

# The Thompson's \$4 million renovation gets underway

**By Tess Hunter**

Managing Editor

The Thompson senior center in Woodstock will begin moving out of its facilities at 99 Senior Lane this week in the first step in a \$4 million overhaul of the building. According to executive director Deanna Jones, current programs and activities will continue during the renovation and be spread out between three facilities in town — The White Cottage, the Shir Shalom synagogue, and the Norman Williams Public Library.

The expansion of the center is expected to last into the fall of next year. The work will be done by Estes & Gallup, which is based in Lyme, N.H. When renovations are complete, the center will have 4,803 square feet of new space, including an expanded kitchen and dining room, additional community and activity space on the second floor, expanded office space for staff, and a new accessible bathroom on the second floor. Though the final end date for the renovation is expected to be September 2025, Jones says the organization hopes to be back to work in their newly updated kitchen on April 1, 2025.

## The fundraising effort

The project came to life thanks to a massive fundraising effort, which began in 2019. “We started actually, with a gift,”

Jones told the Standard this week. “The very first gift was in 2019 that allowed the planning and development, and even some of the work to begin. So we’ve been in what I guess they call ‘the quiet phase’ in fundraising and reaching out to really good friends and special donors to get us to the point where we’re at now, which is right about \$2.8 million.”

One of those special friends and donors is Woodstock’s Max Comins, who contributed \$500,000 just last week. “We are

thrilled to receive this generous grant from Mr. Comins,” Jones said in a statement last week. “We hope his support will inspire others to contribute to the important work we do at The Thompson. The building renovation funded by community support and this transformative gift is essential for continuing the high-quality services we provide to the older adults in our community.”

Comins is a longtime member of the Woodstock community. He owned and operated the Kedron Valley Inn in South Woodstock for many years and has been active with Pentangle Council on the Arts and other performing arts organizations as a financial supporter, theater producer, and actor. “I am humbled to be able to help those in the community that are in need of and treasure the work that The Thompson

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— executive director Deanna Jones

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does for them,” Comins said in the statement. “I have an extra connection with The Thompson since John Thompson Jr. was my head of maintenance at The Kedron Inn from five days after I bought the inn until I sold it 17 years later.”

Karen Rosene, president of The Thompson’s Board of Directors also said in the statement, “With this generous challenge gift from Max Comins, we invite the community to join us in this effort to expand our facilities to better serve our special community. We aim to raise an additional \$500,000 to match Max’s donation, which will help us achieve the goals of the campaign and support these critical improvements for services now and in the future.”

### Getting to work

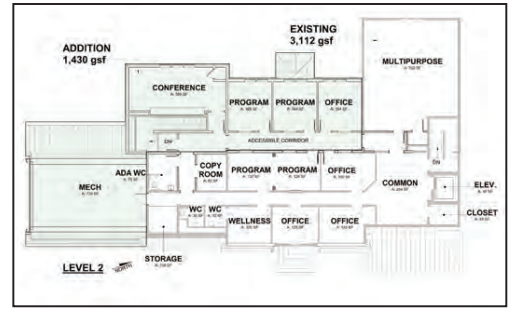
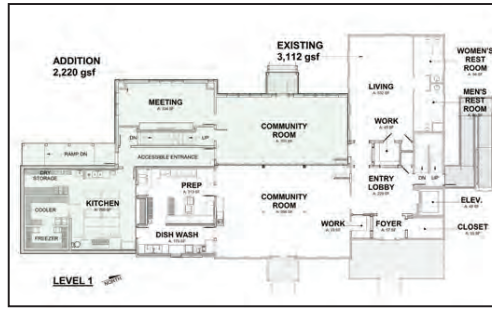
With packing and moving currently underway, Jones told the Standard that she is optimistic about the additional opportunities the renovation will provide to the community — particularly what the improved kitchen space will mean for the organization’s Meals on Wheels program. “[Currently], people are just tripping over each other to accomplish what they do. Ten years ago, we served 5,800 meals, and this past year, we did 14,000 packaged meals for delivery. During the pandemic, it was over 18,000 meals — so we’re just completely at the capacity of what we’re able to prepare in the small kitchen that we [currently] have,” she said. “And we package all the meals in the dining room right now — so we can’t even use the dining room for program space throughout the day.”

