

# A New Chapter for Old Reader's Digest HQ



**From left are Tricia Yarger, director of the Municipal Securities Division for Citi Community Capital; Robert Wilder, Jr., principal of Wilder Balter Partners, Inc.; RuthAnne Visnauskas, commissioner/CEO of NYS Homes & Community Renewal; William Balter, president of Wilder Balter Partners, Inc.; Victor Sostar, executive vice president of Regions Affordable Housing; Norma Drummond, acting commissioner of the Westchester County Department of Planning; Westchester County Executive George Latimer; and New Castle Town Supervisor Robert Greenstein.**

New York State Homes and Community Renewal and Wilder Balter Partners recently announced the completion of a \$21 million affordable housing development in the Chappaqua section of the Town of New Castle. The development renovated the iconic Reader's Digest headquarters building to create 64 mixed-income apartments.

Developed by Wilder Balter, Chappaqua Crossing is located on a sprawling campus that will include a variety of retail and commercial spaces and is also close to the Chappaqua Metro-North train station and Saw Mill Parkway.

"The moment I first walked through, I realized it was an incredible structure with a rich history," said Wilder Balter President Bill Balter. "As builders, we embraced the challenge of retaining the special architectural details while incorporating the modern amenities necessary to create a unique and highly desirable living environment. Our company has built thousands of homes, condos and apartments, but this presented a unique opportunity to work outside the box and we are extremely proud of the way it came together."

The original Georgian-style brick building with its signature cupola opened in 1939 and for seven decades served as the headquarters for the Reader's Digest magazine and associated businesses. The conversion included restoration and preservation of both the company's wood-paneled reference library and its stately formal entrance rotunda, while at the same time introducing creatively designed living spaces.

The development offers a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom units, with 38 affordable to low- and moderate-income residents who meet a variety of income-eligibility levels, and 26 available at market rate. Residents have access to landscaped courtyards, an outdoor play area, two fitness rooms, a club room, walking trails, on-site retail, potential job opportunities of the on-site office tenants, and a shuttle bus to the Metro-North train station in downtown Chappaqua.

When complete, the 700,000-square foot campus will offer a Whole Foods Market, Lifetime Fitness gym, additional shops and restaurants, and more than 500,000 square feet of office space.

The decision to convert the original portion of the Reader's Digest's 680,000-square-foot headquarters from office to housing was reached after discussions between Chappaqua Crossing owner Felix Charney, Balter, and the Town of New Castle.

"A lot of different ideas had been considered for the original section of the building," said Charney, who is president of Summit Development, based in Southport, Conn. "We always had included affordable housing in the plans we had for the overall property, and we had received approval to build new housing on the site. Then, in talking with Bill, who was relocating the Wilder Balter headquarters to Chappaqua Crossing, the idea emerged of converting the Cupola Building to housing. And Bill has done a terrific job accomplishing that goal."

New York State Homes and Community Renewal has provided about \$10 million in financing for the project in the form of tax-exempt bonds and subsidy. HCR's federal and state low-income tax credit allocation will generate \$5.4 million in equity. Other funding sources include \$4.1 million from Westchester County.

"This development is a perfect example of a community finding a creative way to breathe new life into an old corporate property," said Westchester County Executive George Latimer. "By incorporating a unique mix of affordable, workforce and market-rate housing, this complex becomes desirable to all different kinds of families."