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Work begins on apartment building for people with MS

BY CLARE MARIE CELANO Staff Writer

FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP — The late Ray Kershaw will be remembered by residents as a dedicated public servant, but to Marissa Manfredi, Kershaw will always be the man who spearheaded a project that will give her a new home.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held Aug. 17 at the site of Kershaw Commons. The building will provide 30 apartments to individuals who have multiple sclerosis (MS). The apartments will be rented in accordance with the state's affordable housing regulations.

The two-story Kershaw Commons will be built on a 3.3-acre parcel behind Applewood Estates on Gully Road.

MS is a chronic disease of the brain and spinal cord characterized by changes in sensation, visual problems, weakness, depression, difficulties with coordination and speech, impaired mobility and disability.

Manfredi, 27, has MS and currently lives in a local nursing home with mostly older residents. Her family is unable to make the necessary accommodations for her, and until now there has not been housing for people in her situation.

Manfredi said she is excited about having the chance to move into Kershaw Commons and said it is "a blessing" for her. She said she is looking forward to having her own apartment, which will be accessible to her in every way.

"This is more than perfect for me," she said of the new facility. "I am also very comfortable with the surroundings and with the fact that CentraState Medical Center is right near me."

During his term of service on the Township Committee, Kershaw was integral in getting the housing project approved. He was well known for his longtime volunteer service with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and CentraState Medical Center.

The late committeeman's memory will be honored in the name of the building, Kershaw Commons, which will be what is known as supportive housing (housing with various services provided on site).

Financing includes funding from the New Jersey Special Needs Trust Fund.

"Raymond Kershaw was dedicated to serving his community, especially those suffering from MS," Freehold Township Mayor Anthony Ammiano said. "It is only right that a project which offers independent living to those with this challenging illness is named for him."

In a statement, state Sen. Jennifer Beck, state Assemblywoman Caroline Casagrande and state Assemblyman Declan O'Scanlon (all R-Monmouth and Mercer) said they supported the project.

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"The New Jersey Special Needs Trust Fund is helping to fund this project, which, when completed, will offer an alternative for people living with MS, for whom many times the only option is a nursing home. I am proud that District 12 will host the first community of this type in New Jersey," Beck said.

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“Keeping an independent lifestyle is important when battling any disease of this type,” said Casagrande. “Kershaw Commons is going to permit many more people to maintain independence while offering the specialized support needed for people with MS.”

“Not only will this project offer an option for assistance to people living with MS,” said O’Scanlon, “but it will also help Freehold Township provide a portion of the affordable housing it is required to create. This is a win-win.”

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