



Iona Senior Services broke ground last week on its new Iona East adult day center in Congress Heights. Ward 7 Council member Vincent Gray and Ward 8 Council member Trayon White were among the dignitaries to attend the ceremony. (Photo by Diane Gross)

BUILT ENVIRONMENT NEWS

New Iona East day center to serve seniors east of the river, replicating successful Ward 3 program

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Under a Monday afternoon drizzle in Congress Heights, community advocates and politicians teamed up with a local nonprofit and a developer to break ground last week on Iona East, a new adult day center to serve District residents east of the Anacostia River as soon as early next year.

Iona East will provide social, health and therapeutic services to older adults with cognitive, physical and intellectual challenges who live in wards 7 and 8. It will replicate the model of care that Iona Senior Services has provided at its Wellness & Arts Center in Northwest DC for the past 33 years. Iona Senior Services – which originated as Iona House in 1975 – is listed by the DC Department of Aging and Community Living as the senior service network lead agency serving Ward 3 as well as Foggy Bottom.

“Right now, there is no such adult day center in Southeast DC. Things are about to change,” said Sally White, Iona’s executive director. “Soon Southeast DC residents with Alzheimer’s or other chronic conditions will have a place to go in their community” for socialization and health care, she said.

A variety of senior services – such as social activities, exercise and memory support groups – are currently available in the area under the auspices of the East River Family Strengthening Collaborative and at the city’s two senior wellness centers in wards 7 and 8. Such programs, however, often are not equipped to serve seniors as their health challenges mount.



A rendering on display at last week’s groundbreaking shows the new Iona East center that’s slated to open early next year at a Ward 8 office and retail center owned by WC Smith. (Photo by Diane Gross)

The new Iona East will open at the corner of Stanton Road and Alabama Avenue SE, a retail and office building owned by WC Smith near the St. Elizabeths East Campus and the new Entertainment and Sports Arena.

White described Iona East as a place where participants will be able to “get a nutritious lunch and keep their minds stimulated with fun, engaging and therapeutic activities, like art therapy, musical performances and field trips to places like THEARC, where they’ll make new friends

and once again feel part of a community.”

Of the more than 113,000 Washingtonians over the age of 60, at least 20,000 live east of the Anacostia. While the city continues to attract young professionals, the number of DC’s older residents has increased sizably in the last decade, in line with national patterns. And caregivers everywhere face the challenge of balancing senior care with other family and work responsibilities.

For some caregivers like Cathy Caldwell, who lives in Ward 8, accessing suitable resources for her husband Larry has meant long commutes to Iona’s Wellness & Arts Center at 4125 Albemarle St. NW in Tenleytown. Larry was unexpectedly diagnosed with Lewy body dementia and Parkinson’s disease three years ago.

Larry’s trips to Iona have “brought him a more independent lifestyle and he seems to be dealing with his health challenges a lot better,” Caldwell said during the groundbreaking event. When her husband comes home, he often talks about the musical performances and the group discussions; he particularly enjoys the art therapy.

“He is exercising more, and he has accepted his disease a lot better since he has been involved,” Caldwell said.

The opening of the new center in Congress Heights would bring these kinds of services much closer to home for Caldwell and others. “The Wellness & Arts Center coming to Ward 8 will benefit a lot of our residents,” she said, observing that the day services help not only the program participants, but also their caregivers who are freed to attend to other tasks – including their own well-being – when they’re confident in the care of their loved ones.

Once Iona East is operating, it will be able to serve up to 50 families each weekday.



"Soon Southeast DC residents with Alzheimer's or other chronic conditions will have a place to go in their community," Iona Senior Services executive director Sally White said at the June 10 groundbreaking for the new adult day center. (Photo by Diane Gross)

At the June 10 event, WC Smith chairman and CEO W. Christopher Smith recounted how the idea of bringing Iona's adult day health services east of the river was first brought to him several years ago. The nonprofit had hoped there might be room for the program at Ward 8's Town Hall Education Arts and Recreation Campus (better known as THEARC), a community cultural center his company had been instrumental in creating.

"Unfortunately, we just could not figure out how to accommodate Iona," Smith said. "But, in touring their site up at Tenley Circle, and hearing ... and seeing all the great things they do, we knew that it would be very important to have Iona serving the residents east of the river."

When a tenant at 3301 Stanton Road SE moved out, a workable location became available. WC Smith offered the 9,000-square-foot space, along with \$1 million to help the build-out, he said.

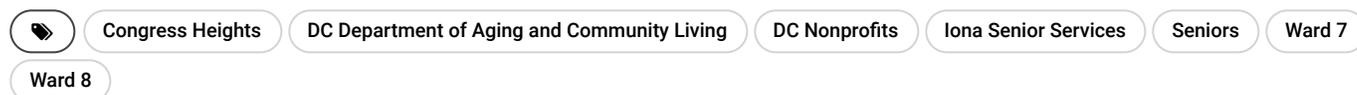
Now, White has turned her efforts toward raising funds to outfit the center's therapy, dining and office spaces once they are properly configured. She announced that a donor, the A. James & Alice B. Clark Foundation, has issued a challenge grant, pledging a dollar-for-dollar match if Iona can raise \$100,000 by Sept. 1.

The center will also draw funding from multiple other sources, including a new grant from the DC Department of Aging and Community Living and fee-for-service payments from Medicaid, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and private insurers.

Last week's groundbreaking drew community leaders such as DC Council members Vincent Gray (Ward 7) and Trayon White (Ward 8), local advisory neighborhood commissioners, and advocates from senior-focused organizations.

The Rev. Kendrick Curry, senior pastor of the Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church and the AARP state president for DC, closed the ceremony, conveying hope that Iona's services will help wards 7 and 8 "continue to be a vibrant, livable community and all of the people will be able to come and say, 'This is our family. These are our seniors, who we respect, we honor and we love.'"

This post has been updated to correct a photo caption and the list of services currently available in wards 7 and 8.



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