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'Long journey' for assisted living center ends happily with ceremony at work site

By David Knopf
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The groundbreaking for Oak Pointe, Richmond's \$7 million assisted-living facility for seniors, took place Sept. 4 in a tent in the United Presbyterian Christian Church parking lot.

"Originally, we were going to have this down there," said Todd Spittal, pointing to the work site at the intersection of Highway 13 and Crispin Street, "but it was too muddy."

Spittal represented Provision Living, the St. Louis company that will manage the 40,000-square-foot, 46-unit center due to open next spring.

The ceremonial groundbreaking – no dirt was actually

turned Thursday – could've taken place almost anywhere and city officials, the principals of ClearPath Senior Holdings and Arco Construction would've been happy.

There was an atmosphere of celebration with Spittal's management firm, as well as officials with ClearPath Senior Holdings, Arco Construction, city officials, board members and

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Richmond Mayor Mike Wright, left, City Administrator Rob Brohammer and resident Billie Hamann were among the local contingent celebrating construction of Oak Pointe, a 46-unit assisted-living center. (Photo by David Knopf/Richmond News)



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and Richmond residents filling the tent for an occasion that, more than once, didn't look like it would happen.

"There were so many obstacles for us to go through," said Mayor Mike Wright, one of a half-dozen speakers who addressed the crowd. "It's been a long journey to get to this point."

Wright and City Administrator Ron Brohammer recounted the hurdles the city and ClearPath had to clear in order to see the project begin.

"They visited 15 sites, none of which was satisfactory to their needs," Brohammer said. "We thought we could lose them."

"Then they looked at this property and thought this would be perfect for all their needs."

The fact that ClearPath liked the location hardly provided an immediate break-through. In fact, it created several new obstacles.

The city owned the property, having acquired it with the stipulation it would be used for a park honoring the late Charles Hamann, a longtime teacher, coach and city leader. Legally bound to use the property for a memorial park, the city was faced with convincing Hamann's widow, Billie, and the church that the ClearPath project would be beneficial for Richmond.

The church ultimately voted, nearly unanimously, to allow the switch. Convincing Hamann, one of the speakers last week, took a little longer.

"Ultimately, Mrs. Hamman became a supporter, if not a cheerleader," Brohammer said.

Quoted in an earlier *News* story, she



BROHAMMER

acknowledged the turnaround.

"It's taken us a while to get to this point," she said. "We started out not too happy, but through discussion and understanding, we've come to a good place. It's a win-win for the city and the church."

Originally, the church sold the parcel to Richmond Parks Board for \$40,000, with the stipulation it would be the site of the Charles Hamann Memorial Park. But for a city in which commercial and residential development have been largely absent for years, the ClearPath proposal was reason for a change of course.

In its agreement with United Presbyterian Christian, the city agreed to pay the church \$25,000 for its release from the park commitment. Richmond also agreed to spend around \$8,000 to raze a small house near the church entrance on East Black Diamond Street.

As negotiations progressed with ClearPath, it was agreed that the developer would devote a half-acre of the property for use as a memorial garden and gazebo honoring either Charles Hamann or the family. Under the plan, the city would be a partner in the garden project and also build a handicap-accessible sidewalk to connect the church and the facility.

In addition, the city pledged to keep the Charles Hamann Memorial Park a priority.

Billie Hamann appeared pleased to be part of the ceremonial groundbreaking, smiling for photos and speaking with enthusiasm.

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"I will probably be there one of these days," she said, referring to the assisted-living project that would take shape behind the podium where she stood, "but I hope it's not too soon. I do look forward to the Charles Hamann Memorial Park when they find somewhere to put it."

According to the agreement with the city, the park would be built with Richmond Parks Board funds.

In their remarks, officials with ClearPath and Provision Living praised the location, the city and cooperation from city government.

"It's an honor to be here in Richmond and bring this to you," Spittal, of Provision Living, said.

Spittal said his firm had already received inquiries from potential residents about Oak Pointe, which will furnish full-service residential living, including meals, activities and around-the-clock on-site staff support and an emergency-call system. The facility, Spittal said, would ideally suit a senior who's living alone but would benefit from interaction with other people.

Jeff Binder, a principal with ClearPath, thanked Brohammer and other city staff for their hospitality, support and persistence.

"We couldn't do it without Ron's help," he said. "This is especially the kind of community we wanted to be in. We have a lot of faith in our team, but we also have tremendous faith in Richmond."

Jim Eisenhart, Binder's partner, thanked Billie Hamann and the church for their support. Mayor Wright also thanked the church, as well as the park board and city staff for their cooperation.

"This is a huge benefit for Richmond," he said.

"What's notable about this is how many people have come together to do this," Brohammer said.

Billie Hamann and Brohammer each noted how construction of Oak Pointe would keep life-long residents from moving away to find assisted living.

"In my time in Richmond, I don't know how many good friends I've had to say goodbye to because there wasn't anything for them here," the city administrator said.

Site preparation is already well under way on the 4.5-acre site on the east side of Highway 13, just north of United Presbyterian Christian Church. Arco Construction, the contractor and ClearPath's partner in the project, has said around 90



After last Thursday's ceremonial groundbreaking, principals in the project lined up for a series of photos. (Photo by David Knopf/Richmond News)

percent of the work would be done by area subcontractors.

Once Oak Pointe is up and running, ClearPath has

said it would employ 30 to 40 people fulltime, with a payroll between \$600,000 and \$700,000.

In reaching its agreement

with ClearPath, the city of Richmond supported a 14-year property-tax abatement that will gradually net

a projected \$600,000 in tax revenue. To help ClearPath with its construction and start-up costs, the abatement

was structured to gradually increase the amount of property tax due on the site, building and contents.