

## **Meridian Women's Center Unveils Upgrade**



**Rachel Hoffman and Larry Moliterno welcome guests to the women's center.**

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*by Jeremy Lydic*

YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio -- For Dr. Rachel Hoffman, a sense of community is the best medicine when treating drug and alcohol abuse.

A Poland High School graduate with her undergraduate and master's degrees from Youngstown State University and a Ph.D. from Kent State University, Hoffman promotes such care as the director of adult residential treatment for Meridian Community Care's newly renovated Women's Center at 64 Ridge Ave. Since November 2009, Hoffman has helped women work through their addictions and reconnect with their community.

"I believe very much in the importance of a strong home base," Hoffman said. "We take a very individualized approach to addiction. What we don't want is to have a program that's one size fits all."

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Hoffman joined the center's staff in welcoming community members to an open house Thursday afternoon, where staff members gave guided tours of the renovated center. The two-floor center features common and dining areas as well as living space for 16 women. Children younger than 5 years old are permitted to stay with their mothers, and some rooms have cribs.

Because most drug and alcohol addictions tend to develop with mental health disorders, Hoffman promotes treating both at the same time. This allows the center to recommend a treatment program specific to a person's individual needs, she said.

"From a research standpoint, it's been shown that treating only one is not going to be effective for the client," Hoffman said.

Programs include individual and group counseling, education, recreational activities, 12-step meetings and quiet meditation. Incorporating the family is an important part of each program, and Meridian's family program is held two Saturdays each month, Hoffman said. The program helps support the family unit and allows the counselors to discuss with families topics that include addiction in the family, co-dependency, enabling and Al-Anon. This also helps raise awareness about addiction, she said. While there's still a negative stigma associated with drug and alcohol addiction, "I think we're moving past that a little bit," she said. And as more people understand the nature of addiction, the challenge then becomes prevention and working to "stem the tide," she said.

"Some families don't realize that a medicine cabinet can be a source of abuse in some households," Hoffman said.

In 2007, Meridian took ownership of the building, which was originally started by Youngstown Judge Joseph Donofrio some 45 years ago, said Meridian's vice president of marketing and development, Ellie Platt. Donofrio "was really seeing a lot of people coming through the courts with drug and alcohol problems," and he felt they would be better off getting help rather than going to jail, Platt said. The center gets referrals from the courts as well as hospitals and other women's services.

A \$10,000 grant received in January through the Ohio Department of Alcohol & Drug Addiction Services helped with the \$50,000 renovation completed a few months ago, Platt said. Residential clients live in rooms on both floors, which they are encouraged to decorate with their own belongings, she said.

"We really value the individual and their own sense of self," Platt said.

A children's play area is next to the group counseling area on the bottom floor, and Platt said another room is being converted into a library, for which the center is accepting book donations.

Residents are assigned to work therapy, which includes daily chores, cleaning, cooking and serving meals, Platt said. The duration of a woman's stay is usually limited to 90 days, after which the center can assist them with finding transportation, stable housing and child care. The women's center also offers outpatient and day treatment services, which allow the women to go back home at the end of the day, she said.

"We were finding that the cost of residency is so much higher," Platt said. "So now, we're trying to base services on our resident's individual needs."

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Day treatment clients attend programs from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and from 8 a.m. to noon on Friday, Platt said. While some attend evening meetings with the residents, they still must attend the day hours. More than 200 women have come through the program so far this year, yet the center is at capacity with "a long waiting list," she said.

"Addiction is becoming an epidemic here in our community," Platt said. "We really feel we can stem the tide."

The women's center employs one case manager and six counselors, most of whom have their master's degree, said Meridian Community Care's CEO, Larry Moliterno. Of Meridian's entire staff, 80% have their master's degrees, so "we're able to offer a continuum of care," including adolescents, Moliterno said. Being engaged with children staying with parents at the women's center is especially important, he said.

"If we can stop a child from doing drugs before the age of 15," Moliterno said, "I think we can make a difference."

Referrals can be made by calling the Meridian Assessment Department at 330-797-0070. For information about bed availability and client care at the women's center, referral sources can call the center directly at 330 259 4682.

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