

# Durand gets big boost with new senior housing, credit union construction projects

by Linda Angelo | The Flint Journal

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The former Lucas Junior High School in Durand is being renovated into the new 75,000-square-foot Sycamore House senior citizen housing center that includes a 15,000-square-foot addition.

**DURAND, Michigan** -- Senior citizens will walk the hallways once roamed by students after the former Lucas Junior High School is transformed into senior housing.

That project, along with the construction of a new headquarters for SAGELink Credit Union, will invest nearly \$12 million into this small town known for its railroad.

"I think it's great for our little town," Durand resident Theo Shelp said.

Shelp, 82, can't wait until the September opening of the Sycamore House, which will feature 40 units of senior housing. Shelp already is on a waiting list.

"I can walk to the store and to the post office where I have to drive now," said Shelp, who has spent the past 12 years living at the Country Village apartments in Durand.

Shelp, who now drives to an Owosso branch to bank, also is happy about SAGELink choosing downtown Durand for its headquarters.

But what's the draw to Durand, a city with a population of 3,846?

Justin Horvath, president of the Shiawassee Economic Development Partnership, says there are two key factors: Durand's location and the aggressive, pro-business attitude of city leaders.

"Durand is right on I-69, which I believe is Shiawassee County's biggest economic asset," he said. "If you don't have good transportation and access to your community, it's very difficult to get businesses and people to come.

"Businesses want to be wanted ... and Durand really rolled out the red carpet to help both of these projects."

Construction is in full swing at both project sites, which are separated by only a block.

Workers at the Sycamore House project this week finished installing 133 windows at the former three-story school, which closed in 1996 and is on the National Register of Historical Places.

The Woda Group, an Ohio company handling the project, is attempting to restore as much of the 1920 building as possible to maintain its historical character.

The original wooden classroom doors, for example, will be restored and the classroom numbers kept in tact. Those doors will open into one-, two- or three-bedroom units or two bedrooms with a den.

The rooms will offer a great view of the downtown neighborhood through 8-foot by 10-foot pane glass windows. Most of the units average 800 square feet with the largest at 1,160 square feet.

If seniors don't feel like traveling into town to get their hair done, a beauty salon will be on site.

The gym, meanwhile, will be converted into a community room where residents can play games or visit a library.

The 75,000-square-foot Sycamore House includes a new 15,000-square-foot addition. Twenty-five units are located in the old school and 15 in the addition.

"We're trying to salvage as much of the old wood and lumber as we can," said Ralph Reckner, assistant director of field operations at The Woda Group.

City Manager/Clerk Amy Roddy said Sycamore House will be an asset to the community.

"There will be more housing available for the needs of this community," she said.

A block away, meanwhile, construction workers Wednesday hammered shingles on the roof of the new SAGELink headquarters building. It's located downtown on North Saginaw Street where a Methodist church was demolished a few years ago.

"We were looking for a central location," said Mark Day, SAGELink president. " We have offices in Corunna and Owosso and three offices in the western part of Genesee County... . Durand is a nice community."

SAGELink's headquarters currently are located in Flint.

The design of the new 21,000-square-foot headquarters is modeled after the Durand Union Station. Complete Building in Columbiaville is the contractor for the project.

The credit union is expected to open June 22, weather permitting, and hold its grand opening July 1.

Horvath said he expects both projects with help bring future business growth.

"We want more of these projects to come to this area and by demonstrating The Woda Group is making an investment in the Sycamore House and SAGELink in a headquarters downtown, that tells other businesses and developers we need to look at that community and Shiawassee County," he said.

"Over the next five or 10 years I expect to see more investment in Durand. This is huge but I think more is coming down the road."



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