

By Amy L. Knapp

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## Purchase of Massillon State Hospital property OK'd

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CommQuest on Friday presented the state with a \$150,000 payment, and the state handed over the deed from the governor for the property and buildings.

A purchase agreement for the property, in the 1600 block of Nave Road SE, has been in place since November. The purchase includes a 7.9 acre site on which the two buildings sit and some green space. Quest Recovery and Prevention Services, which merged with Community Services of Stark County to form CommQuest during the summer, has been leasing the property from the state for \$1 per year since the early 2000s.

Wilson Hall provides housing for men undergoing substance-abuse treatment. It has 24 treatment beds and 14 additional beds for transition or short-term stays.

Regional Center for Opiate Recovery — formerly the Smith House — contains 16 beds and accommodates males and females undergoing treatment for opiate addiction from an eight-county region — including Stark, Wayne and Tuscarawas counties.

ReCOR also provides outpatient treatment and a driver intervention program for first-time DUI offenders in lieu of jail.

Keith Hochadel, president and CEO of CommQuest, said Wilson House is typically 95 percent full, and that ReCOR likely will exceed projections for its first year of operation.

### LONG TIME COMING

About seven years ago, officials began talks with the state to find a way to purchase the buildings.

“A couple of times we thought we had a deal,” Hochadel said.

But when the Ohio Department of Drug and Alcohol Addiction Services merged with the state Mental Health department, the sale took a back seat.

“It kind of got lost in the shuffle,” he said.

Conversations with the state picked up again about a year and half ago.

The state offered to sell the property for \$750,000, but officials believed the asking price was too steep.

When land near the property sold for \$2,500 an acre, Hochadel said CommQuest had the property reappraised. The land was appraised at \$135,000.

The state, however, countered offered with \$180,000 price. The parties settled in the middle at \$150,000.

Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Stark County contributed \$50,000 to the cost and CommQuest provided the remaining \$100,000, Hochadel said.

James Conley, a CommQuest board member, said the transfer of the property to CommQuest is a longtime coming.

“We were anxious to get the deal done as soon as possible,” he said. “We have some significant plans and, in order to do that, we are going to need some big time money from foundations and such, and we were reluctant to go ask for money for a building that belonged to the state. Now that we own the buildings, we hope we can get some grant money.”

### BIG PLANS

Conley said the vision of a few people has grown into something that is a value to the community.

Judge Edward Elum and state Rep. Kirk Schuring (R-Canton) were instrumental in helping to bring the project to fruition, he said.

Elum, Conley said, has been a champion of the former state hospital property and saw the potential for development.

Schuring, he said, helped break through the bureaucratic maze and eventually seal the deal.

Schuring said his involvement started in 1993 when a group of Stark County officials sought a facility for alcohol and drug addition services and, once it was in place, give them ownership of the facilities.

The journey, he said, has been arduous.

“We thought something was going to happen quickly, but for whatever reason it has taken a lot longer, but finally, we are at that point now,” Schuring said.

“The deed has been transferred and now CommQuest own the property.”

“It means these valuable services — taking those who are addicted or having problems assimilating into society now have a permanent place to go to get them into the recovery mode and in a position to become self-sustaining members of our society.”

CommQuest has big plans for the facilities, including renovation of the third floor of Wilson.

“We are ready to seek bids for expansion of the third floor with additional treatment beds,” Hochadel said.

Longterm plans include converting the kitchen in Wilson to recovery cafe that would give those who may or may not be ready to go to recovery a place to seek refuge and hold conversations with clients in recovery.

Plans also call for developing the facilities into a training and education campus to teach people about drug and alcohol addiction, and mental health treatment and recovery.

CommQuest, he said, will reach about 12,000 clients this year.

The nonprofit organization receives funding from a number of sources, including federal and state Community Block Grants, third-party insurance and from clients.

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