

NewBridge on the Charles marks first anniversary in Dedham

By Edward B. Colby

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DEDHAM — As the first anniversary dedication ceremony for Dedham's NewBridge on the Charles was about to begin, Gertrude Kramer Green shared what has made her experience at the Dedham senior housing campus special.

“I’ve never met so many people with so many accomplishments and so many warm, interactive people,” said Kramer Green, who came to NewBridge last September.

The night before, she had dinner with a guy who worked at Xerox.

“His unit sent out the first fax message. Can you imagine that? And you just keep meeting people who have done amazing things with their lives,” she said.

Hundreds of residents and donors gathered in a tent for the dedication ceremony and celebration Thursday afternoon – 2 years, 11 months and 30 days after “many of us stood on this spot to break ground for NewBridge on the Charles, on the Dr. Miriam and Sheldon G. Adelson Campus,” said Len Fishman, the CEO of Hebrew SeniorLife.

The 162-acre continuing care retirement community officially opened in June a year ago, welcoming residents in stages during the course of 2009.

Sylvia Band, the president of the NewBridge Independent Living Members Association, recalled how, “with no more to show than a few brochures and an architect’s model of miniature buildings, trees, and rows, Len Fishman met with us and described his dream: a multigenerational community where one could age in grace and dignity, with cutting-edge facilities and superb services, in an exquisite setting, all within earshot of the sounds of children playing in their playground.”

“For a year we’ve been living the reality of the dream, which far exceeds anyone’s expectations,” Band declared. “The buildings are beautiful. The grounds are beautiful. But the unexpected aspect is that more than 350 people, many coming from homes that they occupied for 50 years, have bonded together to create a vibrant, caring and supportive community.”

Said Kramer Green, “That’s what I was talking about.”

Band said a redbud tree would be planted in the Members Grove every year, to create a “visual record” of NewBridge’s maturation as a community.

The keynote speaker was Harvard Medical School Dean Jeffrey Flier, whose 90-year-old mother, Dorothy Flier, recently moved to NewBridge.

But the headline speaker was Governor Deval Patrick, who marveled at what had taken place since he came for the groundbreaking.

“Look what you have wrought. And it’s exactly what you said you were going to do, both physically and spiritually,” Patrick said. “That notion of having an intergenerational experience, I think I told you at the time, was something that I understood personally – having grown up with my grandparents on the South Side of Chicago, having had my grandmother living with us at the end of her life, and my mother lived with us for over 20 years.”

Patrick’s speech focused on generational responsibility – “that each of us in our time is supposed to do all we can to leave this place better than we found it.” For more of his remarks, check out the video at WickedLocalDedham.com.

In his address, Fishman mentioned the campus’s five interwoven pieces: residences for independent living, assisted living, and long-term care, a unit for post-acute rehabilitative care, and the Rashi School.

“In hindsight, the idea of an intergenerational campus was, perhaps, insane. It’s hard enough managing the activities of one Jewish organization. Trying to coordinate two is, well, nearly impossible,” Fishman said.

And, he noted, “Our board made an enormous leap of faith that the Rashi School – who used to call themselves the wandering Jews – could raise funds to build their building. After all, we designed the entire campus around the school. If it failed to materialize, then what?”

But the school did it – pulling through on what Fishman called the Rashi board’s “giant pole vault of faith” – and moved from Newton to its new building in Dedham Wednesday, June 16, the day before the ceremony.

“Rashi, you are the wandering Jews no more,” he said. “Congratulations.”

And NewBridge “sailed right through” the economic storm that greeted its opening, said the nonprofit’s CEO, who credited his board’s gutsy move to buy the property before it was permitted, and its decision “to spend the funds necessary to blow up an old, failed model of long-term care, and in the Gloria Adelson Field Health Center radically raise expectations about what our parents and our grandparents deserve when they are too frail to advocate for (themselves). That’s what each of us wants for them, and frankly what we will want when it is our turn.”

At every crucial juncture, the Hebrew SeniorLife board and a slew of other people who were key to NewBridge’s coming-together “said yes” to the project, Fishman said.

Hebrew SeniorLife’s “more than ever” capital campaign, led by Irwin Chafetz, has raised \$90 million. Miriam and Sheldon Adelson have given \$25 million. Chafetz said

their initial contribution of \$15 million “broke the ice” for other donors to believe in the project and give.

The Las Vegas couple was honored on stage, and they and their two boys were presented with two large golden keys to the campus.

Miriam Adelson said that as philanthropists, “We help you to create the hardware. Now it’s all up to you to do the software, which is the spirit, and the success.”

“God bless you,” she told NewBridge’s residents. “It’s all yours.”



Governor Deval Patrick shakes hands with donor Dr. Miriam Adelson during the Dedication Ceremony for Hebrew SeniorLife's Newbridge on the Charles, in Dedham.



Governor Deval Patrick speaks at the Dedication Ceremony for Hebrew SeniorLife's Newbridge on the Charles, in Dedham.



CEO Len Fishman speaks at the Dedication Ceremony for Hebrew SeniorLife's Newbridge on the Charles, in Dedham.



Governor Deval Patrick shakes hands with Lee Jensen, during a tour of NewBridge on the Charles in Dedham.