A place called Hope - Shelter will house homeless families and youths, plans to open in early 2018

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DAYTONA BEACH — The air is thick with sawdust, and the shrill grind of metal meeting a sharp blade blots out all other sound.

The interiors of some buildings are skeletal mazes of floor-to-ceiling metal supports and meandering lines of new pipes and wires. Newly installed sheets of yellow wall insulation are taking in their last exposure to light for decades. Power cords snake across the gritty floors.

The new Hope Place family shelter being built in the 56-year-old Hurst Elementary School campus is still four or five months away from completion. But when the head of the nonprofit agency that’s going to own and run the 300-bed shelter walks through the vacant school’s gutted classrooms, she already sees a special healing ground for devastated families with nowhere to go.

“Every time I come out here I get excited by what’s about to happen,” said Sue Ellen Jackson, who began as Halifax Urban Ministries’ new executive director about a month ago.

On Jan. 15, Hope Place administrative staff will start moving into one of the old red brick school buildings just off Derbyshire Road north of LPGA Boulevard. Although some of the project won’t be completed the spring, a grand opening celebration is planned for Jan. 30. In February, shelter residents — which will include families, teenagers, and 20-somethings on their own — will start moving in.

The full $3.5 million renovation of the long-vacant school should be complete by April or May, said Shawn Helmer, superintendent of Ormond Beach-based ML Underwood Construction, the general contractor on the project.

Outpouring of help

The new refuge for up to 300 people will be a dream come true for Halifax Urban Ministries, which for years had hoped to relocate from its current family shelter just off Ridgewood Avenue in a neighborhood that struggles with crime, poverty and dilapidation.

The school district sold the 14.5-acre Hurst property just north of Daytona Beach to Volusia County early last year for $200,000. A few months later, the County Council voted to give $3.5 million to transform the school buildings into a 55,000-square-foot assistance center. The project started attracting donations last year, including $100,000 from retired teacher Angie Forest and two $75,000 grants from Daytona Beach that will go toward operations. Tens of thousands of dollars more is coming from other local governments including Holly Hill, Ormond Beach, South Daytona, Ponce Inlet and Daytona Beach Shores.

Forough Hosseini, a major force behind the project, said Hope Place is on budget.

“We have about $150,000 in annual commitments from cities, and an up to $400,000 commitment from Volusia County in matching funds,” said Hosseini, who chairs the Daytona State College Board of Trustees and is a member of the United Way Foundation Board.

She is also a founder of other local programs to help homeless and poverty-stricken kids, including Hope House and Food Brings Hope. Hope Place is doing more fundraising with naming rights for individual buildings at the shelter and sales of bricks that will pave the complex’s sidewalks.

The project will include 11 buildings when completed. There will be some new furniture, but to make ends meet several hotels have donated furniture, and local businesses donated storage space for the furniture. Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University is donating outdoor furniture, and DeLand High School is donating benches for the shower rooms.

There have also been donations of building materials and the expertise of local professionals who are providing guidance on everything from septic systems to construction to legal matters.

Ridgewood commitment continues

Halifax Urban Ministries plans to continue its free meals, prevention program and services for the homeless in the complex of buildings at the corner of Ridgewood Avenue and North Street. But it’s yet to be determined what will become of the nonprofit’s 96-bed shelter there.

Another agency could try to run a shelter in that location, but that could mean a battle with City Hall.

“We told people at North Street that’s not a suitable site that works for the city,” said City Manager Jim Chisholm.
The city is trying to consolidate homeless services as much as possible at the new First Step Shelter that will be built west of Interstate 95 over the next year or two.

If the 96 shelter beds on North Street are vacant for a year or more, the city authorization that allows their use will go away, said Anne Evans, chair of Halifax Urban Ministries’ board of directors.

“We won’t let those beds on North Street go empty,” Evans said.

Evans isn’t sure yet how the 96 beds will be used, but she said they could become a safety net at least until the First Step Shelter opens west of town in 2018 or 2019.

Jackson, who before becoming Halifax Urban Ministries’ executive director ran a Texas agency focused on preventing child abuse and domestic violence, is walking into a flurry of changes for the 30-year-old agency. In addition to the family shelter relocating, Halifax Urban Ministries is under contract to sell the old house at 215 Bay St. that it's used since 2001 for a homeless prevention program, showers and washing machines for the homeless, and the agency’s human resources and finance operations. The sale of the home that had been used as Halifax Urban Ministries’ main address is set to close Jan. 16.

Complete makeover

When Hope Place broke ground in this past January, the goal was to open in August. Then the plan was to have Thanksgiving dinner there. But work didn’t start in earnest until May, and the extensive overhaul of an old building that has to meet the latest code regulations has taken longer than expected.

Very little at the school built in 1961 is not being upgraded or replaced. Walls that weren’t thick or strong enough, or tied into the roof, are being knocked out and replaced. New windows are being installed. New plumbing and electrical wiring are being strung through the buildings.

Some sections of roof are being patched. There will be a new air conditioning system. Built-in cabinetry has been ripped out. There will be new flooring and ceilings, new window blinds and everything is getting a fresh coat of paint. New landscaping will also be added with the help of a local club.

The old chain link fencing that currently wraps around the perimeter of the school property will be replaced with a black wrought iron fence that will give the facility less of an institutional look. The new gate will have position sensors and a card swipe system to control access to the shelter. Security cameras will also be installed.

Partly because of a mix-up with permits, the kitchen will be one of the last things completed.

“Due to multiple issues in the kitchen area, that section of the building will not be finished until mid- or late March,” said Hosseini, who is executive vice president of information systems for ICI Homes. “HUM is aware of the situation and is planning alternative ways of feeding their residents while the kitchen is not ready.”

Once the kitchen is complete, there will be an employee-run cafeteria where residents can get three free meals per day.

‘Not just a Band-Aid’

The bulk of the space on the Wright Street campus will be used for housing. There will be 26 emergency shelter rooms, each of which will have four beds. There will be nine apartments for families of four to six people. Some of the apartments will be designed to accommodate residents with various disabilities.

“That would be horrible to turn away a family” because of inadequate facilities, Evans said.

The nine apartments, which will have kitchens and bathrooms, will be used by families closer to getting back to independent living. Those who have jobs might be charged minimal rent, depending on their situation.

There will also be 32 beds for unaccompanied youth ages 17-25.

Most of the shelter residents will use communal bathrooms, showers and a laundry room where there will be no charge to use washers and dryers.

Residents’ rooms will be spartan places to sleep with little more than beds, dressers and mobile closets. In the administration building, there will be wireless service and a study room, communal living room and children’s play room.

One of the buildings will be leased out for a child care service overseen by the Early Learning Coalition that will have space for up to 100 kids and be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Catholic Charities will have an office on site to offer counseling and staff training.
Halifax Urban Ministries has deeded the building on the eastern edge of the campus and some land on that part of the property back to the county, which might use the space for a library and a community park, Evans said. Next summer, there will also be a community garden on the sprawling property.

Jackson can’t wait to watch lives turn around.

“I love the good work that’s being done, not just to be a Band-Aid, but for the long-term chance to move into middle-class living,” she said. “It could really affect personal changes. Let’s have some real positive outcomes.”