

Sterling House invites you to ‘name the grotesque’

Sterling House is holding a ‘Name the Grotesque’ gargoyle labeling contest in association with its 85th anniversary and renovation this Fall that will culminate with four events on ‘Sterling House Weekend,’ Oct. 13-15.

Several weeks ago, Sterling House office staff began moving into some of its new space in the soon-to-be-completed 2.4 million dollar renovation that includes renovated food pantry, modern public access, rear stairwell and a four-stop elevator added to the rear of the 1886-built historic home.

Heating, ventilation, air conditioning, fire and building code upgrades are also included in the state-funded project that has been many years in the planning, according to Board of Directors Chairman James Millward. A public ribbon-cutting and open house celebrating the agency’s 85th anniversary and renovation completion will begin at 4 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 13. “We would like the community to join us for this historic event.” said Executive Director, Amanda Meeson.

Meanwhile, several weeks ago the aforementioned “grotesque,” a mainstay at the former home of Captain John W. Sterling dating back to the 19th century on Main Street, was anchored in place by workers high atop a new roofline, with perch-views rivaling any place along Stratford’s historic Academy Hill district.

Often referred to as a gargoyle, carvings like Sterling House’s dragon-like creature were placed in the upper corners of Gothic Cathedrals and palaces centuries ago. The local creature has been stolen and returned twice in the last 35 years. It should be safe from larcenous eyes and prying crowbars nearly 50-feet above ground level, but the team at Sterling House wants it to have a name.

The grotesque had been gracing the main hallway on the first floor of Sterling House since its last disappearance from the roof and return back in the 1990s. “The renovation offered us an opportunity to properly anchor it back on the home,” Meeson added.

Back in a new section on the first floor, Office Manager Donna Kelly and her staff are now serving the public via the new greeting room, part of a front office “makeover.”

Sterling House itself and the surrounding estate were deeded to the town of Stratford in 1932 by Capt. Sterling’s daughter, Cordelia, “for the purposes of a community center, playground and park for the use of the residents of the Town,” according to the deed executed after her death in 1931. The agency is publishing a commemorative ad booklet detailing the transaction and other history.

Renovations that are soon-to-be-completed include a four-level elevator from the basement-level Food Pantry to the third floor. Today, the expansive third floor rooms mainly serve as storage including historical records and memorabilia. But in the past it has been the site of lively fencing and ping-pong contests, among other activities.

The installation of new stairwell and elevator will allow the agency to program the third floor again and meet modern fire and safety code requirements.

Front office staff didn't miss a beat, either, and even as the furniture was literally being moved from one room to another on August 28, they continued to register local residents for its pre-school, after school, Fall soccer and other programs including scrapbooking, piano lessons and creative arts.

Kelly is co-chairing the ribbon-cutting and open house committee along with Stratford resident Meral Prewitt and they invite the public to stop by on Oct. 13 to tour the renovation and includes free refreshments and live music on two floors.

Persons interested in submitting names for the ongoing 'Name the Grotesque' contest should mail or drop-off their entries to: Sterling House Contest, 2283 Main St., Stratford, CT 06615.