Jones says the new kitchen will feature a designated packaging area and a Combi oven that will steam vegetables and rice, as well as do convection baking. “We will have more commercial kitchen equipment than we have now, which will allow us to increase our capacity and [the food] will be healthier and more flavorful... The other, newer piece of equipment that we’ll get is a steam kettle, which is a big kettle that’s heated with steam that you can make soups in in larger quantities.”

According to Jones, the new and improved facilities will make it much easier to operate The Thompson’s current programming and will provide plenty of opportunities for new activities as well. “We have a living room space that we use for programming right now. The French Table has lunch in there because it’s a little bit quieter. And then the Bridge group comes in to play, and they have to share the space, which doesn’t always work well. So being able to have spaces to meet all the existing needs is really key. But our programs are always evolving, and I’m sure there will be new programs.”

### The growing demand

Jones says the renovation was largely precipitated by the increased demand for services. “We’re turning people away. We meet, on average, 20 new people every month. Which is hard to believe — that 20 new older adults in the community just pop in for either meals or Medicare counseling or something. We’ve grown so significantly,” she explained. “As an example, we have our Thanksgiving meal and we have 20 people on the waiting list. And had close to that for the Veterans Day lunch that we just did. So we’re literally turning people away,



Above, these floorplans illustrate the additional 4,803 square feet of space that The Thompson will net after the renovation. The current footprint is marked in white, the additions are highlighted in green. Left, a rendering of the east elevation of the soon-to-be renovated Thompson senior center. While the facility is under renovation, programming and activities will be moved to other venues across town.

Courtesy of The Thompson

Just knowing that the demographics for the next 10-15 years are going to continue to increase the way they have the last 10 years — we’re already at capacity and turning people away, which we don’t want to do.”

Jones emphasizes the community’s impact on the project. “One of the things that I’ve really loved about this organization and our board and staff is that we evolve to meet the community’s needs,” she said. “This is the culmination of more than five years of planning and fundraising by an incredible board and staff, and it’s the response from the participants. Everyone who participates [at The Thompson] sees the need, feels the crunch of the space, and is looking forward to this. People are super excited about it. And I’m just glad that we have a community that will help us evolve and meet those needs.

“Not every senior center in the state or, and especially even out of the state, are as fortunate as to be able to meet the needs of the community. That’s one thing that we hear all the time is, ‘I don’t know what I would do without The Thompson’ or ‘My sister doesn’t have anything like this.’ We’re so lucky. And

I think it’s really true — it meets an incredible need in the community. We’re serving over 1,800 people every year. Now, that number grows every year.”

Because of the renovations, The Thompson will not be providing in-house meals for the two weeks from Monday, Nov. 18 to Tuesday, Nov. 29. Starting Monday, Dec. 2, in-house meal service will resume at the White Cottage, at 823 West Woodstock Road.

Beginning Monday, Nov. 18, The Thompson’s exercise and Aging at Home programming will take place at the Shir Shalom synagogue at 1680 West Woodstock Rd. This will include the foot clinic, Medicare counseling, one-on-one, gentle yoga and tai chi classes, and the Bone Builders and Strength, Stretch, Stability programs.

Mahjong and other special events will be held at the Norman Williams Public Library. Full details and schedules can be found at The Thompson’s website, thompsonseniorcenter.org.

Standard correspondent Max Huibregtse contributed to this article.

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told the Standard. “With 5,000 people coming into town, we want to make it a celebratory, festive weekend with all kinds of things to do at all the different organizations.”

With roughly a dozen members representing many of the organizations that traditionally hold events during the weekend, the committee has also encouraged a new level of coordination across town. “Because it’s a 40-year-old event, over time

back and forth. That’s one I really love.”

### Wassail Parade

The weekend’s centerpiece — the Wassail Parade — will also see some significant alterations.

While the High Horses Center for Equine-Assisted Services has organized the 2 p.m. horse parade for almost a decade, this year it has been spearheaded by the Woodstock Chamber of