

# A New Lease on Life for Nursing Home

By Laura Ulrich

If you don't have a friend or family member living at the Newfield Garden Apartments, you might drive past without even knowing the facility exists. Tucked into the trees next to the Newfield Central School, the complex is private and serene; if you do glance between the trees, you could easily assume not much is going on there. For the past 12 months, though, you'd have been very wrong.

Since July 2009 the building has been quietly undergoing a renovation. The complex, which serves elderly and disabled individuals, first got an accessibility overhaul, making it more user-friendly from its sidewalks to its sinks. Next it got an energy makeover, with changes that are expected to cut the energy bill by as much as 40 percent. Last, each of the building's 28 one-bedroom apartments got a facelift, with new paint, tile and carpeting. Kitchens were redesigned using a more open layout, and bathrooms got new cabinets and vanities.

Better Housing for Tompkins County, which owns and manages the Garden Apartments, completed the work using a \$1,659,913 grant from the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal's Housing and Trust Fund Program. Andrew Piliero, property manager at Better Housing, says making the building and its apartments more accessible was the first goal.

"Many of our folks move here when they are no longer able to care for a big house and yard," Piliero says. "Our goal is to create a

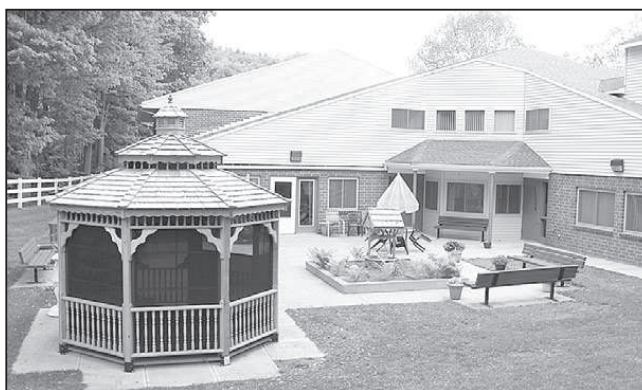


Photo by Jon Ulrich

Among the improvements at Newfield Garden Apartments are a new gazebo and landscaping enabling residents to enjoy the outdoors.

place that makes living easy, and we really focused on that with this project. We looked at everything from automatic doors to handicapped parking spots to how accessible the sidewalks and doorways were," he continues. "We also looked at features like roll-in showers and lowered countertops."

One need clearly stood out. Instead of an elevator, the building had a wheelchair lift. "It did lift people from the first floor to the second and take them back down, but it wasn't user-friendly," Piliero says. "So we installed a new high capacity elevator that's bright, inviting and functions well."

In addition, showers for the handicapped were renovated and counters in handicapped-accessible units were redesigned. Common bathrooms were completely gutted and renovated to

allow handicapped visitors access. "One of the best things was, being that it's government funds, they kept a close eye to make sure we were up to today's accessibility standards," Piliero says.

In making the building more energy efficient, contractors installed a central water heating system and energy efficient-lighting throughout. All appliances were replaced with Energy-Star-rated models, and new windows were put in. Taken together these upgrades should produce a noteworthy 40 percent cost savings.

And then there were the changes residents probably notice the most; the ones that may have made them feel like they were living in the set of a home-improvement show. Working with speed and efficiency, contractors from Two Plus Four Construction Company of

Syracuse sent residents out for the day and set about making over their living spaces before they got home, replacing floors, painting walls and reorganizing layouts.

"Residents felt as if they had gotten a new apartment without having to move," Piliero says. "Before the renovation, we were asking how long we'd be able to keep renting the apartments. We weren't sure how marketable they were. Now it's as if the place has a new lease on life, and it will be a viable option for years to come."

A new gazebo was added, along with landscaping so residents could enjoy the outdoors.

For Evelyn Van Etten, who has lived at the Garden Apartments for 14 years, the little things make the biggest difference. "Before, when I was working in my kitchen, I couldn't see into the living room," she says. "With the new cabinet design, I can look right through and talk to someone or see what's on T.V. I really enjoy that. The new bathroom vanity is really nice, too."

For Piliero, that means mission accomplished. "We can talk about energy savings and statistics, but what really touches my heart is seeing the smiles on residents' faces and seeing how the project has improved their lives," he says. "When I see how proud they are of their homes and their new community, that's pretty great."

An open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held at the Newfield Garden Apartments on Tuesday, May 25. Tours of the facility will begin at 11:30 a.m. and the ribbon cutting will take place at noon. The public is welcome.

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