

MORRIS LEDGER

HOME SALES

A list of transactions across Morris County. Page 2.

Governor
Lewis
Morris



LEWIS MORRIS SAYS:

If you're looking for a way to honor our nation's war heroes this Memorial Day weekend, you have plenty of events to choose from. Check out our list of parades and memorial services on page 3.

THE NEWSPAPER FOR MORRIS COUNTY

News (973) 539-7910 or (973) 392-1800 E-mail [morisledger@starledger.com](mailto:morrisledger@starledger.com) Advertising (973) 392-4072 Delivery 888-453-3437 Listings for this section: E-mail event@starledger.com

A quiet house that fosters transformation

For 26 years, a Victorian home in Morristown has quietly housed women from all walks of life who have one thing in common: They battle addiction.

For the newly sober, this home is often the first stop on their journey to re-enter the world.

AROUND THE TOWNS



PAULA SAHA

They stay for several months, find jobs in Morristown, do household chores, develop routines and, all along, receive guidance and counseling from a professional staff of counselors.

This is Mrs. Wilson's, a private, non-profit halfway house for women, one of just a handful of women's

halfway houses in the state. The house is named for Lois Wilson, the wife of Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill Wilson ("Bill W."), and the house runs according to the AA 12-step philosophy.

While the recovering community in Morris County knows Mrs. Wilson's well, the greater public has little or no idea of the work done at the home for the last 26 years. But a new executive director and development director are trying to change all that.

"We do want people to know we're in Morristown," said Lee Williamson, director of development for the house. "We buy groceries in this town. The women here go out to work in Morristown as well. We really are a part of the community."

"We have so many women who have completed this house who have done so well for themselves," said Kathryn E. Howie, the executive director.

The house can currently accommodate 11 women, who stay for an average of six to eight months, though the time varies by individual. Mrs. Wilson's raises most of its half-million dollar budget from fund-raising, though it has some state contracts for women who meet certain criteria. But even that money only covers one-third to one-half of the costs for that client, Williamson said.

After a few weeks of getting used to living in the house, the women are required to go find full-time jobs and pay \$120 a week in rent. They have to follow strict rules about keeping their rooms neat and attend meetings outside the house so they have a support network when they leave.

Many alumni of the house say the structure is key to Mrs. Wilson's success.

One alumna, a 31-year-old woman who now lives in Union and asked not to be named, lived at the house about five years ago. She remembers working at a video store during that time. Today, she is a sales representative for a pharmaceutical company.

She started drinking at 13, she said. By the time she came to Mrs. Wilson's at 25, she was an intravenous drug user, a heroin addict.

"I was living down South and I had lost my job," she said. She used to do research at a hospital laboratory. "I had no way to pay the rent. Electricity was turned off, phone was turned off."

Her father found out about Mrs. Wilson's from its Web site, she said, and she lived there for about seven months in 1999 and 2000. "It was difficult," she remembered, "but it was worth it."

"They forced you to get involved in AA," she said. "They gave you a support network for when you left the house."

Some of the current staff members of Mrs. Wilson's are former clients. Elizabeth Johnson, for example, was a client at Mrs. Wilson's some 10 years ago. Now she is the house manager, and is on her way to getting certified as a counselor, she said.

"I believe with all my heart that Mrs. Wilson's was the place for me," she said. "I needed to be somewhere where I didn't know anybody."

Paula Saha can be reached at psaha@starledger.com or (973) 539-7910.