

Ground broken on MS facility

By COLLEEN CURRY • STAFF WRITER • August 17, 2010

FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP — Multiple sclerosis struck Marissa Manfredi without warning at age 22, sending her from a Rutgers University dorm room to a nursing home with elderly residents in a matter of years and leaving her struggling to move without a cane, walker or occasional wheelchair.

But Manfredi, now 27, hopes to be one of 30 residents to reclaim independence, activity, and even a social life at Kershaw Commons, the \$11.3 million special-needs housing project for MS patients on which ground was broken Tuesday morning.

The 31,000-square-foot facility will be built on 3.3 acres of land on Applewood Drive, off Gulley Road. It will be built by Westchester County, N.Y.-based special-needs housing developer and MS patient Ken Rosen. The facility will be the first MS-specific housing on the East Coast, offering accessible design, proximity to CentraState Medical Center's MS facilities, and affordability to patients who might otherwise be restricted to nursing homes.

The one- and two-bedroom apartments, featuring automated extra-wide doors, easy-entry shower units and specially designed appliances, will be available to patients with limited incomes. The annual income eligibility level for a one-person household would be \$30,900; for two-person, \$35,300; and three-person household, \$39,700. The rent for a one-bedroom apartment would be \$1,041 and \$1,326 for two-bedroom. Tenants will pay for heat and electricity.

In one of the project's many partnerships, rental assistance will be available from Monmouth County.

Residents also will be able to take advantage of social and educational programs in a common room, and receive some on-site medical care.

"Kershaw Commons is a wonderful example of how a wide spectrum of organizations can work together to provide better supportive affordable housing to New Jerseyans with special needs," said Lori Griffa, commissioner of the state Department of Community Affairs, which granted the project \$2.5 million and

helped find financing for it among other state agencies. The project is named for former Freehold Township mayor Raymond Kershaw, a lifelong advocate for the National MS Society and an early champion of Rosen's idea for supportive housing. Kershaw, who died in June 2009, called Michael Elkow, now the northeast regional vice president of the National MS Society, each day from the hospital in his last days of illness to check on the project, Elkow said.

"Ray wanted to be involved with organizations that changed people's lives," Elkow said. "He helped develop the (CentraState) Wellness Program, and made sure Freehold Township came together on this partnership. I know he would be quite proud today."

The project would create 45 construction jobs and two permanent jobs. Rosen said he expects the nonprofit housing to open by Sept. 1, 2011; construction begins Monday.

For patients like Manfredi, who originally is from Monroe and now lives in a Monmouth County nursing home, that opening date is an exciting one: the combination of unit accessibility and proximity to services and doctors at CentraState means a chance at reclaiming parts of her life.

"I can't be by myself, for medical reasons, but nursing homes are so restrictive. A situation like this is amazing. I'll be medically safe, but still be able to have a small social life — go to the movies with friends. And there will be other people who