

# One year after the fire —

By Karen Krien

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It has been one year since the fire at the St. Francis Good Samaritan Village.

Shortly after lunch on Oct. 19, 2010, firemen were called to the Village to put out a fire in the center section. As smoke rolled from the roof, residents were moved outside in record time. Fortunately, the weather was warm for October. Residents had sweaters and light jackets and some had light throws over their legs but, for the most part, no one was cold.

Residents were moved to the St. Francis high school gym along with their medical and medication records. High school students, teachers and volunteers were there to help them wherever they needed. Knowing that most of them had only the clothes they wore, the Methodist Church Thrift Store opened its doors and donated clothing. Water, drinks, snacks and eventually, an evening meal, were available at the school. Within a few hours, most of the residents had been placed in nursing homes in the surrounding area.

The next problems were addressed. Over 65 employees were now without jobs. The 48 Village residents had moved out of the county. The hospital and clinic would feel the loss of patients, the pharmacy would not have the medicine it dispensed to the Village, there would not be groceries purchased to feed the residents, and the staff, without income, would not be able to shop as usual.

A public meeting was held and Randy Fitzgerald, operational director for the Good Samaritan Society, was there to answer questions about the future of the Village. A benefit was held to raise money for the staff. At the same time, the employees at the Good Samaritan Society in Sioux Falls, S.D., were also concerned and started raising funds.

The society pledged to continue to pay the staff until Nov. 13 with insurance money. Part of the staff found jobs in area Good Samaritan Society run facilities but were now adding traveling and/or lodging expenses.

While the fund-raising money for the staff was helpful, it was only a band-aid. The residents wanted the Village back up and running.

At the time of the fire, there were 48 residents in the 50-bed facility. But, when the Cheyenne County Commissioners met with Randy Fitzgerald, operational director for the society in Kansas, they found that the society had plans for the Village but it wasn't putting the facility back together like it was.

Mr. Fitzgerald had brought Greg Hensley, an architect with the design building firm, Altman Charter. He had plans for the Village which included renovating the west wing of the Village, building additional residents' rooms which would be private rooms, and another wing for assisted living.

Mr. Fitzgerald said the demographics showed that, in the future, having a nursing home with 48 residents would not pay for itself. There needed to be more private rooms and assisted living.

The Good Samaritan Society did not plan to build the additional wing and assisted living — this would have to be the responsibility of the taxpayers.

Good to their word, the society renovated the west wing, the kitchen was put into working order and the former residents began arriving at the Village in March. By the end of the month, the facility was full with 22 residents. Two-thirds of the staff were again employed.

Workers began partial demolition on the middle section in January including removing the roof. The north brick wall was left intact but the south wall was removed and a wall was put up to make an 8-foot corridor. Plans also included renovating three additional private rooms in the west area of the damaged wing and offices in the east end. This area should be done by the first of the year.

In the meantime, a special election was held on Aug. 2 and voters agreed to authorize the county commissioners to earmark up to 6 mills for long-term care in Cheyenne County, but this would probably not go into effect until January 2013. At that time, the Good Samaritan Society plans to sell the facility and all the equipment, the apartments and grounds (not the home health agency) to the county for \$1. In turn, the county will agree to lease the management of the facility to the society for a period



JEFF PAULSEN, Good Samaritan Village administrator, talks to carpenter, Marty McLaughlin, who works with Altman Charter.



Herald staff photos by Casey McCormick and Karen Krien



PROGRESS HAS BEEN SLOW but a year after the fire at the Good Samaritan Village, there are many changes seen. On Oct. 19, firemen rushed to the Village to put out the fire; above, workmen started putting on the roof in the spring; workmen on Tuesday were putting the windows in the hallway which is complete enough that Janie Schulz, who works in the kitchen, is able to take the food cart through to the west wing where residents are fed.

