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Bethesda Episcopal Church Forms New Non-Profit to Help the Homeless

Saratoga Springs -- Bethesda Episcopal Church of Saratoga Springs has created Mercy House of Saratoga, Inc., a new, non-denominational, non-profit that will provide temporary residences for a wide range of needy people. Housing will be offered in partnership with several local agencies in a new building to be constructed next to the church on Washington Street.

Those to be served include victims of domestic violence and their children, homeless military veterans including women with children, people living with mental health and substance use diagnoses, and race track backstretch workers who are in recovery from physical injury or substance abuse.

Partner agencies include the Backstretch Employees Service Team (BEST), Transitional Services Association, Veterans and Community Housing Coalition, and Wellspring (domestic violence). These agencies will identify and refer individuals and families -- people already in our community who are homeless or at risk of becoming so.

A fifth organization, In Our Name, will offer a "pay as you are able" café for guests and the community, a center for discussion and discovery, employment readiness and socializing.

A New Four-Story Building

Mercy House will offer housing in a four-story, 30,000 square-foot building that will be constructed at 26-28 Washington Street, just off Broadway in Saratoga Springs. The building will also serve as the parish house for the church. Construction for the \$9 million building is expected to begin by the end of 2019.

"Mercy House was formed to further our religious mission to help people in need," said Darren Miller, Bethesda's Senior Warden. "When the Bethesda congregation began planning our new parish house, we saw the opportunity to do more for the Saratoga community. Mercy House will offer hope to people who are facing a tough stretch in their lives. The downtown location offers easy access to bus lines, a supermarket, a community center, employment opportunities, and a primary-care health facility."

"Dignifying humanity has always expressed the heart of the church's mission," stated The Very Rev'd. Marshall J. Vang, Bethesda's Interim Rector. "What we are creating is more than a collection of stone and mortar. Mercy House will be a place of renewal and hope."

The first floor of the new building will be primarily dedicated to Bethesda's parish activities and offices. Residents and housing partners will have access to first floor Bethesda parish rooms for events,

counseling and meetings, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, with which Bethesda enjoys a 75-year relationship.

The upper floors will include 18 apartments(1- 2- and 3-bedrooms) plus communal space to accommodate up to 47 individuals. There will be a two-bedroom apartment for a full-time, on-site manager employed by Mercy House, and a digital security system will assure resident safety.

"Feeling safe at home is something we often take for granted," said Maggie Fronk, Executive Director of Wellspring. "As Wellspring works with families that have experienced abuse, a key factor in building a future free of violence is the ability to find a safe, affordable place to live. Domestic violence is the primary cause of family homelessness in Saratoga County. Bethesda Episcopal Church's housing program will afford individuals and families much needed affordable housing with access to employment opportunities, public transportation and services."

"The importance of a caring community as integral to the healing process cannot be overestimated," said Paul Ruchames, Executive Director of BEST. "BEST is honored to be a part of this project and pledges to do all possible to help it come to fruition and later, to thrive."

"Transitional Services Association is excited to be a part of this collaboration with the Bethesda church," said Sybil Newell, executive director. "For the past 40 years we have provided housing and supportive services to individuals living with mental health and substance use diagnoses in Saratoga County. One of our biggest struggles has always been finding safe and affordable housing in the Saratoga Springs area that is also accessible to resources and services. The proposed project- Mercy House- will fill a great need in our community to provide housing to vulnerable individuals, in an optimal location."

"We're excited about our partnership with Bethesda Episcopal Church to provide stable, supportive and affordable housing to our veterans, said Cheryl Hage-Perez, Executive Director of Veterans & Community Housing Coalition. "This partnership will create an opportunity for single, homeless, female veterans with children to remain stably housed while receiving the support services they need to live a productive and successful life in their community. This project will provide the only services for this target population in our area."

"Food For Thought is a café based upon the mantra of 'Feed, Teach, Employ, House' said Frank Zarro, In Our Name's coordinator. "Each of these critical human needs will be addressed within the walls of the Bethesda annex. Meals will be served every day, on a pay-what-you-are-able basis. Everyone will be included and no one will be turned away. We also hope to help Mercy House's guests to develop job-ready skills and habits to support the hospitality community."

"Mercy House builds on Bethesda's long-standing commitment to helping people in need, including establishing the Home of the Good Shepherd in 1871 and sustaining it for more than a century," Miller said.

"Homelessness in Saratoga County is a byproduct of our community's economic success over recent decades," said Gordon Boyd, President of Mercy House. "We will provide a resource to meet a major

share of the need, but the work of others must continue and grow. Like other challenges Saratoga County has met over the years, when everyone gets involved, good things happen."

Mercy House was incorporated in October 2018. Its Board of Directors includes both members of the parish and of the outside community. Assistance provided at Mercy House will be non-denominational. Mercy House is planning a campaign to begin in the coming months to raise the additional capital needed to begin construction.

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MEDIA: Feel free to contact Mercy House's partners and friends for additional perspective.

PARTNERS:

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OUTSIDE SUPPORTERS AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT:

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