

Restoration House making steady progress

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The pieces are coming into place quickly to complete the vision of the Restoration House. Most recently, electrical wiring and the HVAC system have been installed, and insulation and drywall is going up. Also, the building will be getting a new roof.

Located on the property of Bryson City United Methodist Church, the mission of Restoration House is to provide a central location for people in need. It will not only house the Swain County Caring Corner's Free Clinic, but it will also serve as a clearinghouse for people in need of resources like where to go for heating assistance.

Inside, two doctors' offices and two exam rooms are planned, as well as two restrooms, one of which will have a washer and dryer in it and a second that will be ADA acces-

sible. The house will also have a community prayer room, a bedroom and a lobby that will include lots of information for visitors.

In addition to the Swain County Caring Corner Free Clinic, the Zacchaeus Financial Counseling Services will offer programs at the house and Mountain Mediation will have office space.

"We want it to feel like a community effort," said Pastor Wayne Dickert. "The financial piece, several churches got together and created a pool of money."

In the past, people would have to seek out assistance separately through various churches and nonprofit agencies.

Dr. Frank VanMiddlesworth, the primary physician at the free clinic, said since the clinic opened at the Bryson City United Methodist Church earlier this year. They have served

90 patients with a total of 185 visits.

"We're grateful the Methodist Church and Pastor Wayne Dickert have embraced this vision we share," VanMiddlesworth said. "We enjoy operating out of the church; it's fun to see the decorations the Vacation Bible School has in the room. It's been very positive."

He added that the clinic volunteers are looking forward to seeing "what God has in store" with the new Restoration House. He said one of the biggest differences for the clinic is they won't have to move the equipment in and out of the rooms.

In addition to accessing services like the Free Clinic, visitors to the Restoration House will be able to talk to someone when they visit and be connected with other agencies that can serve their needs, Dickert explained. The Resto-

ration House board members also see it as a benefit that the house is located just across the street from Swain County Department of Social Services.

Working with DSS is also beneficial in preventing abuse of those services.

"I've learned along the way we're walking that fine line of help in the short term and long term and being that healing presence," Dickert said. "The Restoration House is a place of healing in mind, body and spirit. That's our vision, really."

Outside, a labyrinth raised bed garden continues the spirit of collaboration.

"Both Terri Hanna (pastor of Bryson City Presbyterian Church) and I wanted to do a prayer labyrinth and have a place of meditation and prayer," Dickert explained. "One idea was a raised bed garden and at the center of that is the cross. We feel like it should be a cross of new life. We got together

with the health department, Swain County School System and Soil and Water Conservation and talked about what can we do with this."

Other people have gotten behind the Restoration House as well. Julie Richards donated a conference table, and Shaw Manufacturing has donated the wood floors.

The goal is to have construction completed by the end of the year.

Through conversation, the idea emerged that the cross at the center of the garden will be a pollinator garden. The other beds will comprise the community vegetable garden, and Swain County Middle School students will have classes there in the spring.

Jennifer Brown, nutrition director with Swain County Schools said she and Swain Middle teacher Cindy Matthews had been looking for such an opportunity.

"It's been in my long-range plan since I started here four years ago," Brown said.

So far, lettuce has been donated from a farm to school program, and students have planted flower bulbs.

"We're really excited about it and that it's going to be a community project because I think that's what it takes for projects like this partly because the summertime schools aren't really in session," Brown said.

"I think it's a great opportunity for us and the community overall, I hope we can expand this, I'd like to have some on our campuses at least this is a start."

"I think it will be a hands-on learning experience for the students themselves. One of my goals is to have whatever they harvest, we can come back and do taste tests in our cafeterias and talk to them about their experience and get them excited about eating more fresh vegetables and fruits," Brown said.