

Stockton Opens Anne Azeez Hall in Woodbine

College's First Cape May County Instructional Site Dedicated April 29

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Galloway Township, NJ- Cape May County's first instructional site of The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey was formally opened at a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Monday, April 29, 2013 at the Anne Azeez Hall in Woodbine, NJ.

Anne Azeez Hall is a \$1,146,545 addition to the Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage of Stockton, located at 610 Washington Ave. The 2,800-square-foot facility includes two state-of-the-art, electronic classrooms, one of which holds 20-25 students and instructor; the other holds 35. When the dividing wall is open between the two, the multipurpose space can accommodate groups of 55 to 60.

"This is a remarkable day for Stockton as we look to expand our academic offerings here in Woodbine, Cape May County," said Stockton College President Herman J. Saatkamp.

"Today we also celebrate Anne Azeez, for which this expansion is named, adjacent to the historic Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage, named in honor of Anne's beloved husband," President Saatkamp said. "None of this would be possible if not for the generosity of Anne and Sam's son, Michael Azeez. The naming of this wonderful building and museum is an extraordinary tribute to his parents and endowing this building to Stockton will ensure its legacy for many, many years to come."

"Just a few months ago, Stockton celebrated the opening of Kramer Hall in Hammonton," said President Saatkamp. "Like Kramer Hall, Anne Azeez Hall will allow Stockton to establish a stronger presence here in Cape May County, a place where students and the community will have opportunities to access a Stockton education and learn more about the dynamic history of this community."

"We're also excited to be a part of the renaissance of Woodbine by serving as an

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anchor organization and helping add new vitality to this wonderful building and to this community,” President Saatkamp said.

More than 200 attended the ceremonies and reception, including representatives of the state, Cape May County and Woodbine, as well as people whose families were among the original settlers of Woodbine.

Lawrence Levy, a local history buff who now lives in Upper Township, said his grandparents, Barnet and Ida Breslow, settled in the borough early on. “I remember Mr. Sam Azeez fixing bicycles in his mother’s bakery,” Levy said. He said Woodbine was “the only documented community outside Israel to have been self-governed by Jews for 60 or 70 years.”

Anne Azeez was an honors student at Ocean City High School who began working at 17, as her family did not have the means to send her to college. She and Sam Azeez married and moved to Woodbine in 1956.

Anne Azeez’s son, Michael, president of Unitel Wireless, donated \$5 million including the original museum property to Stockton in September 2011, the largest gift in Stockton’s history.

Anne Azeez, the mother of four children and grandmother of 12, said, “The honors really belong to Michael. When the historic landmark Brotherhood Synagogue building in Woodbine came dangerously close to being sold, Michael had the vision to create a museum” that would honor the history of the multi-cultural community which was founded in 1891.

“The museum is now 10 years old,” Anne Azeez continued. “I am so proud of what Michael has done. When we decided to give the museum to Stockton, it was our intent to see it continue into perpetuity,” she said.

“With the addition of the classrooms, I hope that students in Cape May County will take advantage of the educational opportunities offered here in Woodbine,” Anne Azeez said. “I am grateful that we were able to provide another option for our young people to achieve success through learning.”

Michael Azeez, founder of the Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage, said, “I’m excited for the museum as part of Stockton and for the town of Woodbine. The new classroom building provides an expanded opportunity to build on the success of the past 10 years.”

Michael Azeez said his mother was “an inspiration to her friends and family.” He thanked the project’s contractors, and then singled out John Scarpa, as his partner for

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30 years, who “frequently sees things others don’t.” The John F. Scarpa Foundation partnered with the Azeez Foundation and Stockton to build the new hall.

Michael Azeez thanked President Saatkamp for having “the vision and leadership in making it work,” adding that Provost Dr. Harvey Kesselman “pushed it through at an administrative level.”

Dean Pappas, vice chair, Stockton Board of Trustees, thanked President Saatkamp for helping to bring “this wonderful new addition... that serves as an opportunity for Stockton College to offer programs in Cape May County.”

William Pikolycky, mayor of Woodbine, known as “Mayor Bill,” said with this opening, “Woodbine has come full circle” as a place of education. He noted that the community was once home to the state’s first agricultural school and a Navy training center.

He thanked Nancy Wittenberg, of the state Pinelands Commission, along with local and county officials, saying it was “historically significant” that “all these regulatory agencies worked together. That doesn’t happen very often,” he said, drawing a laugh.

Dr. Kesselman, provost and executive vice president of the college, said, “We are excited and proud of the opportunity that will be available to Woodbine and all the surrounding communities.” He said there will be community education offerings, continuing education courses and arts and cultural events. “There will be something for everyone” here, he said.

Michael Benson, Woodbine councilman and member of one of the founding families of Woodbine, said his initials were still carved into a bench in the synagogue where the speeches were held. He said the Azeezes had left a great legacy by restoring and adding to the site. “It’s a place for community, it’s a place for education, it’s a place for all of us to come together.”

Gerald M. Thornton, director of the Cape May County Board of Chosen Freeholders, said the Azeez’s legacy “will last for generations.”

Maribeth Capelli, chair of the Stockton Student Senate’s Student Welfare committee, said the partnership between Stockton and the Azeez family “helps us to educate, celebrate diversity and conquer all forms of stereotypes and prejudices.”

Current programs scheduled for Anne Azeez Hall include professional development workshops for K-12 educators hosted by the college’s Southern Regional Institute and ETTC (www.ettc.net). Undergraduate and graduate courses will also be scheduled at

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the facility during the summer and fall.

Other speakers at the ribbon-cutting were: Dr. Rodger Jackson and Dr. Michelle McDonald, incoming president and vice president of the Stockton Faculty Senate; and Eduardo Ortiz, president, Woodbine Borough Council. State Sen. Jeff Van Drew (D-1), who was called to the Legislature in Trenton, was represented by his communications director, Ed Kaczmariski.

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