

There's One Color to this Rainbow: Green House will be home to six women with disabilities

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Marilyn Yeager, a spunky 81, and some of her best friends have lived together as a family in a split-level house near Creve Coeur for 20 years.

They're a group of six older women, ages 53 to 81, with developmental disabilities.

"We're like sisters," said Yeager.

Soon, this group will move into a new house on Dautel Lane between Creve Coeur and Maryland Heights. The house is a project of Rainbow Village, which provides housing for people with developmental disabilities. The house will be the first thoroughly "green" house built by a nonprofit agency in the St. Louis area, said Alan Broddon, a board member and the project manager.

Some of the environmentally friendly features include automatic on-off faucets, energy-efficient fluorescent lighting, skylights, high-efficiency heat pumps and no vinyl or petrochemical products.

Broddon said the lower use of energy and the new technology would make the house more affordable.

"It will not only provide excellent housing for six people but it will provide housing that will be environmentally friendly and economically practical," Broddon said.

Matt Belcher, president of the Home Builders Association of St. Louis and Eastern Missouri, also heads that organization's Green Building Council. Belcher said Rainbow Village followed the National Green Building Guidelines.

To accommodate people in wheelchairs, the new house is on one floor and has wider doorways and halls, a roll-in shower and accessible bathroom fixtures, kitchen appliances, counters, cabinets and a sink.

The women have had their first peeks at the new house, which is under construction, and each selected a bedroom.

"I like my bedroom," said Suzanne Peterson, 64. "I like everything about it."

Yeager liked that there would be no carpets, which can be a hazard when a person walks, and that she won't have to climb up into the bathtub.

The women attended a ceremony with friends of Rainbow Village, state legislators, a representative of the Missouri Department of Mental Health and St. Louis County Executive Charlie Dooley.

Rainbow Village opened its first group homes in 1978 and today has 45 homes that serve 225 residents with developmental disabilities in St. Louis and St. Charles counties. The organization started when several families wanted to make sure their children with developmental disabilities could live in safe, secure homes and be assured of a "home for life," said Nancy Tice, board president.

Several service agencies - St. Louis Arc, Life Skills, Emmaus Homes, Open Options, United Cerebral Palsy and Cooperative Home Care - provide staff members or services to help residents, said Janet Wright, director of development and community relations.

Yeager and Petersen have lived together in two homes since 1979. They are excited to bring their shared pet cat, Tuxedo, and parakeet, Pretty Boy, to the new home.

"I hope Tuxedo will like it," Yeager said. She added that she was pretty sure he would.