

News Release

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HISTORIC “MOTHERHOUSE” RENOVATIONS BEGIN FOR AFFORDABLE SENIOR HOUSING COMMUNITY

AMHERST, NY – Federal, State, and local officials participated today in a ceremony at 400 Mill Street to mark the beginning of the historical “motherhouse,” renovation, a project that represents a partnership between both public and private entities. The historic St. Mary’s of the Angels Motherhouse will be renovated to create the 101-unit *St. Mary’s Commons* affordable senior apartments.

The renovation of the “Motherhouse” into the *St. Mary’s Commons Apartments* represents a significant success story. The 132,000 square foot building, built in 1927, had been on the market since the Sisters of St. Francis moved their residences to the Village of Williamsville in 1999. In an effort to control the site’s fate, the Town of Amherst bought the 90-some acres and turned the land into the Amherst State Park. When the developers, CRS Properties, and Whitney Management Co., Inc. submitted a proposal to purchase the building in 2000, it had been vacant for nearly two years. “Last week we were able to finalize the transaction to make the Town of Amherst the former owner,” said John “Skip” Cerio, President of CRS Properties. Amherst Town Supervisor, Susan Grelick has expressed on many occasions that she is happy about the outcome. The renovation has many benefits; it will serve a community need, and generate tax revenues from the parcel. It also addresses the concerns of the neighbors who didn’t want the property commercially developed.

New York State Assemblyman Jim Hayes said in opening remarks, “Today, like everywhere in Western New York, Amherst finds its population getting older. Seniors comprise almost 30 percent of our community and the need for affordable housing continues to be of great importance.”

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“Our ceremony today is important because it celebrates another milestone in the re-development of one of Amherst’s most historic parcels of land. Today we begin the work of preserving a great architectural treasure for practical reuse as an affordable home for scores of seniors in our community.” Hayes congratulated the developers for their vision and dedication to historic preservation. He commended his colleagues in state and local government for working cooperatively to achieve this important community goal. In addition, he thanked the Sisters of Francis for continuing to bless the community with daily prayers and good works.

"Because seniors represent one of the fastest growing segments of our population, it is especially important that we provide high quality, safe and affordable housing to meet their special needs, " said Judge Jerome M. Becker, Chairman of the New York State Housing Finance Agency. "We are extremely proud of this project which will not only provide homes to more than 100 seniors, but will also have an enormous social and economic impact on the Amherst community for years to come."

St. Mary’s Commons will be created with the renovation of the historic Angels Motherhouse, where the St. Mary’s of the Angels order of nuns spent 70 years serving the community. The magnificent, 132,000-square-foot, gothic-style building, originally designed by Buffalo City Hall architects Dietel and Wade in 1927, will be transformed into 101 apartments for qualified, independent, senior citizens. The 90-acre Amherst State Park will remain open for the public to enjoy. The project’s mission is to provide affordable housing in a state park setting, while at the same time preserving the historical significance and beauty of the “Motherhouse.”

The developers, CRS Properties, Inc., and Whitney Capital Company, L.L.C., are known for completing successful projects of this kind in Amherst. The two development companies collaborated previously with the development of Hopkins Court, a 105-unit affordable senior housing community that opened in 2001. Mr. John “Skip” Cerio, President of CRS Properties, Inc. commented, “*St. Mary’s Commons* presented another opportunity for us to participate in a project with a wide range of benefits for the town.” Cerio is also known for building the Amherst Pepsi Center.

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Amherst natives, Mr. Tom Granville, Jr. and Mr. Garry Munson, of Whitney Capital Company, L.L.C., participated in the ceremony. *St. Mary's Commons* will be managed and operated by Whitney Management Co., Inc., an affiliate of Whitney Capital Co., LLC, a Long Island-based group that is co-developing with CRS in this development for the community. Whitney Management oversees or manages 4,500 units of housing nationwide.

St. Mary's Commons will consist of the historic building along with four acres of park land on Mill Street. The apartments will offer 60 one-bedroom units, 37 two-bedroom units and 4 studio apartments. Amenities will include dishwasher, range, garbage disposal and a Spacemaker washer/dryer. Approximately 12 units will actually retain some of the original building's characteristics, such as built-in bookcases and china cabinets. Plans for common areas call for turning the sprawling Motherhouse chapel into a community room with an exercise area and a place for computers with Internet access. Additionally, the chapel balcony will be turned into a library.

With *St. Mary's Commons* being a senior-housing complex funded in part by state and federal grants, residents must meet the established maximum income guidelines in order to be eligible for residency. This effort is made to support the elderly community of Amherst and continues in the tradition of the St. Mary's sisters who as part of their mission took in and cared for the elderly since their foundation in 1861. With initial renovations already underway, *St. Mary's Commons* is expected to be completed and once again ready for occupancy in early 2004.

Other attendees at today's ceremony include, Carl Calabrese, Deputy Erie County Executive; Hon. Susan Grelick, Amherst Town Supervisor; Hon. Barry Weinstein, Erie County Legislator; Hon. Jane Woodward, Amherst Town Board; Thomas VanNortwick, NYS Dept. of Housing and Community Renewal; Grant Lesswing, NYS Housing Finance Agency; Scott Schmid, J.P. Morgan Chase Bank; Sister Marion Rose, Sisters of St. Francis; Michael McGuire, Amherst Town Councilman; Tom Granville, Whitney Capital Company; and Garry Munson, Whitney Capital Company.

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