

# Mary Wade's "Senior Campus" Moves Forward

by Allan Appel | October 31, 2007

It was moving day in Fair Haven -- for a house.



Pictured is 77 Pine St., an attractive 1890s Gothic-roofed house having stood for more than a century directly across the street from the Mary Wade Home. It is on its way to becoming 138 Clinton St., as Mary Wade moves the home to make room for new senior housing.

In the dog-legged, or L-shaped plot thus created at Clinton and Pine, the Mary Wade Home will build a brick structure echoing its current building in order to provide 75 additional units of assisted living for the elderly.

This is only the beginning of the fulfillment of Mary Wade's master plan: to create an historically appropriate and financially viable "campus for seniors" in its venerable village setting by the Quinnipiac River.



It was a real community event Tuesday -- historic preservation, economic development, and community-building all wrapped up in one fascinating and rarely-viewed experience: how a house is moved and preserved. MaryEllen Masiello's second to eight graders from nearby St. Rose of Lima school were especially on hand to view it.

None of them had seen a house moved. When the structure made its first lurch, and lost one small piece of wood from the back porch, the kids gasped.



The move was halted briefly as incredibly daring workers dashed underneath to adjust . . . whatever it is you adjust when you're moving a 150-ton house.

Not to worry. Having been raised up from its foundation several days before and steel beams put through the foundation, and then all that laid on a dolly, it was ready to chug along again with the certainty of Mike Mulligan's steam shovel.

Mover Joe DeNicholas (middle) was only too happy to explain how it all worked to Mary Wade residents such as 94-year-old Alex Giampietro, a retired teacher at Catholic University in Washington, who has recently moved into Mary Wade (pictured with Teresa Wells, one of the administrators).

DeNicholas' family has been in the house-moving business for five generations. So he was the perfect house-mover to talk to Mary Wade's seniors. His dad has lifted and moved, among other New Haven historic structures, Louis' Lunch, now on Crown Street.



According to David Hunter, Mary Wade's long-time chief executive officer, the new/old 138 Clinton will join ten other houses in various stages of rehabbing that Mary Wade owns along Pine, Grafton, and Atwater streets, its now and future campus.

The houses have been rehabbed by Mary Wade, along with assistance from community development block grants, coordinated by funders such as New Haven's Livable City Initiative.

"The idea," said Hunter, "is to have people of modest means live in the homes, and expand options for the elderly while we do this." Occupants must federal income guidelines, since federal housing dollars are a source of the renovations.

Mary Wade's employees have been urged to live in the units. But most, Hunter said, exceed the income eligibility. At present one employee does.

The uses to which Mary Wade's ten small houses will be put are still in flux as the master plan of the campus evolves. Phase I will be the rehabbing of a house at 73 Atwater St. into larger Mary Wade office space. Phase II, to begin in 2008, is going to be the extension of the current building towards Atwater, adding 34 more units of assisted living. It will also enable the adult day care program, which now services 50 folks, both residents like Giampietro and others vanned in from around the city, to expand to 75.

Phase III, slated for 2010, will be the building on the site vacated by 77 Pine and adjacent property of the 75 units of assisted living. Until the funding is in place, the area will be used for parking, and otherwise grassed in.

Phase IV will involve the converting of some of the individual houses -- many of which , like 77 Pine, are of historic value -- into shared houses for seniors.



"We're going to do some experimenting with this 'campus for the elderly,'" said Hunter, whose Mary Wade home has just received a "Pathways to Greatness Award" from the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging." Then, pointing to the attractive house beside the one just moved, he turned to LCI chief Andy Rizzo and said, "We'd like, for example, to try to have three or older people have their own bedrooms there but share the kitchen and baths in that house and have a caretaker/worker live upstairs. Different arrangements to preserve independence as long as possible."

Rizzo was full of compliments for David Hunter. "He had a vision of this place as a campus for seniors ten years ago that frankly I wasn't convinced of back then. The houses were in terrible shape, even by our standards. But he stuck with it. But now I am convinced; he's to be given tremendous credit."



The house traveled successfully another 50 feet and came to temporary rest; the workers were going to lunch before the final moved onto the Clinton Avenue site. "You build a building one brick at a time," Hunter said, "and a community one person at a time."

If you have a vision, you do both, at the same time. "Yes," said the Community Foundation's Lee Cruz, whose work with the nearby Chatham Neighborhood Square Association is also helping to stabilize Fair Haven while celebrating its history. "It's time we joined in on this work with you."