, rent for about \$359 to \$429 a month. Income limits are \$19,800 for one person and \$22,620 for a couple.

Although in Chester County, the Parkesburg School project has Lancaster County connections.

Housing Development Corp. is the managing general partner of the project. Progressive Construction Co. and Lepore/Moyers Partnership are co-general partners.

Fulton Bank provided 99 percent of the equity, said Jim Eby, HDC's vice president and director of development.

Listed on the National Register of Historic

Places, the school opened in 1900 and expanded in 1916.

Architecturally representative of the Italian Renaissance and Colonial Revival styles, the three-story building was the community's only school until 1950, when it became an elementary school.

About that time a one-floor addition was built that held the principal's and other administrative offices.

During the conversion, which began last November, the addition was separated from the main building and made into seven of the 35 apartments, Eby said.

"They have their own entrance doors," he said. "They're for people who maybe don't want to be in a large apartment building."

The main building, which hadn't been used for a number of years, required a lot of refurbishing, Eby said. "Structurally it was pretty good, but it was a really expensive job."

There was significant water damage, he said. "The auditorium literally had an ice rink in it."

All the window openings were retained and some were restored.

The sashes were replaced. "And we put in windows which are easier for seniors to use," Eby said.

Wood floors were kept in five first-floor apartments. The others have wall-to-wall carpeting.

On the outside the building is painted beige with green trim.

Keeping the auditorium as a gathering place was important, Eby said. "What to do with common spaces is always a big question. In this case we want people, when they're in the building, to know this was a school. We plan a lot of activi-

ties there."

Next to the auditorium are several offices, including one that will house on-site medical services from Brandywine Hospital.

The apartments include air conditioning, mini blinds, an electric range, a frost-free refrigerator, smoke detectors, and a "tele-entry" system, which allows tenants to screen visitors by phone or through a special channel on their television sets.

Heat, water and sewer service, and trash removal are covered by the monthly rental fee. There are at least two handicapped units. They have 3-foot doorways, which are standard in every apartment, a kitchen sink with space underneath for a wheelchair, a stove with front knobs, and either a roll-in shower or a bathtub with a bench seat, Eby said.

The building also has a community laundry, a kitchenette next to the auditorium/community room, on-site building management, on-site building maintenance with 24-hour emergency service, sprinklers, an elevator, and parking.

The school's listing on the National Register of Historic Places has as much to do with its importance to the Parkesburg community as its age, Eby said.

"This building has a lot of emotional attachment for people."

Gertrude Kieffer is a case in point. A former resident of Parkesburg, she moved from Gap to Parkesburg School Apartments on Nov. 4. Four of her six children went to school there.

"I just like it here," she said. "The whole thing is beautiful."

For information on the apartments call Housing Development Corp. at 291-1911 or 1-800-732-3554.