

# Better Housing Upgrades Apartments

By Patricia Brhel

In going through a building or remodeling process, it's usually apparent that some parts of the project are more fun than others. Picking out colors and shopping for products can be fun. Dealing with dust, holes in the wall and waiting on workmen, not so much.

Fountain Manor tenant Elaine Genung isn't looking forward to the mess of remodeling at her home in Caroline, but she is looking forward to the finished product.

"It will be new and clean and more energy efficient," she says. "With new bathroom tile, kitchen appliances and cabinets, new windows and doors and energy efficient heating and air conditioning systems it should also save us money on our utility bills."

Genung also appreciates the workmen now involved in the project. "Mark DeTomaso, the site construction supervisor, has been very nice and pleasant about answering questions. During monthly meetings he's been good about letting us know what they're doing and he's promised to keep us informed about when work will be done in our apartments."

Workmen currently are concentrating on the water system and they'll be enlarging the dining room and putting new siding on the building. Other improvements at Fountain Manor include a new entrance, with a temporary entry while new stairs and a new elevator are installed.

"These apartments are a bit over 20 years old and some of the maintenance has been deferred, so it's



Photo by Patricia Brhel

The fountain at Fountain Manor in Caroline, where a major renovation project is getting underway.

past time for a remodel," says Genung.

Fountain Manor is owned by the Caroline Seniors Inc., but maintenance, repairs and the collection of rent is the responsibility of Better Housing of Tompkins County (BHTC). The agency is a New York State-certified Rural Preservation Company. Their mission is to provide housing for people of any age who are disabled, or those 62 or older; and the apartments in Slaterville Springs are some of the 121 they manage throughout Tompkins County.

BHTC is also charged with administering the \$2.4 million New York State Division of Housing and

Community Renewal's Housing Trust Fund Program, the state grant that's funding this remodel.

Work on the building and its 24 apartments is expected to continue through next spring of 2011, taking about nine months altogether.

Richard Cowan, Better Housing's property manager, explains, "Enhancing the energy systems and using green building techniques will improve the affordability of housing here."

He has good things to say about the construction company hired to do the work, Two Plus Four Construction, their site manager, Mark DeTomaso, and Carl Campbell, the building maintenance supervisor. "Two Plus Four has been great to work with on other projects including Newfield Gardens. They really understand the needs of the clients that we're working with here, people who are elderly or disabled and they take care to make sure that the stresses are limited," he says.

According to Cowan, DeTomaso, as site manager is good at keeping the lines of communication open. He is holding monthly meetings,

where the tenants are invited to ask questions and comment and if he can't answer a question, he promises to come back with an answer.

"He has also pledged not to start any phase of the job until all the materials are on site," Cowan says. "He won't be working on the individual apartments until later this fall, when the outside work is done. Once all of the appliances, tile, carpets and other materials are on the job, they'll be able to go in and tear out the old stuff and redo an apartment in two days time."

The building maintenance coordinator came in for some praise, too. Cowan says, "Campbell is not only the maintenance staff, he's also the chief of the Slaterville Springs Fire Department. He's dedicated to the job and he goes above and beyond what he's required to do. Campbell has approached his fellow fire fighters and ambulance crew members, and is asking that other area volunteers help some of the seniors pack and move their belongings into and out of temporary storage when the time comes."

Campbell notes that some of the elderly and disabled residents at Fountain Manor don't have a lot of energy or strength, and getting their apartments packed up and ready for the remodel may be difficult.

"I'm hoping that community members will step forward and help when the time comes, which should be October," Campbell says. Anyone interested in helping may give him a call at 229-5618, and he'll let people know what the work schedule is.

"The firefighters, both Slaterville Springs and Brooktondale, already do a lot to help the tenants," says Campbell. "They not only do the normal ambulance calls but members helped fill the fountain and I can always call them when I need help lifting or moving something heavy. Since I moved here in 2004 I've discovered that this is really a wonderful community."

Cowan can be contacted at 273-2187, ext. 202 or e-mail rentals@betterhousingtc.org.

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