Mercy LIFE hosts grand opening at former Sacred Heart Hospital

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NORRISTOWN — It's been 24 years since Sacred Heart Hospital closed its doors, but Thursday marked the opening of a new chapter for the venerable, renovated building.

The grand opening for Mercy LIFE—Norristown celebrating the first Montgomery County Program for All-Inclusive Care (PACE) Adult Day Center included a dedication and blessing, open house, and facility tours, in addition to the seventh annual Mercy LIFE Devoted Caregiver Award presentation.
Mercy Health Care administrators have describe the new facility at 1430 DeKalb St., which began operations Oct. 1, as “a welcoming place for seniors 55 and over to receive medical, nutritional, social and spiritual services, while being transported safely to and from their own homes.”

With Mercy Health having formerly operated Mercy Suburban Hospital in East Norriton until 2015, when it was sold to Prime Healthcare Services and became Suburban Community Hospital, taking over the former Sacred Heart Hospital marks a homecoming of sorts for the health network that was founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1986.

“We really never wanted to leave the Norristown area and we wanted to get back there to serve that community,” Dan Drake, senior vice president of continuing care, Mercy Health System, said back in June.

On Thursday, Drake added, “Mercy LIFE—Norristown marks our first Adult Day Center in Montgomery County. Now, we are able to ensure Montgomery County seniors remain as independent as possible and have the best overall quality of life right in their own neighborhood.”

In addition to the grand opening ceremony, emceed by Telemundo 62 Breaking News Anchor and NBC 10 Morning News Anchor Lucy Bustamante, Mercy LIFE recognized the seventh edition of its annual Devoted Caregiver Award program. The award, established in 2012 to recognize an outstanding Mercy LIFE family caregiver, was presented to the Norristown Fire Department and the Norristown Police Department.

“Honoring the first responders who care for and protect all of us, but especially for the frail and elderly of Norristown, is a fitting way to commemorate the opening of our sixth Adult Day Center in Southeastern Pennsylvania,” said Drake. “We are moved by their service and look forward to emulating the care and compassion with which they serve the Norristown community.”

Norristown Fire Department Fire Chief Tom O’Donnell said the department was “humbled by this designation. We appreciate the opportunity to connect with a new community partner that aligns with our vision and values of caring for Norristown.”
Norristown Police Department Police Chief Mark Talbot added, “Part of our mission is to understand and serve the needs of the borough's neighborhoods. Mercy LIFE will enrich Norristown with their all-encompassing approach to senior care. We are honored to be chosen as one of their Devoted Caregivers.”

In an earlier interview, Drake explained that Mercy LIFE is part of Mercy Health’s Continuing Care system, which also includes Mercy Home Health, covering in-home visits in Montgomery, Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Philadelphia counties.

Established in 1998, Mercy LIFE is a nationally recognized program providing these services to older adults without co-payments.

“Not everybody in the Mercy LIFE program is elderly, but the concept is to serve the frail elderly in the community where they live instead of them going to a nursing home. There are a lot of people who lack these services, so we're really happy to be pretty much in the center of Norristown with this new center,” Drake said.

The nonprofit Mercy organization, which is part of Michigan-based Trinity Health, noted that it is investing $6 million into a program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) model of care for more than 3,000 Medicare and Medicaid eligible seniors in the region.

In addition to Medicare and Medicaid, there is also a private pay component, allowed Drake, who said that Mercy LIFE clients will benefit from immediate assistance from an on-site team without the typical waiting period for a medical appointment or prescription refill, or the costly co-pays that often accompany these services.

The facility, which will be similar to Mercy LIFE operations in Philadelphia, Elwyn and Sharon Hill, will offer primary care and physician specialist services; nursing care; rehabilitation therapy; dental, vision, hearing and foot care; medical equipment; home care; home-delivered meals; mental health and social work services; caregiver support; personal emergency response systems, plus transportation, recreational and social programs.
“We’ll have adult day services for medical management and for socialization Monday through Friday,” Drake said. “We’re pretty much a morning to 5 p.m. operation, so the great thing for Norristown is that we’re not clogging up the streets night and day, but then we provide home care for the participants. It’s a great thing for them and their families, who are used to taking mom and dad to a cardiologist one day, a general practitioner the next day. We have all our practitioners go to that location. So you could see your physicians, have lunch and then go home.”

Similar facilities elsewhere have shown to be an extremely effective model of care, Drake noted.

“Politicians on both sides support it because it saves money over people going to a nursing home, plus they’re getting quality care while staying in their homes, where they want to be. It’s the best of both worlds. You’re getting the medical management and socialization in one place, but at the end of the day you’re sleeping in your own home. Most of the people in our program have lived in their neighborhoods for 30-plus years. The other good thing,” Drake added, “is that we’re bringing a lot of opportunity to Montgomery County for jobs. In most of our centers employees live within 10 miles of the centers, and we’ve hired some people who live close to the Norristown center. So this will be a real positive thing for Montgomery County.”

For more information, visit www.mercylife.org.