

## Senior citizen housing opens downtown

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Mammie and Leroy Ragins love it.

The Ragins are just getting settled into Sumter Place, a new three-story affordable housing apartment complex on West Bartlette Street designed for folks 55 years old and up who want to live independently -- and just off Main Street.



Keith Gedamke / The Item  
Sumter Place, a senior living center, has now opened off Bartlette Street downtown. The facility features single- and double-bedroom apartments.

A Sumter native, Leroy Ragins worked for Korn Industries for about 30 years, he said, and then for a few months at the Exide plant until his health started failing. His wife suffers from glaucoma, and with their close proximity to Tuomey Regional Medical Center and several downtown drug stores, they couldn't be happier.

"We know some people already from church and from growing up here," he said. "Everybody is very friendly and they greet you with a smile."

As the Ragins are on a fixed budget and fit within certain economic parameters, Sumter Place has been a godsend for them, especially considering they used to sleep with their clothes on in their last residence, he said, because of lack of proper heating.

They need do that no more.

When they leave their two-bedroom, 1,100-square-foot apartment to socialize in the downstairs community room, Sumter Place Manager Cindy Walker said it can be "like a high school reunion."

Bob Duncan, vice president of Greensboro, N.C.-based Beacon Management -- the property managing agents for Sumter Place's parent company, SunStarr Real Estate Group of Fond du Lac, Wis. -- stopped by Sumter Place and its sister property, S. P. Holladay Manor, on Wednesday as part of his duties to make sure the residents are pleased with their new quarters.

The feedback so far has been pretty good, he said -- so good, in fact, SunStarr is scouting other locations.

"So far we've had a great response from the folks that have moved in -- they like the new fresh appearance and the large community spaces," he said. "I think SunStarr is looking at other potential properties in South Carolina."

Walker said the residents can take advantage of the community room, which has a kitchen, dining room, couches, a flat-screen TV, several tables and a fireplace.

"It'll get cozier," she said, as more residents move in and make themselves at home.



Keith Gedamke / The Item  
Gloria Teseniar talks with Sumter Place manager Cindy Walker and resident Mammie Ragins while touring the new facility Wednesday morning.

Of the 41 units available, 14 have already been rented, and the level of interest has steadily risen since Sumter Place opened up about three weeks ago.

Sumter Place-ers can also enjoy an onsite "beauty shop" -- with weekly visits from a beautician -- as well as a computer room and exercise. Each apartment, Walker said, also has emergency pull cords should a medical emergency arise.

While some residents stay fit on the exercise room's treadmills, many use the hallways to walk laps -- and visit with their neighbors in the process.

Gloria Teseniar, manager of S.P. Holladay Manor, said she would love to see a grocery store locate in the area, but in the meantime, a bus stop on South Sumter Street is close for residents and can get them where they need to go. So far, all of Sumter Place's new residents have done nothing but give thanks and praise for comfortable, clean and safe downtown affordable housing.

"It's like they've died and gone to heaven," Teseniar said.

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