

Stepping Stones gets grant to create tour

Curator will enhance visit with inspiration from AA co-founder

Sean Gorman
The Journal News

BEDFORD — The museum dedicated to the lives of Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill Wilson and his wife, Lois, is launching a new guided tour to help tell the couple's story to a wider audience.

Hundreds of people each year visit Stepping Stones, the Wilsons' home at 62 Oak Road in Bedford Hills. Many visitors have been personally touched by the work the couple has done to help alcoholics and their families cope with addiction.

"It's just going to refine the message of the story of hope that's embodied here at this home," Annah Perch, Stepping Stones execu-



Joe Lazese/The Journal News

Annah Perch, executive director of Stepping Stones, the former home of Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill Wilson and his wife, Lois, says the landmark has received a grant to create a new tour.

utive director, said this week of the tour, expected to be launched in October.

Stepping Stones recently received a \$2,500 grant from the New York Council for the Hu-

manities to create the tour of the house, which the couple lived in for decades before Bill died in 1971 and Lois died in 1988.

Bill Wilson drank heavily for about 17 years while married to Lois before he quit and co-founded Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935, according to Stepping Stones. Lois co-founded Al-Anon, a self-help group for family members coping with an alcoholic relative.

The organization has a guided tour now that is detailed but a bit informal, Perch said. Dr. Jill Vexler, a cultural anthropologist and curator, will create the new tour.

"She's going to enhance it (the tour) and hone in on the inspiration that's behind Bill and Lois Wilson in general, which is something that should appeal to everybody," Perch said.

For people recovering from addiction, visiting Stepping Stones is

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"almost a pilgrimage," Vexler said. "The power of the place touches their souls," she said this week.

And yet a tour also has to speak to people who don't have that experience or any knowledge about the Wilsons, Vexler said.

Bill Wilson's book — "Alcoholics Anonymous" — has sold millions of copies and lays out a 12-step program to treat alcoholism and stay sober, according to Stepping Stones.

"The 12 steps really can apply to anybody," Perch said. "You don't watch the Oprah Winfrey

show or Dr. Phil or any of those self-help people without hearing a little bit of the 12 steps described in some way."

The desk on which Wilson wrote the book is at Stepping Stones, which was listed in 2004 on the National Register of Historic Places. The home is kept in the same condition as it was when Lois Wilson died. In the bedroom on the second floor is a photo from 1965 of Bill kissing Lois, his arm around her shoulder.

Last year, Stepping Stones had about 1,800 visitors, including a man who traveled there from India, where he had been in Alco-

Visiting Stepping Stones

Tours are made by appointment. To schedule one, call 914-232-4822. For more information about Stepping Stones, visit www.stepsstones.org.

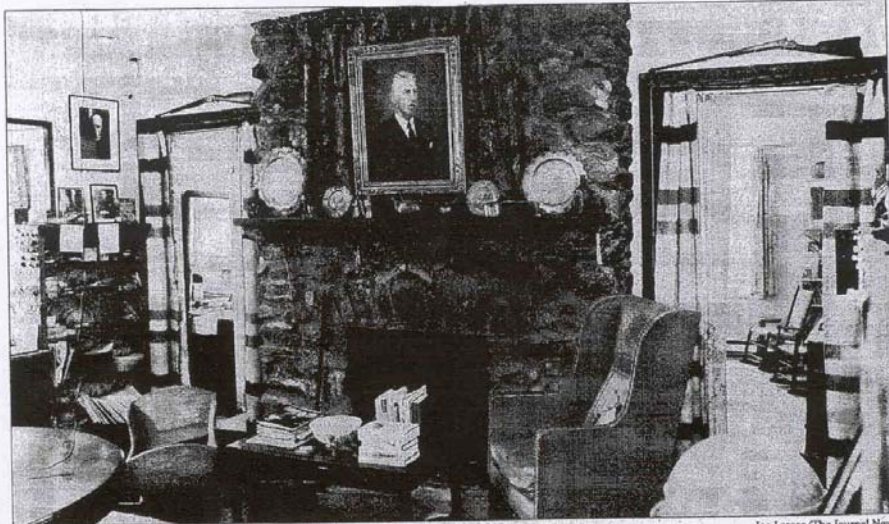
holics Anonymous for 27 years, Perch said.

Jasp Ketting, the founder of the Bedford Hills Historical Museum, said it's worthwhile to tour Step-

ping Stones, noting the couple's importance in helping others cope with the problems caused by alcoholism. The Bedford Hills Historical Museum, located in the basement of the Bedford Town House, has an exhibit on the Wilsons.

"I think the most important exhibit (in the museum) is the photo of the Wilsons because (Alcoholics Anonymous) has tremendous influence in the whole world," Ketting said.

Reach Sean Gorman at sgorman@lohud.com or 914-666-6481.



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Stepping Stones is kept in the same condition as it was prior to Lois Wilson's death in 1988.