

# NEW HAVEN REGISTER

## Continuum of Care to hold grand opening of New Haven facility



*Continuum of Care President and CEO Patti L. Walker in front of their new headquarters at 19 Legion Ave. in New Haven Wednesday, April 6, 2016. Peter Hvizdak — New Haven Register*

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NEW HAVEN >> Three decades ago, when Patti Walker took over [Continuum of Care](#) it was a small social service organization with financial problems and a limited reach.

Today, Walker, the president and CEO of Continuum, runs a \$40 million operation that serves some 2,400 clients with serious mental illness, which often leads to homelessness, as well as persons with developmental disabilities.

From a five-person staff in 1983, the large agency, which includes Continuum Home Health, Inc., now has clinicians, including 50 nurses, and program managers totaling 800 workers.

It operates 41 buildings that house either group homes or apartments for clients, but up until two weeks ago, staff was scattered in four locations with no centralized administrative building.

Walker Wednesday led a tour of its new 30,000-square-foot headquarters at 109 Legion Ave., developed in a partnership with Continuum of Care Inc. and Centerplan Development.

“People feel very much like family here,” Walker said, as staff came out of their offices to visit with each other. About 130 employees work to this site, with the rest out in the community.

Centerplan, headed by [Robert Landino](#), has also constructed a pharmacy on the Route 34 site, as well as a building that will be leased to a restaurant with an office tower, garage and maybe a hotel in the mix on the 5.5 acres.

Continuum plans a grand opening Thursday to celebrate its new facility made possible with a \$7.5 million state grant and \$13 million in New Market Tax Credits from Capital One, N.A., Mid-City Community CDE, Massachusetts Housing Investment Corp. and The Community Builders.

It will have another celebration in two months on June 8 when it has a 50th anniversary party and fundraiser.

Continuum is a respected partner with Yale-New Haven Hospital, Bridgeport Hospital, St. Vincent’s Hospital, the Connecticut Mental Health Center, the Veterans Affairs medical center, state Department of Correction and the courts, which all send indigent clients in need of services and housing.

But it may not be known generally to the public, partly because of patient privacy rules and the desire to blend into the community.

Two-thirds of the housing options are tucked unobtrusively into neighborhoods in New Haven.

Its sister home health operation, where nurses and other staff are hands-on with psychiatric medication delivery, as well as physical medical services, made 180,000 care visits last year, Walker said.

Deborah Cox, vice president for fund development, said they cover the most Medicaid supported patients in a home health population of any private agency in Connecticut.

A big focus is on wellness for a demographic that dies 25 years younger than the average population.

“It is essential that we are able to coordinate the medical care with the community-based residential care,” Walker said, which generally is unheard of in the same agency.

Cox said an important component of their work is bringing people to a recovery level where they can gain employment.

“As they are recovering, we help them get to the next step in their lives,” Cox said.

There is also an extensive peer mentoring system where qualified clients, after an internship, get paid to go to seven other agencies at 11 locations to help those in the early stage of recovery.

“They want to give back,” Cox said.

In addition to a growing program for the elderly, Continuum runs a small prison diversion program, a community re-entry program and one that keeps people who have committed a minor offense tied to mental illness out of jail. It currently has about 47 clients.

The building is full of art chosen by Walker and reminders of why they do what they do, including guidance from Mother Teresa.

“The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyways,” was some of the advice framed in one of the hallways.

“The beauty of this building is that we built it so clients can come here too for programs,” Walker said of training, exercise and nutrition instruction.

The organization has been saved from state budget cuts this year, but is concerned with a change in reimbursement for nurses who give medication to clients who are not capable of doing it on their own.

Walker said they are working with the state to save money so they don’t have to make those cuts. Connecticut is looking at a \$900 million deficit next year and billions more in the next two years.

“Hopefully there will be a partnership to find a way to reduce costs so they won’t make cuts that will be harmful. It would end up costing the state a lot more in the long run because the people we care for go to more expensive means of care,” said Martin Morrissey, executive vice president and CFO of Continuum.

He was talking about patients who go off their medication and end up in the emergency rooms or in the criminal justice system.

As the plans came forward for the [development on this part of Route 34](#), not all the neighbors were happy, with a vocal group criticizing it as more suburban, than the dense urban mixed-use the city had been promising over the last decade. The criticism was leveled at the site plan, but not at Continuum.

Going forward, the city will soon have control over the Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, where residents want a design that will slow traffic to allow for real neighborhood retail and residential use on several contiguous blocks.

The building was designed by Barry Svigals, as is the new logo, which shows somewhat abstractly, people being housed.