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The Middletown Press | B6 | Friday, January 21, 2005

Low-income senior housing pilot launched

By LISA BACKUS

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HARTFORD - Thanks to a first-of-a-kind partnership between the state and the non-profit Community Renewal Team, low-income seniors who need help with daily living now have the option of moving into a subsidized assisted living community that allows for independence, socialization and support when needed.

The Retreat on Retreat Avenue recently opened its doors to its first resident and is now accepting applications to fill 80 studio and 20 one-bedroom apartments.

The facility is specially designed for low-income seniors over age 65 who need some help with daily living but are still independent enough to enjoy a community setting.

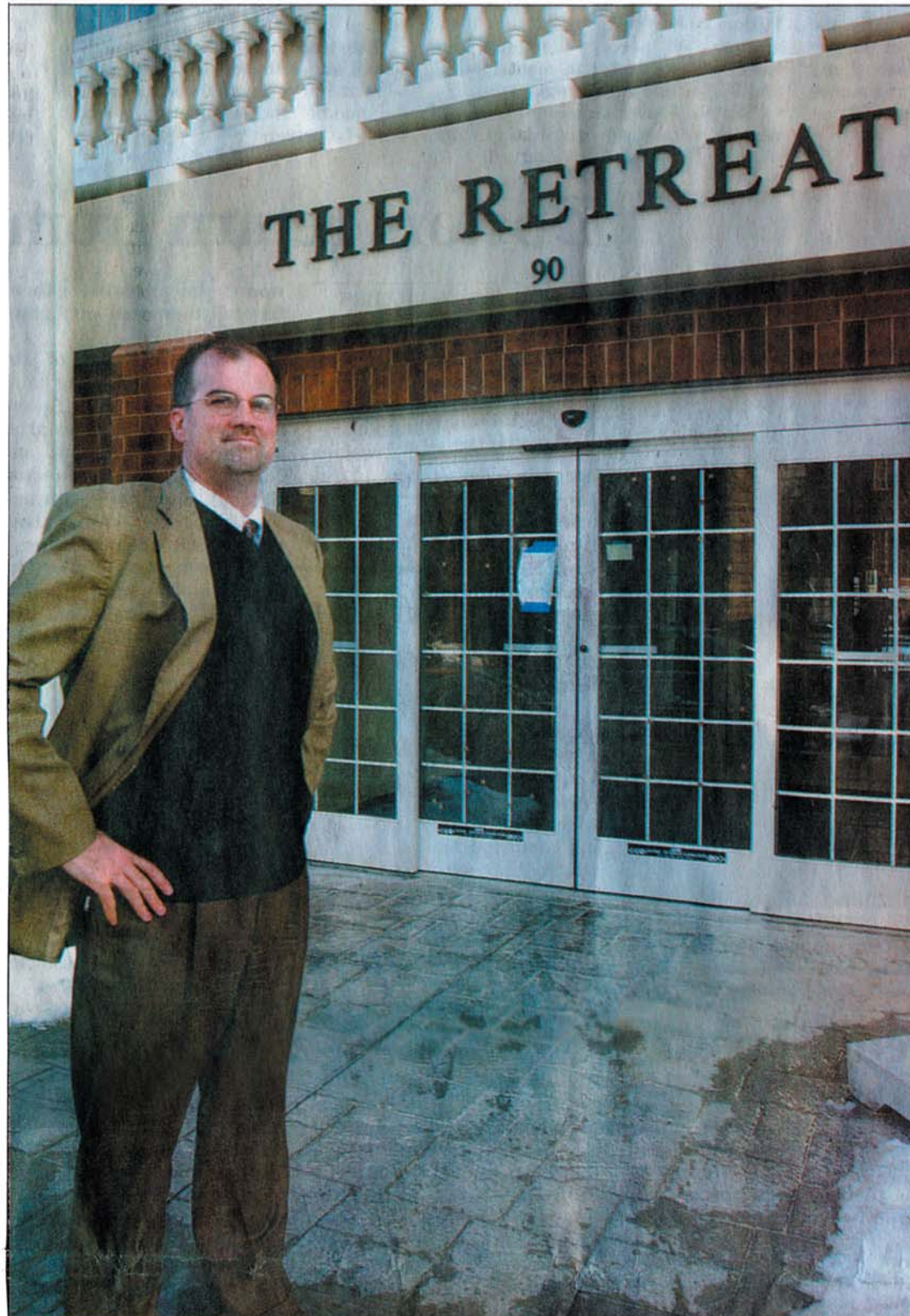
"The state's goal is to help seniors remain and become self-sufficient longer," said CRT spokesperson Liz Dupont-Diehl. "This is kind of the next step in that and it really was such an unmet need in the state."

The Retreat is open to any state senior who is 65 or older who meets the financial guidelines provided by the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders and the state's guidelines for low-income housing tax credits.

Prior to the opening of The Retreat and a similar 25-unit facility in Glastonbury, low-income seniors had few options other than to rely on family members or retire to a nursing home when they needed help with daily living.

Retreat Executive Director Gustave Keach said the financial guidelines allow seniors to pay based on income rather than dishing out the average \$4,000 to \$5,000 monthly cost of most assisted living facilities.

"This is set up for people who can no longer live safely at home but aren't in need of skilled nursing services on a full-time basis," Keach said. "Our residents will likely pay about 10 percent of what peo-



Tom Whren/The Middletown Press

Gustave Keach is executive director of The Retreat in Hartford. At right is the "fireplace room."

ple pay when they enter other assisted living facilities in the state."

Each apartment at The Retreat offers a kitchenette with a microwave, sink and a refrigerator. Each floor has a "family room" which allows residents to entertain family and friends in a larger setting. The family room includes a television with cable, a DVD player and toys for the grandchildren.

Three meals a day are provided in The Retreat's dining

care plan for each resident and every resident will be given an emergency pendent they can press if they are in need of help 24 hours a day.

The Retreat is operated by CRT, the state's largest Community Action Agency which provides for Meals on Wheels, a senior lunch program, shelters, Head Start for preschoolers and a number of other programs designed to help people and families become self-sufficient.



room and additional rooms are available to allow residents to partake in family celebrations on site.

Keach said as part of the socialization aspect, residents will take their meals at flexible times in the dining room. Meals will be delivered to residents when they are feeling under the weather.

The dining area also includes a patio where chefs can serve summer barbecues. Residents will meet on a regular basis to discuss menus and other community issues.

The lobby features a café where residents and guests can purchase coffee and snacks, a library with computers and a living room with a fireplace. Transportation to doctor appointments and field trips are provided. A number of social activities such as crafts will take place on a regular basis. An on-site nurse will form a

The project is considered a state demonstration pilot to help make assisted living more affordable for the average person. The Connecticut Housing Finance Authority and the state's Departments of Social Services, Economic and Community Development, Office of Policy and Management and Public Health were involved in bringing the concept to life.

Keach said the facility is designed to create a community atmosphere for seniors who wish to maintain their independence for as long as possible. "They can live here as long as they are financially and medically appropriate which could be for many, many years," Keach said. "Here they can get quite a bit of care before they have to consider moving to a nursing home."

For information on how to apply for residency at The Retreat, call (860) 560-CARE.