

Around Town



Submitted photo

Looking like any other home in the neighborhood, the newest Helen's House is currently being constructed in Kaukauna with an expected opening in May. This is a residential alternative to large nursing facilities.

Residential alternative to large nursing facilities, 'Helen's House,' expands in Fox Valley

Helen's House, the Fox Valley's residential alternative to large nursing facilities, broke ground for its second home on Feb. 18. The newest home, being constructed in Kaukauna with an expected opening in May, follows closely behind the first Helen's House, which opened this past July in the Town of Grand Chute.

"Recognizing the need for alternative care environments for our seniors, we are developing the Helen's House concept — a unique alternative to nursing home placement rooted in the belief that seniors deserve the opportunity to age in the community, rather than large nursing facilities," said Christopher Collar, Appleton resident and founder and president of Helen's House LLC.

The living environment involves four seniors sharing a private, single-family home in a normal neighborhood.

Helen's House provides individualized personal care and nursing services to each resident to ensure they have 24/7 support, enabling them to remain in the environment that is most comfortable — an actual home, usually for significantly less than they would pay in a traditional nursing home.

"Each Helen's House has over 2,400 square feet of living space with four large bedrooms, four private bathrooms, two beautiful

indoor living areas and front and rear outdoor living spaces, all built to ADA standards utilizing our best craftsmanship," said Greg Calmes, the builder and one of the principals at Calmes VerKuilen Construction.

"Helen's House is designed to blend into the fabric of the community," Collar said. "These homes are authentic in every way — from the way they look, to the residents' personal furniture and decorations, even the smell of home-cooked meals — they are authentic homes intended to restore meaning and hope to people who would otherwise be in a large nursing facility."

In fact, you would not recognize Helen's House when you walk past one — they are well-kept homes in normal neighborhoods and there are no signs out front — but in reality you'd be seeing one of the Fox Valley's most innovative approaches to senior care.

Three residents have already signed up to move into the Kaukauna Helen's House. "I am already planning for the third Helen's House," Collar said. "And I'm very thankful for the positive reception Helen's House has received throughout the Fox Valley."

Based on the need in the area, and the support from families and healthcare professionals, Collar anticipates opening up to 12 homes from Green Bay to Oshkosh during the next few years.

Here's what relatives of two of the residents have to say:

"My 94-year-old aunt has made tremendous progress during the past months as a resident at Helen's House. The close interaction between my aunt and her caregivers at Helen's House has positively impacted my aunt both socially and physically. Recuperating from hip surgery was not an easy piece for my aunt, but her living situation at Helen's House has made her life cherished and meaningful. Thanks for making this living situation possible." K. Thompson, niece of current resident.

"Thank you so much for the great care that Mom is receiving. Just yesterday we had Mom at her great-granddaughter and great-grandson's birthday party and she was telling everyone what a wonderful place she lives at and how caring and helpful everyone is. Mom was recommending Helen's House to everyone there. Thanks to all of you!" G. Gardener, daughter of current resident.

"With few exceptions, a real home is where our seniors want to remain," Collar said. "A home is where they maintain their dignity and independence. A home is where they can heal and recover quickly and effectively. A home is where the most cost-effective and flexible care can be delivered. We recognize the tremendous need in our community for this type of environment, and we see it as our responsibility to meet that need."

Named after Collar's mother, Helen Griesbach Collar, a lifelong Appleton resident who died in October 2012 at age 90, Helen's

House is based on a proven model of a residential alternative to large nursing facilities created and perfected by Brookside Homes of America, headquartered in Erie, Penn.

"The prospect of putting a loved one in a nursing home is one of the toughest decisions you'll have to make," Collar said. "You want your Mom or Dad to get the care they need, but the typical options are either large institutional settings or costly one-on-one care at home. When I thought about my Mom's experience, and learned about this concept, I just knew I had to bring it to this area."

Helen's House is on the web at www.helens-house.com.