

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

# Ribbon cut on project for special needs, seniors

**BY CATHERINE CARRERA**  
 Staff Writer

**MAHWAH** - A \$3.5 million affordable housing project in the township began last week with a demolition team on site to raze a home at 92-98 Ramapo Valley Road.

The property was donated to the township by Linda Webster-Cennerazzo and her father, George Webster, on behalf of his wife, Judith, who died at age 72 in December 2011.

Judith, a longtime township resident and volunteer, left the 1.5 acres to her daughter, Linda, who decided along with her father to donate it provided it be used for special needs and senior housing.

That concept has only begun to take physical shape.

A demolition team was at the site on April 25 as officials formally marked the project's groundbreaking. Bergen United Way President Thomas Toronto, Bergen County Freeholder Maura DeNicola of Franklin Lakes, Mayor William Laforet, Madeline Corp. Executive Director Shari DePalma and Webster-Cennerazzo attended the ceremony to speak about the project.

Last summer the township was required by the state to submit a plan about how it would use the \$1.2 million in its Municipal Housing Trust Fund to provide affordable housing. Otherwise, the state threatened to seize the funds.

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The timely donation by the Webster family enabled township officials to team up with Bergen United Way to draw up a plan for special needs and senior housing, which is being undertaken in conjunction with Madeline Corp., a nonprofit affordable housing developer.

In addition to the municipality's contribution, Toronto said, funding is being provided through investments by the county, state and Bergen United Way.

According to DeNicola, the county division of community

development is in the process of applying for a \$600,000 grant to aid the effort.

"This couldn't happen without all the team players we have involved now, from the local level to the state," Laforet said.

The plan for the affordable housing structures – one for special needs and one for seniors – on one parcel of land "is quite unique to Bergen County," Toronto said.

The plans call for 22 special needs units and 12 senior units in the two structures.

The plans are expected to be presented to the township Planning Board for approval soon, DePalma said.

Construction likely would not begin for several months after approval, and the buildings would probably not be completed for another year, she said.

According to Laforet, the project will be called "Frankie's Home," which he said everyone involved has approved.

"Frankie was the first person who came to my mind when we began the conceptual phase of the special needs housing project," Laforet said. "He was a young man with special needs who went through our school system. He was a staple in the community."

Although Frankie no longer lives in the township, "his name and his significance was so great to our community full circle to the project," Laforet said.

A plaque dedicated to Judith Webster and a special ceremony will be held once the project is completed, he said.

Webster was unable to attend the ceremony.

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From left, Bergen United Way president Thomas Toronto, Bergen County Freeholder Maura DeNicola, Mahwah Mayor William Laforet, Linda Webster-Cennerazzo and Madeline Corp. executive director Shari DePalma.