

A new chapter for former Nahant school

By Tara Vocino / The Daily Item | Posted: Friday, July 3, 2015 3:00 am

NAHANT — The Nahant Preservation Trust and volunteers from the community have stepped up and renovated a former school building that fell under disrepair.

Collectively, the volunteers renovated the fencing and landscaping themselves and installed new heating and cooling systems to improve energy efficiency and comfort at the former Valley Road School, which is 100-plus years old.

Built in 1904, the former middle school/junior high, which closed in 1983, is a historical building.

According to Emily Potts, 71, of Nahant, president of the NPT, the woodwork in common rooms (former classrooms that are now office space) was stripped and refurbished; the roof was renovated after a fair amount water damage; and electric and heating units were installed.

“Some rooms were also repurposed,” Potts said. “The coat rooms, or cloakrooms — as they were called back then — became bathrooms. Replacing the HVAC units was more economical.”

Potts said the other 14 former classrooms are now being used as office space for an art gallery and legal and health-care compliance businesses. Each room is named for its purpose and named after someone, Potts said. A community room — also called the Serenity Room — can also be rented for public use.

Potts said the only thing left to do is to repair the cracked floorboards, which will be replaced when more donations flow in.

According to NPT Vice President Dennis Maroney, the group was founded in 1996 as part of a campaign to prevent the destruction of the former school.

Funds were needed quickly, Maroney said, to obtain a “stay of execution” and the NPT mounted a difficult, but successful, effort during a special Town Meeting to place the building in a status that would permit restoration.



Andy Puleo

Andy Puleo, the facilities manager at the refurbished Valley Road School building, looks out the window to the harbor in the Serenity Room.

“Fifty percent of the building is leased to tenants, providing annual operating revenue sufficient to operate the building, including utilities, insurance, repairs and maintenance,” he said.

Maroney said \$30,000 was spent on renovations and investments to the infrastructure.

He said the neighbors have helped by providing landscaping.

“They took it upon themselves to bring the community together, rather than taking it out of the town’s operating budget,” Maroney said.

According to Andy Puleo, 76, of Nahant, facilities manager, the building could have easily been left vacant.

“The way I picture it, the building outlived its life as humans outlive their life,” Puleo said. “But rather than closing, it came time for a new generation to be born and re-live the building again.”

His wife, Roz Puleo, 73, of Nahant, was a student in 1957 and is now a NPT board member.

“It’s a good building,” Puleo said. “Originally, they wanted to take it down and put houses there. But it has significance to the town, and it’s great that the committee got together and raised money to save it.”

Puleo said there was a lot of controversy and meetings for two years before Town Meeting members voted to save it in the ’90s.

A NPT flyer mailed to Nahant residents stated the purpose of the renovated building.

“The Nahant Community Center on Valley Road hosts the Historical Society, the Council on Aging, and the Boy and Girl Scouts,” it read. “The Serenity Room is a beautiful space and is available for meetings, classes and social events. For those looking for local office space, there are also spaces for rent, which help support the operating costs of the building.”