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VNACJ has high hopes for showhouse fundraiser

Hopes are high for grand fundraiser

BY **PATTI MARTIN** • STAFF WRITER • OCTOBER 2, 2008

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How does an organization follow its most successful fundraising event in history?

For the Visiting Nurse Association of Central Jersey, the answer is simple — stage another designer showhouse.

The second Stately Homes By-The-Sea Showhouse will open its doors at Sheep's Run in Rumson April 28 and run through May 31. At 99 Rumson Road, the 10,000-plus-square-foot home, which features 25 rooms and 10 1/4 bathrooms, is an exemplar of country house style. The living room, for example, is 40 feet long with 12-foot ceilings. The stair hall rises two stories.

Designed by architect Harrie T. Lindeberg, the house was built in 1915 for Thomas F. Vietor and his wife, the former Elizabeth Allen, who were residents of New York.

Among the home's notable features is the intricate, ornamental metalwork by Oscar B. Bach, much of it done in a bird motif.

Currently resting on approximately 6.5 acres, the house "roots" in the land and the steep pitch of the roof evoke the romantic charm of a Cotswold cottage.

The interior underscores Lindeberg's dedication to elegance and the pleasures of living. His approach — simplicity of design and excellence in proportion — created large interior spaces that will offer interior designers exceptional opportunities for creative expression.

"We are so grateful to the Mulheren family for allowing us the opportunity to again stage a showhouse," said Judith Stanley Coleman, chairwoman of the VNACJ board of trustees. "Through Nancy's generosity, the efforts of the VNA will be able to grow and thrive."

Now owned by the Mulheren family, the house has been named Sheep's Run. The property was acquired last year by the family with the goal of preserving the house and land from further development.

The chance to stage such a grand event for a second year is a wonderful opportunity, according to Nancy Montserrat, director of development for VNACJ.

"Another showhouse allows us to raise awareness of the services of VNACJ and allows us to raise funds to fulfill our mission to provide everyone who needs care in the home and out, to get that care," she explained.



The home to be featured in this year's Stately Homes By-The-Sea, a fundraiser run by the Visiting Nurse Association of Central Jersey, is Sheep's Run in Rumson. PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE VISITING NURSE ASSOCIATION



The metalwork inside the designer showhouse is one of its most notable features.



The 2007 designer showhouse at the Metcalf Estate, which also is owned by the Mulheren family, raised nearly \$500,000 for the nonprofit organization, which provides health care services to people in Middlesex, Monmouth and Ocean counties. It attracted more than 13,000 visitors and featured participation by 44 interior designers and 13 landscape architects. The monthlong event also featured showhouse boutique shopping and a cafe by celebrity chef David Burke.

For 2008 chairwomen Liz Thees and Debbie Ansell, the chance to stage a second showhouse is an exciting — if not daunting — challenge.

"This is a great house," Thees said. "It's different from last year's house and it offers so many possibilities."

With its architectural bones, the home offers interior designers wonderful creative opportunities.

"When it opens, the showhouse will wow visitors," Ansell says. "You definitely don't get to see houses like this anymore."

Showhouse committee members have been in contact with interior designers throughout the metropolitan area, and designers chosen to participate in the event will be announced in late fall.

"The response was great last year, and because of the success, we expect even greater things this year," Thees said.

While the house will be a work in progress for months to come, its history makes for a compelling story in the present.

Located on the southwest corner of the intersection of Rumson Road and Bingham Avenue, the property was part of a dairy farm to which Thomas Vietor added 13 acres acquired from his neighbor to the west.

Vietor, an importer and commission merchant, became a member of the Sea View Golf Club, Rumson County Club and Sea Bright Beach Club when the family moved to New Jersey.

The Vietors sold the house in 1927. Henry Butler, the second owner, sold the house to Mary Riker in 1934. In 1949, Meador Wright of East Orange, publisher of Suburban Life magazine, purchased the house from Riker's estate for investment purposes. In 1952, Wright divided the land into three parcels. Lloyd and Sergie Christianson purchased the main house in 1961. Last year, the Mulheren family acquired the property from Lloyd Christianson's estate.

The showhouse will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays. Tickets are \$35, \$20 for seniors and \$25 for advance purchases. For more information, visit www.statelyhomesbythesea.com on the Web.

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A stairway window and chandelier.

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