
IN THE NEWS Transformation of UAW property underway; will house Tender Touch Therapy

Story by Heather Poyner, Kenosha News

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The Kenosha United Auto Workers union hall that once hosted Mardi Gras soiree fundraisers, pizza bake-offs and appearances by national politicians, will soon serve families of children with special needs throughout the Kenosha area.

This fall, Tender Touch Therapy signed a long-term lease to occupy the former UAW hall at 3615 Washington Road. Remodeling and construction work is well underway to transform the 18,000-square foot building, according to S.R. Mills, president and CEO of Bear Real Estate Group.



UAW Local 72 sold the 11-acre property in July 2019 to Bear Development for \$1 million. When it opened in 1961, the building was the largest union hall in Wisconsin.

Tender Touch owner Linda Niemela is thrilled about the prospect of having so much space.

"We have been outgrown in our current space for the past five years," she said. "Finding a new space has been a really long search for us."

Tender Touch Therapy moved to its present location at 5219 88th Ave. in the Town of Somers in 2006. The clinic provides rehabilitation and medical support services, including occupational and speech therapy for children with developmental, cognitive and medical needs.

Tender Touch Therapy's other business entity is Medical Support Services, which provides outreach and education on special needs issues and sponsors community events.

Kenosha is the company's headquarters. It also has clinics in Oak Creek and Mount Pleasant and has about 90 employees companywide.

Tender Touch Therapy staff hopes to move into its new quarters by May of next year. For Niemela that's not a moment too soon.



"In Kenosha we see some 100 patients a day," Niemela said. "We started realizing we were outgrowing our space when we hit 60 families. I don't even have my own office space in Kenosha anymore."

Transformation of the old union hall into office and therapy space is being undertaken by Kenosha-based Partners in Design Architects and construction done by Construction Management Associates, which is also Kenosha based.

"We will be able to offer services we couldn't before and are very excited to offer a whole new line of services," Niemela said.

Regarding the re-use of the union building, Mills said, "It's a perfect use of the building. It's not often you get to breathe life into an old building."

Union Court

Also under way is the construction of Union Court Townhomes and Senior Living apartments, on about half of the UAW property and also adjacent land.

Located at 3631 40th St., the development includes a residential subdivision of 111 units: 80 for seniors and 31 town homes designed for family occupancy, Mills said.

Construction began in May of this year. Occupancy of the first town homes will begin in January with all town homes completed by April. The senior homes will be ready by July. The property will be managed by Bear Real Estate Group.