

Chabad of Westport purchases historic Connecticut restaurant

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Chabad of Westport purchased the historic Three Bears restaurant. Photo by Paul Schott

WESTPORT – A year after moving into the site of the former Three Bears Restaurant on Newtown Turnpike, Chabad of Westport closed on the property on Jan. 29. Represented pro bono by Norwalk-based law firm Goldman, Gruder & Woods, the organization purchased the property from Three Bears Associates for \$1.6 million.

Since establishing a presence in Westport nearly a decade ago, Chabad has held programs in a variety of spaces, including the Kings Highway North home of its co-directors, Rabbi Yehudah and Dina Kantor; an office building on Ketchum Street; and the Westport Woman’s Club.

According to attorney Kenneth M. Gruder, the sale of the property has been in process for about 18 months. “I am very pleased that my firm and staff were able to help,” Gruder says. “It was our pleasure to have done this without a fee, helping to establish a new permanent home for a wonderful organization that reaches so many members of the community in many different ways.”

The move to the former restaurant in early 2012 resulted in a notice of violation issued by Westport town officials, as Chabad had not received prior approval to occupy the building. Chabad later was granted an abeyance by the town, allowing the group to remain at the site while officials reviewed its application to open a religious center. Last July, the Planning and Zoning Commission unanimously approved a site plan for Chabad to make the Newtown Turnpike property its permanent home.

“Whenever you deal with a nonprofit organization, the needs of the community and the interests of various board members must be considered,” Gruder says. “In these tough economic times, all nonprofits are having difficulty pursuing major objectives. It was gratifying that we could help Chabad

achieve this dream.” Gruder and his wife, Allison, have been longtime supporters of Chabad and were honorees at the organization’s 2011 annual gala.

Portions of the Three Bears building are more than 200 years old, originally used as a stagecoach shop. The current configuration was created in a redesign project at the turn of the 20th century.

Approximately \$150,000 in interior renovations is planned after the necessary permits are obtained from the Westport Planning and Zoning Commission. Able Construction of Norwalk has been selected to do the work.

Owner Peter Greenberg is a long-time Chabad supporter and has provided his services at cost, which he will continue to do. “I am looking forward to caring for this beautiful old building,” he says. “It has a lot of history behind it and I think it will serve our community very well.” Greenberg says that only minor interior modifications are required, and improvements are required, mostly to the parking area and some slight interior modifications.

“It is our honor to be in such a landmark building in Westport and we look forward to preserving the integrity of the building and at the same time providing a warm home for the community,” said Kantor. “To have one stable location, an address where everyone can find comfort, community, creative programming, education, and a full vibrant Jewish life adds both to the organization and to the greater community.

Kantor says that the center will continue to offer a diverse range of religious, educational, and cultural programs for all age groups. “What’s different is having one location, our own facility, and no longer needing to be like the Jews in the Sinai, packing and unpacking every time we want to host a program,” he says. “The town and the community have come together with great generosity to make this happen.”

For now the new center is known as Chabad House of Westport, Weston, Wilton and Norwalk.