



Shelter Island Reporter

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TOWN OF SHELTER ISLAND • VILLAGE OF DERING HARBOR



DON BINDLER PHOTO

Flying free

This beautiful red-tailed hawk was spotted on Shell Beach last week.

Passing it on and making meaning of the holidays

Why did Richard Surozenski and Bill Cummings spend the better part of last Saturday in a yellow rowboat, hauling a fully-decorated Christmas tree to the middle of Chase Creek?

ON THE HALF SHELL



CHARITY ROBEY

For the same reason millions of Americans on the same day in November wipe the dust off their roasting pan, take the dress shoes out of the oven (where they are stored) and cook a 20-pound bird.

Tradition. The transmission of our customs and beliefs is how we make meaning of the holidays.

Transmission is the key. Rich, who made sure there was a glowing tree floating in Chase Creek for 25 years, asked his neighbor Bill, who runs the House on Chase Creek, to observe the process, which involves securing every light with a twist-tie, wiring, floating and positioning the tree — all while taking care not to fall into the Creek before the eyes of holiday shoppers on Bridge Street. Now Bill has stepped up to take this cherished Island tradition forward.

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A new future for the Island's past

Historical Society's home is transformed

BY AMBROSE CLANCY | EDITOR

Repairing, redoing and updating an old house is always a voyage of discovery, with the past often brought into vivid relief, providing answers and, as often as not, more questions.

That was the case when architect William Pedersen and builder Chris Fokine began work to bring the Shelter Island Historical Society's home, the 18th century Havens House on South Ferry Road, into the 21st century. Not only is the house

being renovated, but a \$1.7 million, 2,800 square foot construction project is underway that will include a courtyard, workrooms and meeting rooms, an exhibition gallery and a climate-controlled archival space so the Historical Society can properly house, preserve and expand the existing collection of 100,000 documents and objects. The two floors will be connected by dual staircases and a lift to provide access for people with limited mobility and also to move materials from one level to another.

Breaking ground on the project two years ago, one intriguing discovery of the Havens House makeover was oak ceiling beams, hidden un-

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BEVERLEA WALZ PHOTO

From left, Supervisor Gary Gerth, architect William Pedersen and builder Chris Fokine, at a Town Board tour last week of the new construction at Havens House.

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HAVENS HOUSE

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der plaster for more than 250 years, the trunks flattened on the tops and bottoms but the sides left untreated and covered in bark from 1743. The beams — which have supported the structure through its history as a family's residence, a boarding house, tavern, meeting house and school — are still so solid and functional that “we just had to dust them off a little,” said Mr. Fokine, who heads the Island's Fokine Construction.

But the real discovery came when they looked a little closer and discovered Roman numerals carved into each beam. “These were marked so they could be taken down and assembled, like an erector set,” said Mr. Pederson, an Islander with an international reputation as an architect, who has created the design pro bono. “They were either moved from another location to here or were set to be moved.”

Another key element of the original construction of the seemingly indestructible building is that there is a basement constructed from large stones, rather than some impermeable material, Mr. Pedersen said. The house is close to wetlands and prone to flooding — a large pond sprang up early on in the new construction that was dubbed by some as “Lake Fokine” — but the original builders used the stones so water could flood into the basement rather than being blocked and raising the house off its foundation.

MARKET FORCES

Mr. Fokine and Mr. Pedersen, along with Historical Society officials, took the Town Board on a tour last week of the newly renovated house and new facility, which has a ribbon cutting set for June. Mr. Pedersen outlined plans for the Society's cam-

pus for the board, including moving and expanding the popular summer Saturday's Farmers Market to a new parking lot on the north side of Havens House, rather than keeping it in front of the building on South Ferry Road.

Society Executive Director Nanette Lawrenson noted that the market attracts a large number of people and the foot traffic tears up the grass and landscaping. Plus, with many children attending, there was a danger from traffic on busy South Ferry Road so close to the market.

The new location will be leveled, Mr. Pedersen said, providing space for 32 stalls and electricity for the vendors.

The town owns a strip of land adjoining the Society next to the proposed market's site. Mr. Pedersen suggested that it could be used for parking, as it has been on past summer Saturdays and for special events throughout the year.

Councilwoman Amber Brach-Williams said that was not a done deal, since the Community Housing Board, charged with finding space for affordable housing on the Island, is taking an inventory of all town-owned land not slated for preservation and it might have its eye on the space for new construction.

LIGHT, STONE, SAFETY

The overall new construction added on to Havens House is an impressive display of the use of natural light — some even flooding to the below-ground exhibition space and work rooms — and gray and white Pennsylvania wall stone. At several points in the new campus, 20-inch high stone walls will provide seating for visitors and staff when the weather suits.

The lion's share of new construction will be below ground, Mr. Pedersen has said, so as not to “overwhelm



BEVERLEA WALZ PHOTO

Construction at the Shelter Island Historical Society's Havens House on South Ferry Road. Most of the new construction will be below ground and open to the public in June.

the scale of the existing building. We were determined to keep [the new construction] from becoming competitive with Havens House.”

Ms. Lawrenson, ushering a guest recently into the new archive room, called it “our pride and joy.” A soaring, 21-foot ceiling overlooks the 20-foot by 28-foot room, providing “visible storage,” Ms. Lawrenson said, in a humidity-controlled atmosphere. There will be state-of-the-art lighting, a large map table and rooms adjacent for archivists, historians and visiting scholars.

A new archive room was one of the spurs to embark on the construction project, she said. “We had close to two thirds of our collection stored in the attic of Havens House,” Ms. Lawrenson added, noting that the material was difficult to access and that the danger of a fire was ever-present, with the top of the house often reaching 100 degrees and more in the summer.

Former Shelter Island Fire Department Chief John D'Amato, who is

presently vice president of the Society's Board of Trustees, warned officials that Havens House was such a fire trap that the thousands of documents would be lost by the time an alarm came in to the fire house. Chief D'Amato urged officials to move the materials or build an archival facility.

Mr. Pedersen said the new construction with a zinc roof and stone and brick material has made it a “non-combustible structure.”

The courtyard, which Mr. Pedersen described as creating another room, will have stone walls inviting people to sit, and is shaded by four Chinese elm trees.

In the main gallery below ground a space on the wall is reserved for a tapestry, being woven by Helena Hermarck, an internationally honored weaver. The tapestry will recreate in textiles the oldest document in the Society's possession, a 1652 contract spelling out an ownership agreement of Shelter Island between the Manhasset people and the English settlers.

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