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NORTHVIEW

20 years later, some regret decision to close nursing home

"It was a hard decision," said Russ Kutz, who was assistant administrator at Northview. "I do believe it's worked out well."

Known as LindenGrove Inc., the nonprofit joint venture took over in June 1987 and began moving residents to three new nursing homes. Today, those private homes continue under the LindenGrove name in Waukesha, Menomonee Falls and New Berlin.

The old county facility, which still stands at 25042 W. Northview Road, closed its doors in February 1989.

William Bestor, president of Community Memorial Hospital, said he believes the transition has given senior citizens in Waukesha County access to vastly improved health care services and facilities.

Bestor cited LindenGrove's advancements in care for those battling Alzheimer's or recovering from strokes or needing assisted-living arrangements. In contrast, he said,

Northview Home probably would be ill-equipped to serve the county's dynamic needs.

"I think Northview Home would be a dinosaur," he said.

Other counties struggling

Other counties similarly have wrestled with whether to remain in the nursing home business.

According to a study by the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, 40 of 72 counties in Wisconsin still had county-owned nursing homes as of last year.

The study also detailed financial problems associated with most such nursing homes.

John Reinemann, legislative director for the Wisconsin Counties Association, said counties continue to close nursing homes periodically, usually to relieve short-term financial difficulties.

Reinemann said his association believes county nursing homes still represent an important safety



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Therapist Diana Friend works with Clarence Dechant at Northview Home in 1986. Northview offered medical services 24 hours a day.

net for senior citizens who cannot afford private homes or retirement centers.

"Ultimately, of course, these people have to go somewhere," he said.

Some of those who had a hand in closing Waukesha County's nursing home still second-guess the decision today.

Former County Supervisor John Hilger, who voted against the move in 1986, now believes that he was wrong and that the county was correct to close the nursing home.

Senior citizens have plenty of other housing and health care options, Hilger said, including some that are funded or subsidized by taxpayers at the federal, state or local level.

"If you ain't got nothing, somebody will take care of you," he said. "I mean, they're not going to let you starve."

The county spends about \$80 million a year

on health and human service programs, many designed to help senior citizens. Reforms being adopted this year will reconstitute some long-term care services as part of a new Aging and Disability Resource Center.

None of that, however, convinces Joe Marchese that closing Northview Home was a good move.

Marchese, another former county supervisor who opposed the closing in '86, said he suspects that some low-income seniors have fallen through the cracks and missed out on needed health care services in the past 20 years.

"People are hurting. People are suffering," he said. "And they go to the county to see if they can get taken care of."

Recalling days when he visited the nursing home on weekends to play cards and enjoy ice cream with residents, Marchese added: "These people were well taken care of. We had everything in there."