

A Fresh View of Amherst Street

New Medical Offices Settle Down in a Former Supermarket

By Stephanie M. Mangino

The Winchester Star

A former supermarket is taking on new life as a medically-focused office building.

For years, the former Superfresh grocery store (and before that, A&P) sat empty at 525 Amherst St.

Occasionally, an event occurred on its site, but most often, it was an object people looked at and wondered about when it would be used again.



Ophthalmic surgeon Dr. Frank H. "Hank" Reuling Jr. takes a look at the eyes of ophthalmic technician Barbara Boudinot. He is a founder of the Winchester Eye Surgery Center, which expects to open at 525 Amherst St. by year's end.
(Photo by Jeff Taylor)

Now it has a new exterior — designed by Main Street Architects of Berryville — and owner Thomas J. Scully Jr. of Winchester Capital Group said he's happy with the medical uses setting up shop in the structure that his family built decades ago.

Three entities will make their homes at 525 Amherst St.— the new Winchester Eye Surgery Center LLC, Valley Home Care, and a center for cancer wellness. Six thousand square feet of the approximately 20,000-square-foot building still needs to be rented out, according to Stan Corneal, agent for the building's leasing company, Adams-Nelson & Associates Inc.

Scully said his family's company will retain ownership of the building — assessed at \$888,400 according to Winchester tax records — and continue to rent space rather than offer up condo-like suites for outright purchase.

Valley Home Care hopes to be the first of the groups up and running with a target opening date of June 1, said its director, Angie Fishel.

Valley Home Care is part of Valley Health, which is also the umbrella organization for the cancer wellness center.

Valley Health Vice President Lawrence K. Van Hoose said the Winchester Medical Center Foundation has provided the cancer wellness center with \$200,000 to help with startup.

Valley Home Care, currently located at 333 W. Cork St., sells home medical equipment and supplies like hospital beds, oxygen tanks, wheelchairs, diabetic supplies and even uniforms, Fishel said.

If a piece of equipment is needed, “We either have it or have access to it,” she added.

The building was appealing for several reasons, said Valley Home Care Director of Customer Relations and Marketing Mike Wade. It is easily accessible from the parking lot, and it is in an part of town that doesn’t have the kind of heavy traffic seen on major routes such as South Pleasant Valley Road.

Many older patients do not like driving through congested areas, Fishel said.

The new space is about 1,000 square feet bigger than the organization’s current home, and the larger space will allow for the expansion of certain wellness product lines, she said.

Additionally, Valley Home Care directed the design of their new suite, which will include displays like a mock bathroom that shows how safety products such as tub rails would work for the consumer. “Our staff is extremely excited about the move,” she said. “It can’t come soon enough.”

That staff will also work right alongside those with the center for cancer wellness, which does not have a set opening date, but will appear later than Valley Home Care, according to Ellen Yoder, R.N., executive director of oncology services for Winchester Medical Center.

While the wellness/image recovery center is separate in name from Valley Home Care, the transition between their two spaces will be seamless, Yoder said.

The image recovery center will carry skin care products; include the services of a beautician who can help style wigs for those who need them; serve as the home for



This building at 525 Amherst St. will soon house three medically-related outfits — Winchester Eye Surgery Center, Valley Home Care, and a cancer wellness center. Valley Home Care expects to be the first to take up residence by June 1. (Photo by Ginger Perry)

cancer support groups; and feature Internet access for family, patients, and loved ones looking to learn more about cancer and treatment, she said.

Most of the services are available now in the community, but they are separate — some in private hands, others handled by the American Cancer Society or Winchester Medical Center, she said. “We want to coordinate these services for the patients in one place that is easily accessible,” she said.

The equipment and items available through Valley Home Care will also be easily accessible by patients and families, she said.

Neither Valley Home Care nor the cancer wellness center revealed the costs associated with designing their new suites.

The third group, Winchester Eye Surgery Center LLC, hopes to start treating patients in its operating room in December, said ophthalmologist Frank H. “Hank” Reuling Jr., who owns 51 percent of the new business. The other major partners in the venture are fellow ophthalmologists John Stefano and Nancy Eisele, who each own 20 percent.



From left, eye surgeons Nancy B. Eisele, John Stefano, and Frank H. “Hank” Reuling Jr. The three are the major partners in the Winchester Eye Surgery Center.
(Photo by Jeff Taylor)

While the center will provide a surgery venue for the eye surgeons in each doctor’s respective practices, it will also be open to other eye surgeons in the area, Stefano said.

The design, construction, and outfitting of the center’s 4,700 square feet of space is expected to cost about \$1.87 million, according to the certificate of public need application for the operating room filed with the state.

The state approved the room over the objections of Valley Health officials. Currently, most eye surgeries are handled at the Surgi-Center of Winchester at Winchester Medical Center.

Reuling said he feels their prices will be lower than those currently charged at the Surgi-Center, and has no worries about services being duplicated between the two centers.

Valley Health’s Van Hoose said the health care system will be able to schedule other procedures at the Surgi-Center fairly quickly once the eye surgeons stop using the facility.

Van Hoose said the hospital even plans to apply for a certificate of public need for a sixth operating room at the center and hope to hear about the application's outcome by July.

So, the eye center will just be a new competitor. "It's friendly competition," Van Hoose said.

The eye surgery center will provide ophthalmologists with a greater ability to schedule surgery times well, said the three main partners.

Also, such an ambulatory center is just a good idea, Reuling said. "It's faster, safer; more convenient."

Having a center dedicated to eye surgeries will also allow for the use of the latest technology in the field, Stefano added.

According to Stefano and Reuling, cataract surgery will form 99 percent of the procedures. Also, 85 percent of the patients will use Medicare, Stefano said.

Three percent of the group's gross income will also be dedicated to providing charity care, Reuling said.

The center is the realization of a dream for the doctors, all of whom had talked about creating such a center for years.

"It's been something we've always wanted, but never thought we could achieve," Reuling said.

With the help of Jesse Chamberlain, President of Oak Hill-based Artisan Medical, a group that has established similar centers in Maryland, the group came together to create a Winchester center.

And now, it's just about waiting and construction. The state must approve the design plans before the project moves ahead, Reuling said. Still, excitement remains high as the group anticipates a year-end opening. Reuling said he "can't wait to get it going."