

## **Transforming a hospital into homes**

Villages of Staunton already has buyers

By Lauren Fulbright/staff

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**STAUNTON** — With more than a third of the upscale condominiums in the former Western State Hospital's Bindery building reserved or sold, developer Robin Miller says the project is right on track.

The bindery is the first of 10 large historic buildings that will be refurbished to form the Villages of Staunton, a housing development set across the hospital's 80-acre campus.

Of the 19 units in the building, two have been sold and about five have been reserved or placed under contingency contracts, Miller said.

The condominiums cost between \$300,000 and \$850,000 each. "I'm very pleased with where we are and think that 2008 will be an excellent year," he said.

At an open house on Sunday, Realtor Debbie Metz of Monroe Properties greeted visitors who came to tour the Bindery. "It's fun showing people because they're very surprised to see something like this in Staunton," she said.

Metz took Richard and Ernie Wood up into the building's cupola, now part of the penthouse apartment. "It would be hard to sit up here and have a bad day," Richard Wood said, while looking out at a panoramic view of the city.

Though the couple loves the property where they live in Greenville, Richard Wood said it requires a lot of maintenance in the summer. "I'm not as young as I used to be and I don't know that I want to keep doing that," he said.

In addition to the history of the building, Rick Harris and Karen Ford of Bridgewater said they like that the campus is close to amenities like restaurants, shops and live theater. The couple said they are thinking about moving after their daughter graduates from high school.

The next step will be to renovate four single-family houses on Greenville Avenue, which were originally the residences of top executives at the hospital, Miller said. Eventually five more houses will be constructed behind these homes, he said.

The company is also negotiating with members of the hotel industry to try and convert the main administration building into a hotel and spa, Miller said. "It's not a done deal yet and we haven't signed a contract, but we've had some very serious negotiations," he said.

In 2008, Miller said his company is planning to develop one of the buildings on the campus into 13 condominiums. Though the entire campus could take 15 to 20 years to finish, Miller said he is confident in the project. "The speed in which we move will be dependent on the market," he said. "I'm just convinced that Staunton is a destination community."

Once the hotel and spa are in place, the value will increase dramatically, Miller said. "By moving in now they have a greater potential for appreciation than if they wait five years," Miller said about the prospective buyers.

Buyers have to be willing to grow with the project, Ford said.

The developers have a good reputation, Harris said. "I think that we would be willing to take a risk on something like that," he said.