

FEATURE

Parish's Inter-Act group lobbies for senior housing

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

SPENCERPORT — Jane Feeney, a parishioner at St. John the Evangelist Church, loves the comfortable house where she's lived since 1949 and where she has raised her six grown children. But she admits maintaining the place can be a lot of work.

"It's a little overwhelming," she said in her living room. "I don't have as much stamina as I used to."

Nonetheless, she added that her good health is a blessing that allows her to work around the house, something many of her fellow senior citizens in Spencerport can no longer do. Many of them must hire help or rely on family members to do such tasks as mow the lawn or wash the windows, she said.

"They find they have to have somebody come and do everything for them," she said.

Her son, Dave Feeney, is well aware of the problems facing senior citizens in the village of Spencerport and the town in which it is located, Ogden.

"I think a lot of the seniors are faced with still wanting to live in the area and the problem of maintaining a bigger home," he said.

He and his mother also said that seniors want to stay in the area so they can visit their relatives and remain close to their friends.

Feeney belongs to a group at St. John the Evangelist that is part of Interfaith Action, or Inter-Act, a coalition of 18 Monroe County Catholic parishes, non-Catholic churches and community organizations. Formerly known as the So-



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer
Jane Feeney and her son Dave are working with Inter-Act to advocate for senior housing in the Spencerport area.

cial Action Network, Inter-Act has lobbied various county and city public officials on behalf of a number of issues in the past few years.

The St. John's Inter-Act group surveyed more than 160 residents of the parish's surrounding area this year, Feeney said, and found that the lack of affordable senior housing in the area was a major concern for many residents. On behalf of the residents of Ogden and Spencerport, the St. John's group held a meeting last month with Spencerport Mayor Robert Kincaid and Ogden Supervisor Donald Walzer. About 80 people attended the meeting, he added.

Both Feeney and another member of the St. John's group, James P. Carroll, said the meeting was designed to encourage government officials to make senior housing a priority, and was not designed with any confrontational purpose in mind.

"It was more of 'Let's get off the dime, and make it happen,'" Carroll said.

In a follow-up interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Kincaid said Spencerport

and Ogden officials have looked into the senior housing question for two years, but have been unable to find land for a housing complex. Nonetheless, the officials are ready and willing to help with any efforts to find such a site, he said.

Kincaid also said that any senior housing site would probably be built by a private developer interested in gaining various state and federal tax breaks and government grants that are available to developers of affordable senior housing.

Park Ridge Health System in Greece has been working with a private developer on plans to build a 40-unit affordable housing complex that would consist of one- and two-bedroom apartments, according to Sandra MacWilliam, senior vice president for long-term care. Such apartments would be available for monthly rents ranging from \$470 to \$625, she said.

She added that Park Ridge is interested in locating such a complex in the Spencerport/Ogden area because many of the health system's clients reside there.

Meanwhile, an Ogden not-for-profit corporation called SAHARO — Senior Adult Recreation and Housing in Ogden — has been examining the affordable housing question since the 1970s.

However, Richard Bardwell, president of SAHARO, acknowledged that it has been unable to do anything about it. He noted that SAHARO has looked at a number of ways of bringing affordable senior housing to the area, including discussing proposals with an out-of-state developer who specializes in affordable housing.

Bardwell said he recently invited Carroll's wife, Mary, who is president of St. John the Evangelist's parish council, to join SAHARO's board of directors.

"We've got at least a couple of different groups working on this issue separately, and it would be nice to consolidate our interests," he said.

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