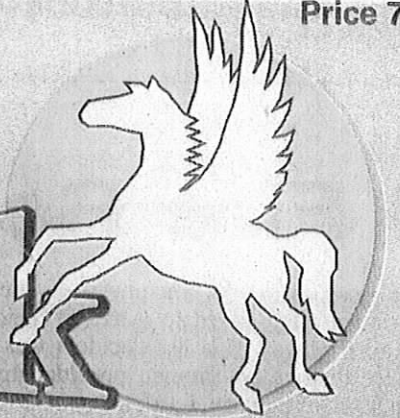


The Laurel Outlook



St. John's plans retirement housing facility

By LARRY TANGLER
Outlook Staff

St. John's Lutheran Ministries in Billings confirmed plans to build an \$5-\$6.5 million assisted living facility in northeast Laurel last Friday. The facility will be built on a four-acre parcel of land on East Maryland, donated to St. John's by Iron Horse Station Subdivision developer Marvin Brown.

"We've wondered for some time if Laurel is a place that St. John's should have a presence," said David Trost, St. John's vice president of management and outreach. "Rev. Martin Dreyer, pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Laurel and Dr. Lee Richardson have encouraged us to come to Laurel for several years. We have not gone into a community unless we are invited. They asked us to explore the creation of a senior housing project in Laurel."

The Laurel project is part of an expansion project including new

buildings and service at the present campus located in Billings at the corner of Shiloh Road and Rimrock Road, a new facility in the Billings Heights and another new facility in another community in the Billings service area.

"We're very excited to have St. John's come to Laurel. They do really good ministry. This is really important for our community," Pastor Dreyer said. "Not just because of the health care they provide — but because of the ministry they provide to people."

The mission of St. John's Ministries is to provide living opportunities within nurturing environments of hope, dignity and love.

The Laurel site is right across the street on East Maryland from property owned by Grace Bible Church.

St. John's is a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) and supported by 22 ELCA congregations in

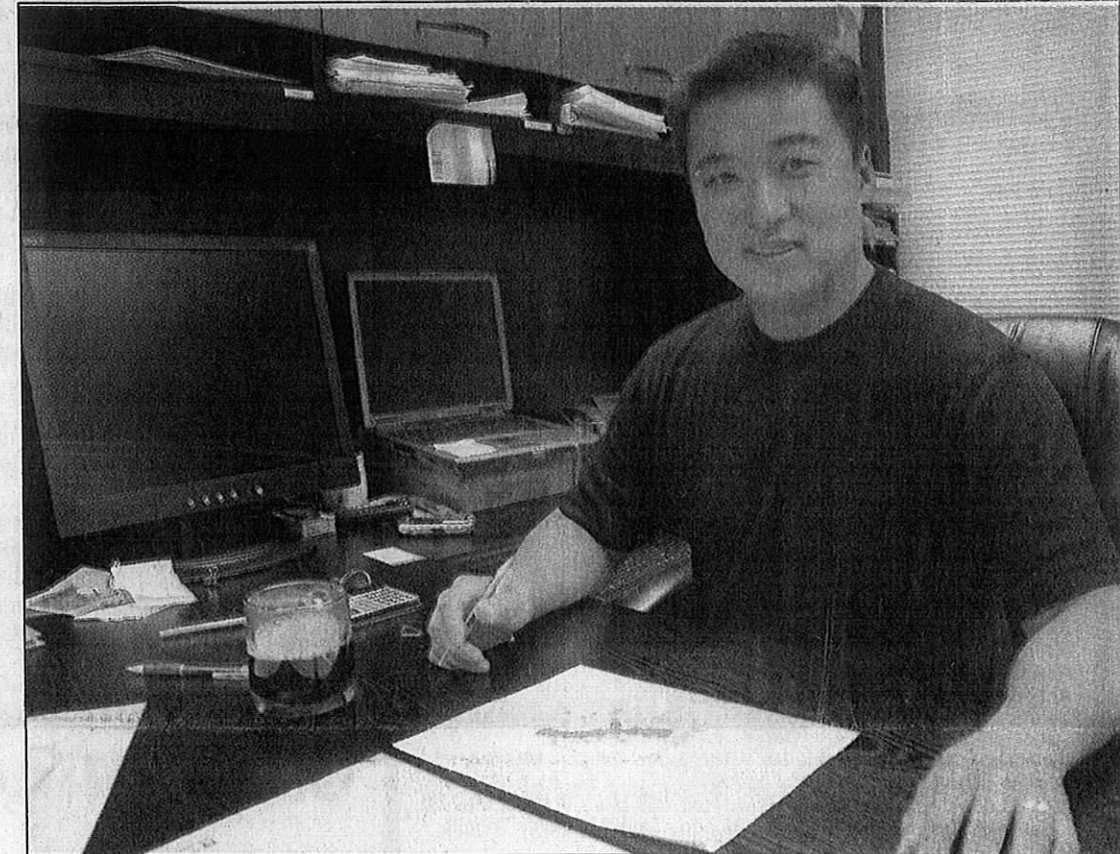
central and southeastern Montana, including Our Savior's in Laurel.

