

A New Community House Is Built

The Community House on South Main Street served the people of Branford for over 30 years. By the mid-1950s with a growing population, it was obvious the building was no longer adequate in size or condition to support the on-going needs of the community. Recreational activities for citizens of all ages had greatly increased during



PICTURES OF THE PAST

Jane Bouley

this period under the directorship of Joe Trapasso. Many individuals and groups in town realized there was a need for a new recreational facility in Branford and that realization became known as Joe's Dream.

The Women's Club started the fund raising effort in 1958 with a benefit ball and received a state award for their overall efforts. Nearly 600 individual fund raising events were held in support of the new project, many done by the children of Branford. A Community Fair was held with 32 town groups participating to raise money. A total of \$175,000 was raised by the citizens of Branford.

On December 13, 1960 several hundred people attended an RTM meeting and the town appropriated the rest of the funds for a new community house.

Land on Church Street was donated to the town by the Hitchcock and Hammer families. The building committee consisted of John B. Sliney, chairman; Arline Ryan, secretary; Mandanna Armstrong; Dominick Giordano; Daniel Cosgrove; Thorvald F. Hammer and Louis Desi. Ground was broken on August 7, 1962 with T. F. Hammer turning the first shovel of earth. The grading of the lot was donated by Dan Cosgrove and the pilings by Bradley & Upson. The architects were Davis, Cochrane & Miller and Herbert White of Branford. The builder was the J. Warren Mylchreest Company of Shelton.

Made of brick and glass with a front terrace of Stony Creek granite, the new community house was 22,000 square feet. There were over 20 rooms in the new building. On the first floor was a 42 x 64-foot all-purpose room with maple floors.



The Community House on Church Street as it appeared in 1978.

Adjoining it was a 19 x 22-foot kitchen. The Women's Club and the Congregational Church donated much of the furniture for the rooms on the first floor. Various groups from Branford donated all of the interior equipment and furniture.

The Branford Garden Club was in charge of planting over 60 trees and shrubs, assisted by the school children of Branford and tree warden Dominick Guarnero. The Garden Club received a national award for the landscape design.

The 72 x 90-foot gymnasium with seating for 260 was named for Joe Trapasso. Dan Cosgrove donated the bleachers in the new gym. The two scoreboards were donated by the Veterans of WWII. The total cost of the building was \$420,000.

The grand opening of the community house took place on February 3, 1963 with First Selectman Donald Holabird cutting the ribbon. The new community house was nationally recognized as a state of the art facility and has been the prototype for recreational facilities in other towns. As originally intended, the community house was rededicated on July 19, 1981 to the 1,403 veterans that served in World War II from Branford, 36 of whom were killed. Two memorial tablets and an honor roll were placed in the front entrance.

Today the "new" Community House is 40 years old and has stood the test of time.



School children, under the direction of Joe Trapasso, planting trees at the Community House in 1963.

The floors in the all-purpose room and gymnasium are still original and in good condition. Dozens of recreational activities take place for people of all age groups.

Since 1963 thousands of Branford citizens and

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Photo by Ann Logan



Courtesy of the Branford Historical Society
Trapasso, far right, help plant

and visitors have used the facility
stands as monument to a communi-
ream and effort.

*itor's note: Jane Peterson Bouley is
istorian for the Town of Branford.*