

No decisions made on fate of nursing home

By Karen Krien
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It has been more than a week since the fire at the Good Samaritan Village, St. Francis, but no decisions have been made on the future of the nursing home.

Rumors have ranged anywhere from razing the burned area and rebuilding, to not reopening.

Jeff Paulsen, Village administrator, told the Village Advisory Board on Thursday he had not heard of any plans for the Good Samaritan Society, located in Sioux Falls, S.D., to leave the county.

The insurance carrier organized the cleanup of the facility and equipment. A local contractor, Travis Milne, has been hired to wall off the burned area on both the east and west sides. The Society was sending a staff construction engineer to assess the damage.

The St. Francis nursing home was almost full with 48 residents before the fire. Residents were relocated in other nursing homes. The Roberts twins, Royce and Russell, residents at the Village for over 36 years, were moved to Sharon Springs where they celebrated their 80th birthday. One of their caretakers, Gloria Bracelin, said they were adjusting well to their new surroundings.

Cheryl Lee, Home Health director, had arrived at the high school gymnasium shortly after residents had been moved there. She reported

People plan forum for Wednesday

By Casey McCormick
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Community members from the county gathered Monday morning to discuss bringing people together with information about the status of the Good Samaritan Village of St. Francis, in the aftermath of last week's fire.

The group will host a forum on Wednesday, Nov. 3, from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at the St. Francis high school auditorium.

The head offices of the Good Samaritan Village, in Sioux Falls, S.D., have been contacted and will have a representative present.

Members of the Good Samaritan Village Advisory Board and employees, Community Builders and individuals from Bird City and St. Francis were at the Monday meeting.

Several of the employees held back their emotions when it came

to speaking about how they are coping and what their concerns are for the future.

"We've lost a family of 64 members," said Janet Siegfried in reference to the number of workers from the facility.

"We are not doing well and the longer we wait (to reopen) there will not be the same residents or employees coming back."

The forum organizers hope to better educate the public on the status of the Village. It should provide answers to the many questions being asked.

A suggestion from the meeting was to have county residents sign a petition of support to rebuild the structure and keep the operation here.

One of the Advisory Board members present was Troy Hilt.

"We don't know what is going to happen, but we can show our community support," he said.

each resident was carefully checked and despite their fragile bodies, not one resident had a skin tear.

Shane Guggemus, chief of police, said he had gone to the high school expecting chaos but was

happy to find the residents doing well and everything was under control.

Paulsen said the state fire marshal, who was on the scene when the fire occurred, commended Janelle Bowers, emergency medical service director, who had taken charge in the absence of Ryan Murray, emergency manager. Murray said he was on his way home from training but was helping where he could by phone.

Food had been prepared by Bonnie Straub and Cindy Neitzel, cooks at the Village, and Alice Kinen, head cook at the school. Helping with serving were Margaret Poling and Allison Grice. Helping clean up were Helen Paulsen and Becca Landers. The residents had already walked more than usual and it had been a long afternoon so students brought tables from the cafeteria to the gym so they could eat.

Dr. Rebecca Allard and Tyler Raile, physician's assistant, were on hand to check residents. Calls were made to family members by Village staff and the hospital staff was helping find places for the residents to go.

Since the residents had only what they were wearing, the United Methodist Thrift Store volunteers brought up clothes in a variety of sizes, making sure they had some clothing to take with them. These clothes were given to the residents.

That's what we are here for, said Carol Forsythe, one of the volunteers, when thanked for the generosity.

The next day, the Village staff with the help of others, started gathering residents' personal belongings, bagging them to be sent to the nursing homes where they were now living. In the south part of the middle wing which burned, many of those items were destroyed.

Some of the nurses and certified nurses aides will have the opportunity to work at other area Good Samaritan facilities with Good Samaritan Society paying mileage and travel time, Paulsen said. However, those in housekeeping, dietary and the office will most likely be looking for employment.

On Monday, many employees were worried. Their salaries would be paid until the end of the month and they were not sure what would happen then.