Trost hopes to have a steering committee formed soon to provide local input into the project. That committee's role will be to promote local awareness of the project, to serve as a liaison between the community and St. John's, to help identify specific senior housing needs and to assist in the design of the facility.

The committee will also be charged with raising "seed money" to help with some of the projects pre-development costs. St. John's plans to finance the project as part of a larger expansion project that will be funded through the sale of tax-exempt bonds.

"The steering committee may very well turn into a permanent advisory board for the operation of the Laurel facility," Trost said. That board would provide

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St. John's Lutheran Ministries Vice President of Management and Outreach David Trost reviews plans for the 36-48 unit assisted living facility planned for northeast Laurel.

Outlook photo by Larry Tangler

Facility

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support and guidance to the local on-site manager in operation of the facility.

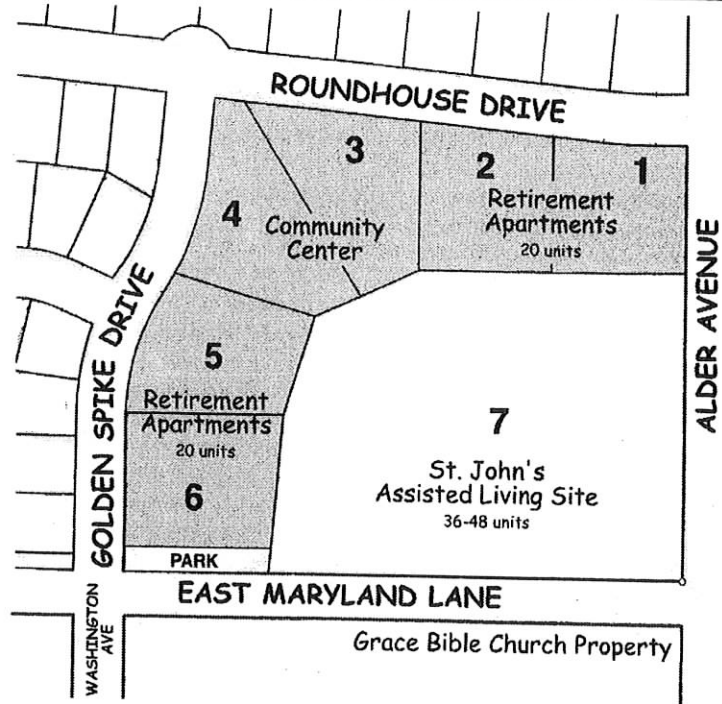
Preliminary plans for the Laurel St. John's facility call for a 36-48 unit senior housing complex, composed of one or more buildings. Trost estimated the cost of the project at \$5-\$6.5 million, depending on how many units are built and the mix of independent or assisted living units.

The level of services provided may vary from independent living active service to high levels of assisted living care. Trost said he expected the assisted living facility would create as many as 15 full-time equivalent jobs. He speculated there would be some administrative staff sharing between the Laurel site and the Billings site, but "frontline" service providers would not be shared between sites.

St. John's Ministries has managed a 124-apartment independent living facility, Sapphire Lutheran Homes in Hamilton for the past five years, besides the units at its Billings site. It also provides support services to more than a dozen rural facilities around the state including facility analysis, interim management services, and other administrative services.

The St. John's Campus located at the corner of Rimrock Road and Shiloh Road provides 24-hour care for more than 500 residents. It is a continuing care retirement community, providing a variety of services from condominium-style independent living units to full service nursing home care.

Trost indicated the Laurel



project could begin in the next 10-20 months depending on the level of community support, results of assessment of the market, the time required to complete construction documents and where those factors end up in the building season. That could mean a construction start date between July 2006 and May 2007. He estimated the project will take a year to complete, once construction begins.

Brown has a pending zoning change request before the Laurel City Council to change the use for six lots surrounding the St. John's site from residential limited multi-family to community commercial. This would allow the lots to be used to build retirement apartment buildings.

If approved, Brown wants to construct 20-unit retirement apartment buildings on lots 1 and 2, and lots 5 and 6. He plans to build a community center with light commercial use on lots 3 and 4. These lots are in block 3 of the subdivision. Lot

7, the St. John's site, is currently zoned community commercial and not part of the current zone change request.

Brown's request has been recommended for approval by the Laurel City County Planning Board. A formal protest to the zone change was filed by adjacent property owners at a July 19 public hearing. Since that time, questions raised by adjacent property owners have been addressed, however the protest has not been withdrawn. If the protest is not removed, the zone change request will require approval by a super majority of 3/4 of the council, — six of the eight council members must vote to approve the zone change request.

The zone change ordinance (O05-07) was approved by the Laurel City Council on first reading at the council's Sept. 6 meeting. Another public hearing on the request will be held Oct. 4, and the council could take final action on the zoning change at its Oct. 18 meeting.