

# Rehab center under renovation

By Kevin Allen South Bend Tribune | Posted: Sunday, February 15, 2015 6:30 am

SOUTH BEND — A building on the city's far west side is undergoing a rehabilitation, so it ultimately can be used to help people recover their health.

An Illinois company is spending about \$3.8 million to turn a former nursing home along Western Avenue into Briarcliff Health & Rehabilitation Center. The facility is scheduled to open next month with 71 private bedrooms for patients and a staff that will focus on spinal cord, cardiac, orthopedic, bariatric, inpatient hospice and specialized wound care.

Richard Kennedy, the executive director at Briarcliff, said the facility will be unique in South Bend — and he expects it will attract patients from as far away as 200 miles.

"We looked at the need in the community. There are patients that don't have a place to go, or they go to places that aren't really designed to accommodate them," he said. "This was designed to accommodate this population like no other place is."

That design includes shower rooms customized for each unit's focus. For example, the bariatric unit has a shower with a built-in bench, and the shower in the spinal-cord unit can accommodate a gurney.

Briarcliff will have two cafeterias as well as several private dining areas where staff members can teach patients about preparing healthy food. There's another kitchen that will be used for training patients to return to self sufficiency after they go home. Other social spaces are set aside for patients to share their common experiences while they heal. The building will include a beauty shop and chapel as well.

An obstacle course in the courtyard behind the building will feature inclines, declines, steps and pulley stations where patients can exercise, and regain their confidence and mobility.

"Our goal is to improve the quality of patients' lives and extend their lives," Kennedy said, "and we



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Chris Hamacher wires networking lines for data and phones Friday at Briarcliff Health & Rehabilitation Center in South Bend. The former nursing home at 5024 W. Western Ave. is undergoing a \$3.8 million renovation and will reopen next month to provide several types of specialized care. SBT Photo/BECKY MALEWITZ

can do that here.”

The building, which is a half-block southeast of where Western crosses Mayflower Road, dates back to 1968 — and that means a fair amount of the Briarcliff project has included modernizing the property. Fire sprinklers have been installed with the renovation, as have new mechanical, electrical and communication systems. Wi-Fi will be available throughout the building.

Menora Financial Corp., based in Skokie, Ill., owns the Briarcliff building. The company bought it three years ago after West Park Health Care Facilities, a home for people with mental illnesses and developmental disabilities, closed. The building’s hallways were filled Friday with the sounds of construction workers putting finishing touches on the place before it reopens March 10.

This is Menora’s first health care project in South Bend, but the firm has several investments in residential properties here. The company fixed up two historical downtown apartment buildings in 2013, and it owns several hundred single-family rental homes in the area.

Kennedy said Briarcliff will employ between 100 and 110 people when it’s at full capacity. He said many of those jobs will pay more than \$50,000 per year.

Chris Fielding, assistant executive director for the South Bend Department of Community Investment, said the Briarcliff project is important because it fills a previously vacant building along a main thoroughfare. “For us, it’s proof that there is a desire to locate on the west side,” he said.

But it also will generate good jobs that people can learn through programs at local schools, such as Ivy Tech Community College and Indiana University South Bend.

”It really gives people a pathway,” Fielding said. “They can have a job in an industry that very rarely has a layoff.”

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