



**HOME SWEET HOME:** While work crews put the finishing touches on the exterior of the building (above), bedrooms at the Whisper Woods assisted living facility in Smithtown have been staged for display to prospective residents.

-David Ambro photos



## Something to shout about at Whisper Woods

By DAVID AMBRO

The stage is set.

A variety of the rooms at Whisper Woods at Smithtown, a 110-unit assisted living facility under construction at 71 St. Johnland Road (Route 25A) have been completed and are available for walk throughs by potential residents and their families.

Whisper Woods, the first New York property of Benchmark Senior Living, of Waltham, Massachusetts, opened its model rooms December 8 and the facility's Executive Director Desiree Krajnyak-Baker and her staff hosted open house events this past weekend and Tuesday, February 13.

For additional information visit the site office or for an appointment call 631-320-5496 or 631-320-3181. The office at the facility is staffed seven days a week for room tours.

"This is a first sneak peek at the models and we have staged some of the rooms," Ms. Krajnyak-Baker said during a tour of the facility Friday, December 9.

She disclosed that people have varied preferences about where to be located in the facility. "One man wants to be located right next to the laundry room because he wants to be able to do his laundry every day. One person wants to be near the elevator

so they can be near the activity, and one person wants to be located near the wine bar," Ms. Krajnyak-Baker said with a laugh. "Everybody has their own unique thing that is important to them."

According to Ms. Krajnyak-Baker Whisper Woods has already received deposits for 36 of the units. "Which is fabulous, we have a third of the residents and we just opened yesterday, and our residents are starting to pick out their rooms in the community."

While the models are open for inspection, the three-story Whisper Woods building is still under construction, E.W. Howell Construction Group of Plainview acting as the general contractor. "They have been fabulous to work with," Ms. Krajnyak-Baker said about Howell.

Ms. Krajnyak-Baker said when the construction is completed there will be a licensing process with the New York State Department of Health. She expects occupancy to begin in June.

One of the staged area's is on the ground floor in the 17-unit Harbor Room section for memory impaired residents. A studio unit and a two-bedroom companion unit have been staged in this area, which is independent of the rest of the building. The biggest difference in the Harbor area is that

(Continued on page 11)

# Media relations policy imposed

## Town Board now requires all contact to go through new information officer

By DAVID AMBRO

The Smithtown Town Board voted unanimously February 6 to approve a media relations policy that sets new guidelines for interaction between the town and the news media.

***"As general policy, all media or press contacts and/or requests to the town, for any reason whatsoever, shall be referred to the Smithtown Public Information Officer,"*** says the lone sentence of bold type in the three-page media relations policy approved by the town board last week.

The public information officer is Nicole Garguilo, the campaign manager last year for Supervisor Edward Wehrheim. She was hired January 3 to the \$75,000-a-year position of public information officer by a unanimous vote of the Smithtown Town Board.

There was no public disclosure or dialogue about the new media policy prior to its enactment last week and town department directors were not provided with copies in advance of the town board vote. During an interview Monday, February 12, Ms. Garguilo said department heads were provided with a copy of the policy Friday, February 9.

Ms. Garguilo subsequently discussed the policy with Department of Environment and Waterways (DEW) Director Russell Barnett, president of the Smithtown Administrators Guild (SAG), the union that represents town department directors and deputy directors. Ms. Garguilo said it appears there is some confusion among department heads about the intent of the policy and how it should be implemented.

Ms. Garguilo said she has assured Mr. Barnett and other department heads that rather than stifling dialogue with the media, the intent of the policy is to assist town officials to provide reporters with information they need for a story. She said the intent is also to facilitate comment from Supervisor Wehrheim relevant to the story the reporter is working on. Ms. Garguilo said she is going to send an email to Mr. Barnett addressing concerns about

the policy implementation. "It is meant to be a tool to get things done faster and nothing more," Ms. Garguilo said. "Department heads can still talk to the press. They just have to let me know so that I can get them any information they might need for the story."

Mr. Barnett said this week that he was meeting with Ms. Garguilo about something unrelated when she raised the media policy for discussion. Mr. Barnett said Ms. Garguilo told him she received a call from a SAG member who questioned the intention of the language in the policy. Both Mr. Barnett and Ms. Garguilo said there appears to be a question as to what it means that all media contacts shall be "referred" to Ms. Garguilo.

Mr. Barnett said Ms. Garguilo told him that the word "referred" might not be the right word and she just wants to be kept informed by department heads if they are contacted by the media.

Ms. Garguilo said the policy approved by the town board last week was drafted by Town Attorney Matthew Jakubowski. According to Ms. Garguilo, many surrounding municipalities have similar policies.

