

# New life for old hospital

*Former Scottish Rite building in Decatur to be renovated under mixed-use project*

**By Bill Torpy**

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**T**he tiny crutches in the basement and the operating table in a darkened room upstairs are the only reminders of the patients who once hobbled the hallways of the Scottish Rite Hospital for Crippled Children in south Decatur.

"That's a scary-looking table," said Robert Soens, president of the Community Center of South Decatur, as he toured the crumbling facility. Years ago, children stricken with polio were placed on that table to have casts and braces fitted on them. But those instruments of healing were left behind in 1976, when Scottish Rite moved to a sprawling modern facility in north Fulton County.

During the two decades since, the rambling, historic facility has crumbled as rain seeped through the roof and the erstwhile hospital awaited a new mission.

Today, that new mission is becoming reality. Decatur officials voted last month to transfer the 6.5-acre property over to a developer for a mixed-use construction project, part of which harkens back to the hospital's original purpose.

That plan includes building 14 housing units for disabled adults, renovating the 26,000-square-foot building into office space and a community center, and building 14 single-family homes. Developers are negotiating with five potential tenants to rent space in the building. Once contracts are signed, Progressive Redevelopment Inc. will obtain the building loans and receive title to the property. Lorri Mills, a PRI executive who is overseeing the project, said she is negotiating with firms in the medical and nonprofit fields, "and they want to be in this building."

"This is a good fit for the historic use of the property," Decatur's assistant city manager, Hugh Saxon, said of the housing units for the disabled. Those one- and two-bedroom units would be built behind the old hospital in conjunction with the Shepherd Center and with a \$1.1 million Housing and Urban Development grant.

The entire project would cost between \$4 million and



Photos by RENÉE HANNANS / Staff

**Rehabilitation in the works:** Plans are in progress to remodel the old Scottish Rite Hospital building (above). Below, Robert Soens, president of the Community Center of South Decatur, takes a tour through the building, where a stack of crutches (right) still stands in the basement.



