

Old Grand Rapids school reborn as assisted care center

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A common area is seen in the new Vista Springs Riverside Gardens assisted living facility. Classrooms that once teemed with children have been reconfigured into 45 quiet apartments in which seniors can live with their spouses, friends and pets. (Photo: Allison Farrand / AP)

Grand Rapids — The kindergarten classroom in the former Riverside Elementary School is now the Terrace Café and a private dining room for Vista Springs Riverside Gardens, an assisted living facility that held its grand opening this month.

Classrooms that once teemed with children have been reconfigured into 45 quiet apartments in which seniors can live with their spouses, friends and pets.

Vista Springs, which operates two other facilities in the Grand Rapids area and several other facilities in southeast Michigan and Ohio, completed the \$6 million remake after buying the 62-year-old building at 2420 Coit Avenue NE two years ago.

The renovated facility now rents its one bedroom and two bedroom apartments to seniors for a base rate of \$3,700 to \$5,950 a month, according to Jo Elenbaas, regional director of professional and customer Relations.

Licensed as a “Home for the Aged,” Vista Springs Riverside offers personalized care services that range from \$600 to \$1,600 per month and respite stays for \$175 per day.



People stand in the dining room of the new Vista Springs Riverside Gardens. (Photo: Allison Farrand / AP)

Located in the city’s Riverside Park neighborhood, the former school building has been remodeled to resemble a residential apartments rather than the flat-roofed institutional structure.

Although the facility provides full meal services, each apartment includes a kitchenette. Transom windows have replaced the old school windows to create a homey atmosphere.

The school’s former gymnasium has been split into two levels, with a dining room on the upper level. The space on the lower level is being developed by Spectrum Health as an outpatient rehabilitation facility that will serve residents and the public.

Next door, there’s a spa and salon that also will offer hair styling services to residents and the general public.

James Rinck, a former Grand Rapids school board member who lives next door to the facility, said the renovated school restores new life to the neighborhood. “We’re all happy with the way it looks,” he said.

“This is one of the most creative and elegant reuses of a building I’ve seen in my life,” said 2nd Ward City Commissioner Joe Jones.

Vista, which has redeveloped a similar facility at the former Taft Elementary School in Wyoming, also operates a 40-unit Northview Woods facility less than three miles away.



In this June 16, 2016 photo, a photo of an old Riverside Elementary class sits in the new Vista Springs Riverside Gardens, in the Creston neighborhood of Grand Rapids, Mich. The building, which was formally Riverside Elementary School, has been renovated into an assisted living facility. (Photo: Allison Farrand / AP)