

Cause for celebration

WOODLAND POND DEVELOPERS HOLD GROUND-BREAKING CEREMONY

Developers for Woodland Pond at New Paltz held a ground-breaking ceremony and celebration at the Wiltwyck Golf Club last Thursday. And only a few days earlier, a small group of individuals comprised of Woodland Pond board members, New Life Development consultants and representatives of the not-for-profit sponsor, The Kingston Hospital, gathered on the heavily wooded 83-acre site to turn over the first spade of earth and commemorate the start of construction of Woodland Pond, the first continuing-care retirement community in the mid-Hudson Valley.

Woodland Pond's celebratory ground-breaking event was attended by more than 175 future residents, their families and friends, representatives from New Paltz and surrounding communities, and board members and senior staff of The Kingston Regional Health Care System.

Cynthia Rozenberg, vice president of strategic planning for The Kingston Regional Health Care System and COO of Woodland Pond, said, "We still have the excitement and enthusiasm for this project that we had in 2001, and I am thrilled that we have achieved this milestone. This day represents the beginning of the construction phase for Woodland Pond as we begin the process of building the kind of retirement community we would want for our parents and ourselves."

"Despite the hard work needed to overcome some of the challenges to getting this wonderful project through the process, at no time did the support from local seniors or our sponsor ever waiver," said Frank Mandy, principal of New Life Management & Development, "We have been so fortunate that the Woodland Pond at New Paltz project has been so warmly embraced by the local seniors, their families and the local leaders."

The project, slated to be built on approximately 82 acres off North Putts Corner Road in the Village of New Paltz, will eventually feature 300 units of continuing care for seniors. Once built, the not-for-profit Woodland Pond will be managed by Kingston Regional Health.

Originally, the developers had stated that they hoped to break ground in late summer.

"It's a couple months later than we hoped to get started," said Mandy. "We really need to get mov-



PHOTOS BY LAUREN THOMAS
First depositor Joan Mandy, principal development consultant Frank Mandy and Gene Heslin, M.D., chair of the Kingston Regional Health Care System Board of Directors after the "virtual" ribbon-cutting ceremony for Woodland Pond held last week at Wiltwyck Country Club in Kingston.



Woodland Pond depositors are honored with a celebration held last Wednesday at Wiltwyck Country Club.

ing before the winter."

When local environmental advocates filed an Article 78 lawsuit against the developers and the New Paltz Village Planning Board, the project lost some momentum. Save Our Woods and Wetlands (SWW) and the Association for Intelligent Rural Management (AFFIRM) settled their legal claim with New Life

and the village government in April.

As part of that agreement, SWW and AFFIRM agreed to allow the developer to break the 100-foot wetlands buffer in some instances. However, New Life agreed to keep the rest of the project 100 feet away from wetlands in all other places and offered \$50,000 to the town and village for a wetlands protection fund.

Ulster County Legislator Susan Zimet (D-New Paltz), who helped with negotiations toward a legal settlement, attended the ground-breaking ceremony. Rozenberg thanked Zimet publicly for her work.

"It was really getting to a point where the Article 78 was really getting in the way of the IDA funding," Zimet said. "I got involved behind the scenes. Ultimately everybody wanted a solution to the Woodland Pond situation."

Ulster County Industrial Development Agency recently approved tax-exempt bonds for the project.

The county lawmaker touted the jobs that project would create, including 350 jobs for builders during construction and 175 permanent jobs once the senior

care center opens. Woodland Pond would provide a benefit to Ulster County, giving seniors a place to retire without having to look out of state, she said.

Bob Hughes, a past president of SWW and who now sits on the New Paltz Town Zoning Board of Appeals, said that the environmental groups' "ultimate goal was really for nothing to be built there."

The groups decided to negotiate with Woodland Pond because "we wanted to honor the seniors of New Paltz."

While Hughes quit SWW in 2005 to join the town planning board, he has since helped the environmental group as a consultant to make sure the project went through with the maximum amount of protection to the environment.

He said many neighbors of the site became involved with the environmental groups because they draw well water from ground near the wetlands and worried about contamination. SWW and AFFIRM also wanted to protect the site because it was one of the "last undeveloped tracts of land in New Paltz."

Zimet said she knew that both the developer and environmentalists had made sacrifices to compromise on the project. However, she praised SWW and AFFIRM.

"They really made that project a better project," she said.

Construction on Woodland Pond cannot begin without a building permit from the village. So far that permit had not been granted to developers, according to building inspector Kathy Moniz.

Moniz said she expected that Woodland Pond would receive a permit in about one month.

The \$117 million in bonds to finance the project still need to be sold on the market, according to Mandy.

For more information on becoming a future resident, please contact the Woodland Pond Information Center at 883-9800 or visit its website at www.woodlandpondatnewpaltz.com.

-Mike Townsend

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