

Finger Lakes Campus Opens Its Doors

Hillside's new Finger Lakes Campus took center stage and officially opened its doors for inspection on October 17. More than 200 guests attended the Open House, including Assemblyman Daniel Fessenden and his wife, Marnie; Betty Graney, former county legislator from District 17; Robert Hunter, former county legislator, District 18; and Ruth Sholes, chairperson of Hillside's Ad Hoc Committee and a county legislator from District Six.

"It was particularly rewarding to welcome the members of the original Cayuga County Legislative Committee who helped make the center a reality after eight years," said Clyde Comstock, Hillside vice president for Residential Treatment Facility.

Open house activities included staff-guided tours and a photographic display of the facility throughout construction.

Located at 7432 County House Road in Auburn, the 48,000-square-foot building has been operational since September 1. Designed by Auburn architect Beardsley, Beardsley, Cowden & Glass, the building has four living units, staff offices, a kitchen, and


school — all under one roof. With its flexible hall dividers, living units can be made larger or smaller depending on the needs of the population.

"We are delighted to have had so many people view our new facility," said Linda Mappes, Residential Treatment Facility director at the Finger Lakes Campus. "A lot of hard work, determination, and talent help to make this project a reality."

A residential treatment facility, the Finger Lakes Campus was designed to meet the needs of severely emotionally disturbed children and adolescents. Its Intensive Treatment Unit/Cayuga Wing is the only one of its kind in New York State.

One hundred and twenty Hillside and Finger Lakes staff members will provide children with medical treatment, psychiatric and psychological services, recreation therapy and special education services.

Once fully staffed, the facility will have 135 employees.

The Finger Lakes Campus is funded through the New York State Office of Mental Health and the State Education Department. 



Great Expectations: The completion of Hillside's new Finger Lakes Campus gave more than 200 guests a reason to celebrate. Pictured in alphabetical order: Anne Athy, Hillside Board Member; Clyde Comstock, Hillside vice president for Residential Treatment Facility; Betty Graney, co-chair, Hillside's Ad Hoc Committee; Robert Hunter, committee member; Linda Mappes, Finger Lakes director; and Ruth Sholes, chairperson, Hillside's Ad Hoc Committee. (Missing from photo: William Foster, former councilman and Earl Lamphere, county legislator, who are members of Hillside's Ad Hoc Committee.)



The Hillside Children's Center is a private non-profit facility overseen by state Department of Mental Health.

David Tobin/The Cit

Hillside Children's Center offers youths unique care

New facility heads toward mid-August opening

David Tobin
The Citizen

SENNETT — If any institution can begin to replace an adolescent's need for a safe, stable, loving home, it might be the new Hillside Children's Center.

With its small, 1:4 staff ratio, its campus-like setting, gymnasium, and courtyards between living units, Hillside represents the latest in a long evolution of psychiatric care for youth.

When it opens in mid-August, the self-contained residential center for girls and boys, set on 28 acres off County House Road, will

house 10 severely emotionally disturbed youth, 40 when it is fully operational a few months later.

While Hillside, like other youth centers in the area, will handle adolescents, age 10 to 18, it will be different from other youth centers, said Director Linda Mappes.

A Division for Youth facility, also in Sennett, handles teenage boys who have committed crimes and been referred by the court system. The Cayuga Home, in Auburn, handles teenagers who have been referred by county social service departments. Children there attend public school.

Hillside, a private non-profit

center overseen by the state Department of Mental Health, will have a full-time psychiatrist, a full-time nursing staff and its own school, with seven teachers and a full-time principal. With maintenance and kitchen staff, it will employ 135.

"The field is moving toward treatment in less hospital-like settings," Mappes said.

But, she acknowledged, "It's hard to think about young children warranting that kind of intense treatment."

And yet, there are. Children with thought disorders, unable to interpret reality correctly; kids



David Tobin/The Cit

Linda Mappes is the center's director.

who hear things, with distorted perspectives; kids who are depressed, with mood disorders; some with impulse control disorders, who can't sit still, can't concentrate, can't focus.

"Some have had some pretty awful things happen to them," Mappes said.

About 80 percent of teens coming to the \$5.4 million Hillside

PLANNING HILLSIDE

Hillside heads toward August opening

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facility will have been sexually abused. Their average stay will be 15 months. About half will come from other psychiatric in-patient facilities. Some, who have made no progress at other treatment centers, will be coming to Hillside's intensive treatment unit, where the staff ratio is 1:2.5, and they will be instructed in anger management and basic social skills.

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MAPPES, WHO GREW up in Weedsport and commutes from Canastota, worked 10 years for the state Office of Mental Health before being hired by Hillside last year.

In taking over, she's sifted through nearly 500 job applications and helped coordinate final phases,

"Kids here tend to be victims rather than exploiters, followers rather than leaders."

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furnishing the building.

The 48,000-square-foot building has four distinct living units, with flexible hall dividers to make units larger or smaller as needed. Nearly all residents will have single rooms.

"With most kids having a history of sex abuse, privacy is a big issue," Mappes said.

The taxpayer cost for such a state-of-the-art facility is about \$214 a day, paid through state and federal Medicaid. That's less than half the cost of a stay at Hutchings Psychiatric Center in Syracuse, Mappes said.

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IT TOOK HILLSIDE administrators in Rochester seven years to make the idea of a Finger Lakes campus reality.

Progress was bogged down by the need to purchase land from Cayuga County, by claims that the site was an Indian burial ground, by the need for extensive environmental impact statements. At times, it seemed the facility would never materialize.

But it has, and, despite the cinder block bedroom walls and long hallways, the \$5.4 million building,

designed locally by Beardsley, Beardsley, Cowden and Glass, doesn't feel oppressively institutional. Living wings are bright with window light.

Security concerns should not be an issue, Mappes said.

"The population tends to be more inward, so you don't get a lot of dramatic acting out behavior; there's not a lot of breaking and entering," she said.

"Kids here tend to be victims rather than exploiters, followers rather than leaders."

But if there is a breach of the 24-hour electronic security system, the sheriff's department, directly across the road, will be notified, Mappes said.

"After the first year, neighbors will probably forget we're here."