

# Regional Services holds ribbon cutting for new location

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LEWISTOWN — On Jan. 14, the staff of Mifflin-Juniata Regional Services and affiliates gathered outside the organization's new Third Street location in downtown Lewistown to officially open services to the public.

Kathie Graham, executive director for Regional Services, addressed the group, which included investors, board members and county commissioners, about the organization's move from the F.W. Black building.

"This is an exciting day for all of us," Graham said to the crowd. "When I walked into this building last April, I had trouble envisioning what could be done here, but I had faith it could happen. Our new location is everything we hoped it would be."

The move was in response to a number of concerns documented in the most recent Community Needs Assessment, Graham said. Though the Area Agency on Aging had been working out of the F.W. Black building for almost 40 years, the public was unhappy with the location and level of visibility, she said.

"The search for a new place began almost three years ago with a number of financial assessments and staff discussions," Graham said. "The location we finally settled on, in downtown Lewistown, was chosen for a number of reasons, but most importantly, because it reaches the highest percentage of clients."

The staff was also uncomfortable with the level of security at the previous building, Graham said. Unfortunately, there was no economical way to make the old building secure because there were too many

entry points, she added.

"Our new location has only one door to come in and go out," Graham said. "We are also adding a door bell system in the lobby so people are buzzed in. That way there is no danger of unknown people wandering the halls."

Another point of concern was the lack of accessibility for handicapped individuals, Graham said. The F.W. Black building had a long set of stairs in front and a tiny ramp in the back that was difficult to navigate. The new building is one level with no need for stairs or a ramp, making every office completely handicap accessible, she said.

"The one-story design also makes it easier for food service employees to access supplies," Graham said. "Previously, all food storage was kept in the basement, but now, the kitchen is so large there is enough room for everything."

The agency is expecting to benefit financially from the move as well, said Dan Lynch, president of the Regional Services Corporation board of directors. Restoring the old building, rather than moving, would have cost the organization more than \$1 million, he said.

Over the years, Lynch added, if funds were continually set aside for upkeep and restoration of such an aging building, the agency would not be able to provide all the services and assistance it does now. The move will make the agency a much more solid organization in the future, he said.

The new building is also rented rather than owned, Graham said, meaning the agency is no longer responsible for maintenance costs. MJAAA is a private, non-profit corporation, majority funded with federal and state money, so saving every dollar counts, she added.

Together, Graham and Lynch cut the ceremonial ribbon and opened the doors at 249 W. Third St. on Jan. 14.

"This project was a major undertaking, but everyone stuck together and here we are today," Lynch said. "After all this hard work, we are now better prepared to serve the seniors of Mifflin and Juniata counties."

The new building offers a one-stop-shop for all Regional Service programs and affiliates, Graham said. People no longer have to go searching from building to

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Sentinel photo by BUFFIE BOYER

The Mifflin-Juniata Area Agency on Aging is now open for business at the new location on Third Street in Lewistown in the former R&S Food building.



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