Every morning in her apartment on the third floor at The Village at Nazareth, S. Rita McGovern walks to her window and rapidly flicks a green light on and off.

“I flash that light every morning to show the construction workers that I’m praying for their safety,” she says with a smile. “I started that when construction began this summer and it will continue every day until the campus projects are finished.”

Nazareth Living Center broke ground on the first of three major construction projects in January 2016. The first creates St. Joseph’s Home, a new two-story dedicated memory care facility that includes 48 private studio apartments. Another project expands independent living at The Village, with 50 new apartments, including 21 two-bedroom units. The third project is an extensive renovation and upgrade of the McGovern Commons skilled-nursing facility. The campus-wide projects total $30 million.

Nazareth Living Center was founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, who purchased a 57-acre farm in south St. Louis County in 1869 to construct Nazareth Home, a place for retired and infirm sisters. In 1965, a larger residential facility, Gleason Hall, was built, providing housing for a greater number of sisters in a modern setting.

In 1992, with a growing need for quality healthcare services for seniors in the surrounding community, the sisters made the decision to open the doors of their facilities to the dear neighbor, enabling the public to join the sisters on Nazareth’s campus.

Today, the campus comprises The Village at Nazareth, which is the senior-independent-living facility, and Nazareth Living Center, a series of programs and facilities that offer assisted living, short-term and long-term skilled nursing, skilled rehabilitation and memory care.
“We’re still on the same property where the first sisters built Nazareth Home,” says S. Rita. “When we walk these grounds, we feel and honor their service and presence every day. As I look at all of the construction, I believe this is a tribute to the sisters who have gone before me.”

S. Rita has lived in Nazareth’s independent-living center for the past several years. “It’s a coming home of sorts,” she says. “I first came to Nazareth in 1969 as a licensed practical nurse and was subsequently transferred to Kansas City to be an emergency department nurse at St. Joseph Hospital.”

Over the years, she served at Fron-tenac Community and the Provincial House before returning to Nazareth in 1992 as director of Resident Services and then director of Admissions and Marketing. She “retired” in 2011, but today S. Rita officially serves as a part-time ambassador, living out a legacy of love and care.

“When I was here, I fell in love with the older adult,” she recalls. “There was so much wisdom here. To me, service is the rent we pay for living, and my role is to serve my fellow sisters and the dear neighbor.”

S. Rita also serves on Nazareth’s Foundation Board along with Sister Mary Kay Hadican. S. Mary Kay is one of five sisters of St. Joseph who serve on the Board of Trustees for Nazareth Living Center.

“In this faith-based facility, the presence of the sisters is a huge asset,” says S. Mary Kay. As we continue to enhance the senior-care services here, the sisters were living in would be great. That’s what they deserved.”

She went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master’s in religious education. For two decades, she was involved in catechetical ministry. She also served as mission leader at St. Joseph Hospital (Carondelet Health) before her selection for Province Leadership, serving from 2002 to 2008.

Along with the current expansion underway at Nazareth, she’s seen other big changes, such as when the sisters made the challenging decision to partner with Benedictine Health System to manage and enhance Nazareth’s healthcare services. That partnership with Benedictine has continued the legacy that the sisters began with both parties focused on the healing mission and delivering high quality care.

With the new facilities set to open at varying times in 2017, timing is crucial. Demand for the independent-living apartments is high, with almost all of the apartments already rented. As the aging population continues to rise—both in the community and nationwide—the need for assisted-living memory-care facilities also is rising, as is the desire for full continuum of care services for seniors.

“What we see under construction here at Nazareth Living Center truly is a tribute to the original mission of caring for our sisters and the dear neighbor,” says S. Mary Kay. “Our legacy does continue.”

Below, The independent living units at the Village at Nazareth, from construction to finishing touches.