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## The Green House, an Eldercare Revolution

*Editor's Note: Last summer we first featured information on Tupelo's Green House project in an article on elder care. This month, we are revisiting this revolutionary concept for long-term housing from an architectural and design viewpoint.*

BY CHIP MABRY

A revolution in eldercare design that has begun in 2002 is now spreading across the United States. This unique approach to delivering care is based upon the Eden Alternative of Dr. William Thomas. Mississippi Methodist Senior Services, Inc. (MMSS) and The McCarty Company of Tupelo have developed and delivered the first Green House project to be built in the United States. The Green House concept is intended to further de-institutionalize nursing home life and provide a "warm, green and smart" environment where elders can engage in meaningful life activities, thereby eliminating the plagues of "loneliness, helplessness and boredom."

The first phase of the 120-bed project included four homes designed to accommodate 10 elders each in private rooms with private bathrooms surrounding a large living area called "the Hearth," complete with fireplace, open kitchen with breakfast bar and a large family-style dining table sized to seat 12 persons. The relationship of the private rooms to the Hearth allows the elders to easily control their own level of social engagement by closing their own door for privacy or by opening their door to observe activities in the Hearth, or to join the group and engage in various activities. Each home has been designed to encourage participation in the activities of life such as menu planning, preparation of meals (or at least watching), setting the table and recreational activities. Phase I was delivered using the design/build method and completed in 2003. All of the homes meet regu-



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latory guidelines and fall within Mississippi Medicaid reimbursement levels.

"Dr. Thomas feels that the traditional system of caring for elders 'is broken and not working anymore.' MMSS has embraced this idea and joins Dr. Thomas in his search for a better way. We are here to help them realize that dream," says Richard McCarty, CEO of the McCarty Company. "Having worked in partnership with Mississippi Methodist Senior Services since 1983 to constantly improve the eldercare environment, we feel like we may be nearing the summit. With the guidance of Dr. Thomas and the unrelenting challenge by MMSS to 'get it right,' we have been able to assemble these new eldercare ingredients into a home for ten elders that meets the state's facility requirements, is affordable based on available reimbursements and still meets the criteria of Dr. Thomas's elder home that is 'warm, smart and green.'"

The Green Houses project at Traceway Phase I received the 2004 National Citation Award from the American Institute of

Architects (AIA) and the National Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA) and has been featured in workshops across the United States

Phase II has been completed and includes six t12 bedroom homes, also delivered using the design/build method. The 12 bedroom design includes expanded storage areas adjacent to the kitchen area and the patio feature is moved to the rear of the homes. The hearth area, family-style dining in each house and private rooms with baths are still central features of all of the home designs, including a new assisted living version being currently built in Raymond Miss., also by Mississippi Methodist Senior services.

The McCarty Company is providing services for other Green House projects across the country, as research from the first Green Houses reveals improvements for elders, family and staff members living and working in the Green Houses. These include Green House projects in Hawaii, Arizona, North Carolina, Alaska, Kansas, Pennsylvania and Texas.

Mississippi continues to lead the way in elder healthcare and living. MMSS and Dr. Thomas are striving to bring a better quality of living to elders in Mississippi and now across the country. The year 2006 promises state of the art healthcare for residents of all areas of the state.

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