Deb Gohl who was the head of the kitchen, said she was worried about how she was going to pay her mortgage and bills. Others said they didn't know where they would all find jobs and didn't want to move.

Bonnie Straub, who had worked at the Village for over 40 years cried as she told about the love and care the workers had for each other as well as the residents. It would never be the same as some workers and residents would never come back.

Paulsen said the Society was sending an employee assistant support person to talk to employees this week.

Help being planned

People are concerned. The Community Builders group met early Monday morning to plan a forum to provide information (see related article).

The St. Francis City Council spent considerable time at their Monday evening meeting, discussing how they could help. Until more is known about the Society's plan, they decided to send letters stating their support in rebuilding the nursing home.

The Village Advisory Board, at their meeting, agreed that Sioux Falls needed to make a decision. The board is hoping the Society will want to rebuild in the right way to offer a continuum of care with independent living, assisted living and skilled nursing.

"Build on what we have, a model facility - quality care in a quality facility. Let's make it better - a vision for our community and for elder care."

The public can assist them, Kevin Berens, member, said, by voicing their concern and desires to preserve the property, the service and the community.

Fort Hays State University increases enrollment

Fort Hays State University has worked to make a college education affordable for all Kansans and accessible both on campus and at a distance through its Virtual College said Dr. Edward H. Hammond, president during his annual visit on Monday.

Enrollment at Fort Hays State has more than doubled over the past decade, he said.

"The old educational model is broken," Hammond said. "Not too many years ago, typical Kansans expected to graduate from high school, perhaps get an associate or college degree, and then spend the rest of their lives working in one profession."

Now Kansans may find themselves in a job that did not even exist when they were attending college, so they have to return for additional coursework, certificates and degrees in order to advance in their careers. We make it possible for Kansans to get the additional education they need, wherever and whenever they need it."

The university's growth has been extraordinary Hammond said, "From 5,506 students in the fall semester of the year 2000, we reported 11,883 students this fall. Our enrollment has more than doubled since the turn of the century."

Credit for part of the expansion goes to the Virtual College, which delivers courses to place-bound students at locations and times that

fit their busy schedules through various formats, including but not limited to online coursework via the Internet, he said.

Fort Hays State has a long history of providing distance education to Kansans, dating back to 1911 when it created a "Correspondence Department" to solve the problem of the numerous teachers who could not afford to travel to Hays for their continuing education needs. By adapting emerging technology to address the needs of place-bound Kansans, Fort Hays State has offered online degree programs since 1999.

Hammond said northwest Kansas is well represented both on campus and through the Virtual College, and said many of the online students will never have to be on campus to complete their education.

"The Virtual College delivers more than 40 degree and certificate programs online and is a leader worldwide in offering distance education programs," Hammond said. "Today more than 3,000 Kansans are enrolled in Virtual College degree programs. The Virtual College currently serves students from every county in Kansas and has students from 28 countries enrolled in degree programs."

On another level Fort Hays State is the largest non-Chinese provider of higher education in China.

"If we can deliver a high-quality

education to 3,500 Chinese students and to a Samoan student on dial-up Internet access, we can deliver a high-quality education anywhere in Kansas," Hammond said. "We offer tremendous support for Virtual College students - tutoring, a help desk, a writing center and many other services. Our goal is to make the virtual learning experience every bit as great as the on-campus learning experience."

Hammond said working with the community colleges and technical colleges is important and Fort Hays State had established 2+2 agreements with community colleges statewide in response to the needs of students who are place-bound and cannot attend the university in a traditional way. This allows those students to transition easily and efficiently into Fort Hays State online programs to complete bachelor degrees and earn master degrees.

Fort Hays State has doubled enrollment since the year 2000, and over the past five years the university grew 33 percent compared to 11.3 percent at the next highest Regents school, Pittsburg State University. Fort Hays State was the leader in Kansans over that five-year period, with growth of 8.1 percent compared to 6.5 percent at the second place school.

Hammond is proud that at \$227, Fort Hays State had the lowest cost of production per credit hour of any of the Regents schools, and at 5.9 percent, Fort Hays State had the lowest increase in cost over the

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