

Published October 24, 2010

Light House Shelter residents get a new place to call home

\$8.3 million facility to serve Anne Arundel County homeless

By NICOLE FULLER

Disagreements with his family forced Martise Stewart from his home. And without anywhere to go, he ended up sleeping in a wooded area in Odenton.

With colder weather approaching, Stewart, who is unemployed, made his way to the Light House Shelter in Annapolis.

"They're helping me get my resume together," said Stewart, 29. "I've only been there two weeks so I'm getting myself together rapidly."

Beginning today, Light House residents, including Stewart, will start moving into a new, \$8.3 million building — called the Light House Homeless Prevention and Support Center — which will greatly expand the number of clients and the services offered to serve the county's growing homeless population.

The new shelter on Hudson Street, owned by Annapolis Area Ministries, held a ribbon cutting celebration Tuesday, inviting throngs of volunteers and financial contributors to tour the new facility. Among the attendees were Maryland First Lady Katie O'Malley and honorary co-chairs Rep. John Sarbanes and state House Speaker Michael E. Busch.

For the dignitaries, Stewart triumphantly performed a rap song he wrote in honor of the new shelter, earning a standing ovation from the gathered crowd.

Elizabeth Kinney, president of the board of directors, told Stewart, "Thank you Martise, you are why we



Martise Stewart, 29, receives applause from Elizabeth Kinney (left), president of Annapolis Area Ministries Board, and others after performing a rap song about the Light House Shelter, of which he is a resident. (Kenneth K. Lam, Baltimore Sun / October 18, 2010)

do what we do."

The 24,000-square-foot facility features five apartments for families — which can serve a total of 30 people — an emergency shelter, a resource and support center offering education, job training and life skills. There is also a new day center for the chronically homeless, where they can shower, do laundry and take advantage of job training and counseling services.

Additionally, the shelter will house beds for 45 people: 30 men and 15 women. The old 20-year-old shelter on West Street, a location that the shelter has outgrown, is for sale and will close as soon as the last residents have moved to the new facility on nearby Hudson Street. There are more than 300 people on a waiting list.

The Light House has received a \$1.2 million state grant to help build its new facility, and about \$6 million in construction costs have been paid through donations from businesses, organizations, religious groups and individuals. Anne Arundel County pledged \$250,000 toward Light House construction over three years and the city of Annapolis has donated \$500,000. The Kresge Foundation has provided a \$575,000 grant to the shelter, with \$425,000 for the construction project and \$150,000 going toward the operating budget.

"It's absolutely unbelievable," said Kathy Baker, director of the Lighthouse Homeless Prevention Center. "It's been a wild ride of life time, bringing a project like this to a completion. Everybody who's been involved in with the project has just been outstanding."

Light House is the only shelter in Anne Arundel County serving adults and children 365 days a year. Other shelters in Anne Arundel are the Arundel House of Hope in the Glen Burnie area, run by ministerial organizations that also operate emergency shelters during cold weather; and Sarah's House, operated by Catholic Charities on Fort Meade, mostly for women and children. In cold winter months, other churches provide emergency shelter.

The old shelter had 17 beds for men and six for women and two family apartments. The three-story building features an art and therapy room, an unemployment resource center with 12 computers and a classroom, allowing workers to offer better resources to its clients. Residents can stay at the shelter for up to 90 days, as long as they remain employed and are free from alcohol and drugs.

The project includes a children's playground, donated by the Ronald McDonald House and a vegetable garden, donated by the Annapolis Whole Foods. Market employees plan to teach the shelter residents how to garden.

Kinney said the new center will "do a lot of life-changing."

The new building was designed by the Baltimore architectural firm of Cho Benn Holback & Associates Inc., and includes many energy-efficient features, such as geothermal heat and a reflective roof.

The construction company, Hammel Construction, hired some shelter residents to work on the building's construction.

Samuel Coates, a former shelter resident who now volunteers there, making lunch for residents and

doing "everything they ask me to do." Coates came to the celebration in a suit and tie. Looking up at the new building, he said, "It's better."