Community House kicks off 75th anniversary year with festive gathering of friends & more on Jan. 25

City, state & federal proclamations presented; The Haven LLC presents $15,000 donation

WEST HAVEN (January 25, 2016) - It was a wonderful way to jump-start a very special year for the West Haven Community House as a gathering of city and state officials, past agency board presidents, a former executive director, a major developer and what some are calling an unprecedented appearance of three city mayors in one place were just some of the highlights of the agency’s 75th Anniversary Kickoff Event on Monday at the agency’s main headquarters at 227 Elm St.

In all, three separate proclamations – city, state and federal – were presented, and numerous individuals were cited for their contributions. Also, pre-school children made a brief appearance and a Community Connections client told the audience how the agency has helped her succeed in life.

The event was held to officially begin the 75th anniversary celebration of the Community House’s founding in 1941 in West Haven by a concerned citizens “work group” led by noted social worker Pauline Lang. Among the special guests on hand Monday at the celebration was Pauline Lang’s son, William Lang, a retired school teacher and West Haven resident who has been a long-time and current member of the Community House’s Board of Directors.

Current Board President Stacie Phan opened the event with remarks that reviewed the agency’s long history and its changing program focus as the decades passed and the times changed. “The physical structure of the Community House has changed with the times, too,” Phan added, noting the structural updates, building additions and property acquisitions that comprise the agency today.

“While the Community House’s programs are diverse, the agency remains unified by the values it consistently promotes: individual development; self-respect and respect for others; positive group relationships; inclusion into the community, and, positive social change.”

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
Also present and cited before the gathering of about 100 people were a host of current and former agency board presidents including 97-year-old Patricia Herbert, Mary Jane Morrissey - chairman of the 75th Anniversary, and Paul J. Dorsi representing both his late parents, Mom, Helen Dorsi, and his Dad, Eugene Dorsi, who both served as board presidents. Also cited were current board president Phan, and past presidents Carole Porto, Sharon Martin, immediate past president Richard Bruno, and Dr. John E. Onofrio, represented by his son, John F. Onofrio, CPA, current treasurer of the Community House board.

The event also featured city and state officials including current and former mayors Edward O’Brien, John Picard and H. Richard Borer. In her remarks to the gathering, Community House Executive Director Patty Stevens noted that each former mayor played roles in the Community House.

Stevens recalled that then-Mayor Borer came to the Community House, guitar in hand, and sang to the preschool children. Stevens also noted that both Picard and current Mayor O’Brien are past Community House board of directors members, with former Mayor Picard still involved in the annual reading to children program at the agency. “I guess if you are interested in becoming mayor in West Haven, you need to get involved with us,” Stevens quipped.

Stevens also took the opportunity to recognize former Executive Director Peter Schwartz, who was present.

Mayor O’Brien then took the occasion to present a Proclamation from the Office of the Mayor, citing the agency’s legacy, which is “woven into the fabric of our community.”

Prompting the audience to chime in with the customary “Whereas” preceding each new paragraph, the mayor called the Community House “the lifeblood of our great city. The Community House has carved out a place for itself in the narrative of West Haven … persevering through recession and war” to facilitate “healthy, independent and meaningful lives for children, adolescents and families, as well as individuals with disabilities since 1941.

“Your award-winning social service agency … has made enduring contributions to our local identity … and as you observe this diamond
Top left and right, more enthusiastic members of the Head Start pre-school marching band. Above, West Haven Mayor Edward O’Brien greets the audience. At left, Board President Stacie Phan poses with Mayor O’Brien, along with former mayors John Picard and H. Richard Borer. Middle left, state legislators including Lou Esposito, Stephen Dargan and Charles Ferraro.
The Haven donates $15,000 in support of 75th jubilee, the City of West Haven is grateful for all that you have done to encourage and support good citizenship and volunteerism."

Mayor O’Brien also introduced Matt Armstrong, a partner in the “The Haven” development project in the city, who presented to President Phan a facsimile of a $15,000 donation check The Haven Group LLC made in support of the agency’s 75th anniversary celebration.

Also present were state legislators representing West Haven, including Rep. Stephen D. Dargan, Rep. Louis P. Esposito Jr., and Rep. Charles Ferraro, with Rep. Ferraro delighting the crowd with a four-line rendition of the Camp-to-Come-to summer camp song. “That’s all I can remember,” he noted to hearty laughter.

Rep. Dargan took the microphone to recount his years here as a pre-school program alumni. “My parents saw the advantage of pre-school, or nursery school as it was called then, well before it became recognized as so important for a child’s early education.

“I was blessed to be here in the 1950s and I had a wonderful time,” Rep. Dargan said. “This is a wonderful facility and a testament to its importance is that we are here celebrating its 75th anniversary.”

Last week, State Sen. Gayle Slossberg, who could not make the event Monday, visited the agency with a copy of the General Assembly Official Citation that Reps. Dargan, Esposito and Ferraro also bore. Dated January 25, 2016, and also signed by State Rep. Gary Holder Winfield who also was not present Monday, the Citation reads in part, “The Connecticut General Assembly hereby offers its sincerest congratulations to The West Haven Community House in recognition of your 75th anniversary.

“The Community House has been the cornerstone social service agency in West Haven providing programs and services that inspire and promote healthy, productive, independent and meaningful lives for children and families, and for adults with developmental disabilities.”

Also on hand was Allison Dodge, representing U.S. Representative Rosa DeLauro, who had a scheduling conflict. Dodge presented an honorary statement that Congresswoman DeLauro read into the Congressional Record of the U.S. House of Representatives, 114th Congress, 2nd Session, which reads in part, “A leading voice of advocacy and quality care, this remarkable organization has left an indelible mark on the West Haven Community.

Congresswoman DeLauro told her fellow Congressmen, “I am proud to stand today and extend my sincere thanks and heartfelt congratulations to the West Haven Community House on its 75th Anniversary. Their good work has made a real difference in countless lives and I wish them all the best for many more years of success.”