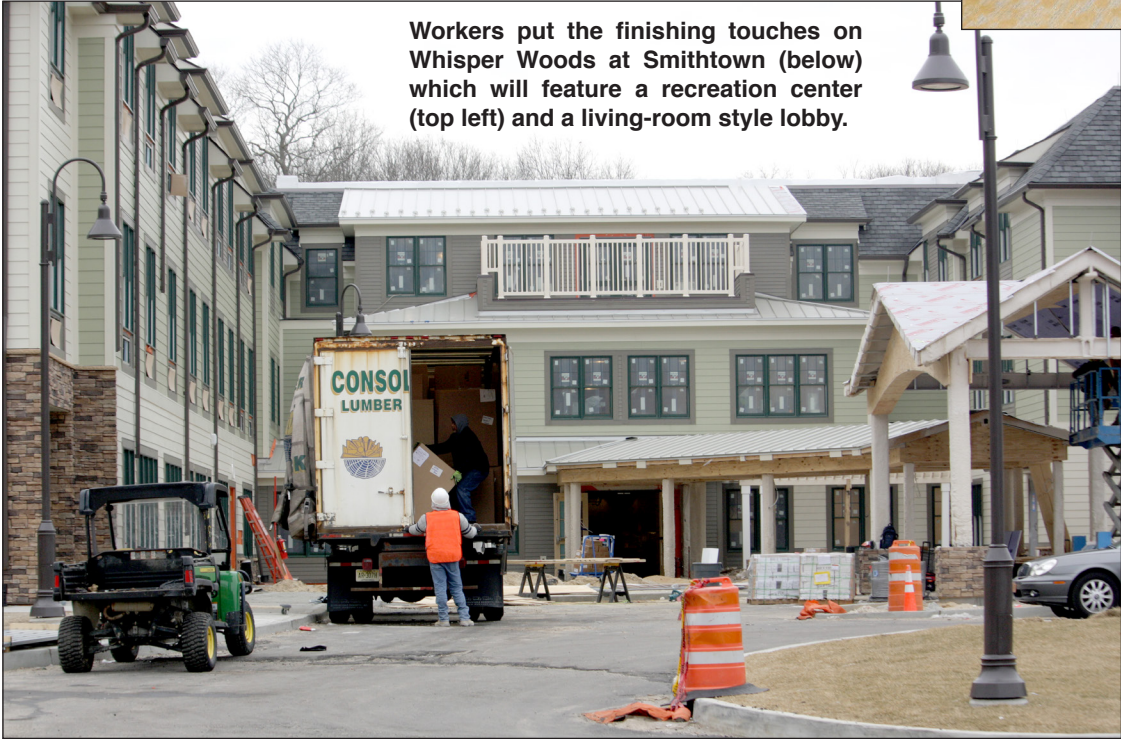
"We wanted to make sure there was a system to get the public and press the information they need in addition to FOIL [the Freedom of Information Law]," she said. "It is literally a standard policy that businesses would have or that surrounding municipalities would have."

Patrick Vecchio, who ended an historical 40-year tenure as supervisor December 31, never had a public relations staff. Mr. Vecchio generated stories himself by sending relevant documents to the media and he allowed department directors and employees to speak freely with the press or to decline to be interviewed.

Mr. Vecchio was also open to the press corps in his office after every town board meeting at which he would discuss impromptu any subject raised by reporters. Supervisor Wehrheim met with reporters after his first town board meeting as supervisor, January 3, and

(Continued on page 12)





Workers put the finishing touches on Whisper Woods at Smithtown (below) which will feature a recreation center (top left) and a living-room style lobby.

## Whisper Woods models ready for closer look

(Continued from page 3)  
the units have no kitchenettes but the Harbor area has its own group dining room.

The rooms are spacious and in the companion room there is a separate bathroom for each bedroom. Ms. Krajnyak-Baker said in the companion rooms a memory impaired resident can live with a non-memory impaired spouse.

On the second floor of the building several of the traditional units have been staged. They include a studio unit, a larger one-bedroom unit and a two bedroom unit.

Ms. Krajnyak-Baker said Whisper Woods will decorate the rooms for residents but that they are encouraged

to bring their personal belongings from home so that they will feel comfortable in their new surroundings.

“How I like to decorate is not how you like to decorate,” she said. “You get to make it your own and you set the standard for how you want to live.”

Ms. Krajnyak-Baker said that it is a difficult decision in someone’s life to downsize from a single-family home, so Whisper Woods tries to provide a spacious space for them to make that transition. Ms. Krajnyak-Baker said that prior to moving in, Whisper Woods staff will conduct home visits to assist residents with their move to the assisted living facility.



**Give Your Car An Extra  
Push To Get Through Winter**



**We Have State of the Art  
Computerized Wheel Alignment System**

### • 2 Wheel Alignment Service

**\$129<sup>95</sup> + Tax**

**\$74<sup>95</sup>\***

**\*Includes Most Vehicles Trucks & SUVs Extra**

### • Oil Change Service

**\$21<sup>95</sup>\***

**Most Vehicles**

**\*Includes up to 5 Quarts of Oil,  
Filter, Top Off of All Fluids,  
Tire Pressure & 24 point  
Courtesy Inspection**

### • FREE Transmission Check • Transmission Service

**Starting at  
\$69<sup>95</sup>\***

**\*Includes Most Vehicles  
Fluid & Filter Additional**

# Augie's Garage & Smithtown Transmissions

**Serving the Community with Quality, Honesty & Integrity  
for over 20 years**

**376 E. Jericho Turnpike • Smithtown  
(1 mile East of 111)**

## 631.265.6650