

# Baltimore MESSENGER

Serving the city's northern neighborhoods

WEEK OF DECEMBER 18, 2008 | VOL. 40, NO. 10

www.baltimoremessenger.com

NEWSSTAND PRICE 50 CENTS

## Clubhouse gone

Baltimore Country Club razes historic facility on 17 acres of land that Roland Park is fighting to preserve **3**

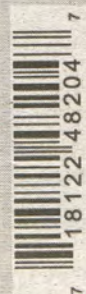


## Firehouse fun

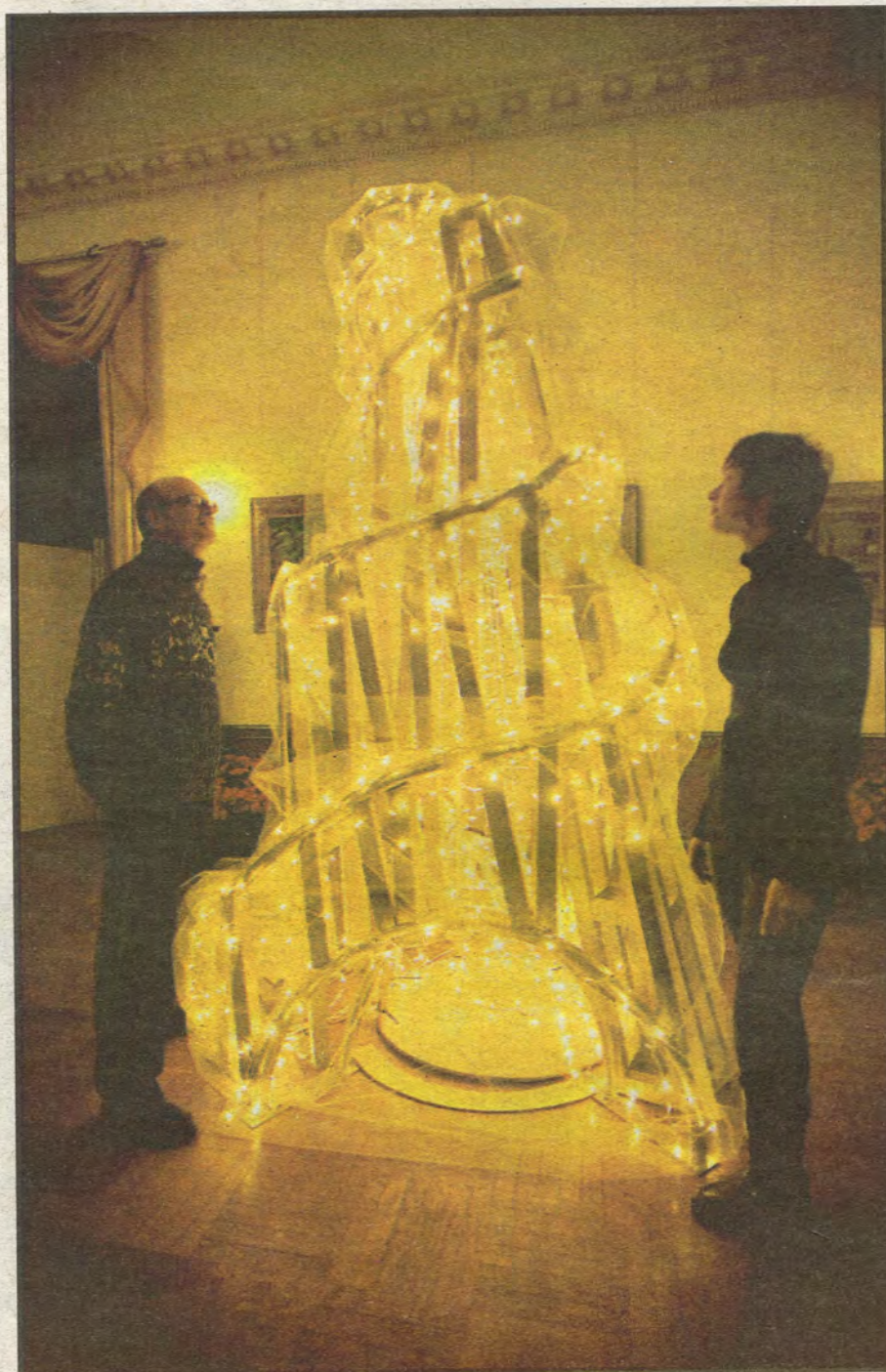
Roland Park station's open house raises about \$4,000 to help purchase new lockers for firefighters **16**

## Wrestle mania

More wrestlers on varsity and junior varsity squads add up to more wins for Boys' Latin Lakers **23**



Crime Log	4
Education	7
Lifetimes	8
Radnor-Winston	17
Hampden	18
Guilford	19
Mt. Washington	20
Best Bets	21
Region	24



## TOWERING ACHIEVEMENT

David Wiesand and Virginia Jarvis fashioned this Christmas "tree" at the Evergreen Museum and Library from foam, netting, glue and plywood, based on "Tattin's Tower," a building designed in the early 1900s but never built. **See Page 21.**

STAFF PHOTO BY DREW ANTHONY SMITH

## Ruscombe reimagined

### Mansion now office space

By Adam Bednar  
abednar@patuxent.com

The last resident of the old Ruscombe Mansion was a rare bird.

In early 2006, a rare black vulture had built a nest on the third floor of the rundown, 145-year-old house at 4901 Springarden Drive, off Greenspring Avenue in Coldspring-Newtown.

That's when one rare bird met another. Azola and Associates, which has carved a unique niche rehabbing and redeveloping buildings that no one else would buy, arrived to revamp the 12,000-square-foot structure as an office building.

See **Ruscombe**, Page 6

## The cost of being a councilwoman

By Adam Bednar and Larry Perl  
abednar@patuxent.com lperl@patuxent.com

For one member of the Baltimore City Council, constituent service means occasionally paying someone's fine out of her own pocket.

Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke said she sometimes pays environmental fines of up to \$150 for elderly constituents.

"I don't do it just because they got a ticket," Clarke said. "I do it when it's a financial hardship case or they're so very elderly."

Or, she adds, if she thinks the fine is unjust.

Environmental fines issued by the city Housing Department start at \$50 and triple if they aren't paid in 90 days. Citations can be issued for simply not putting a lid on a trash can after putting garbage out for collection.

Clarke, who represents much of north Baltimore

See **Clarke**, Page 2



# Former mansion now office space

Building already boasts five tenants

**Ruscombe,** from Page 1

Because the vulture was an endangered species, the company had to work around it, until its eggs hatched and the flock flew away.

"It was a very ominous and

nasty looking building," remembered Tony Azola, project developer for the family business. "It's the type of building we look for."

Two years and \$1.2 million later, there's new life for the house, which Azola renamed Stone Mansion.

We're not a  
mystery novel...

we're a family-owned firm.

Many local funeral homes have been bought out by big corporations in faraway cities. Mysteriously, the name on the outside remains the same — although the ownership is a brand new story.

As a family-owned and operated funeral home, we have deep roots in our community and a long history of personal service. So, if you value a business that has a firm commitment to its neighbors — not the financial interests of distant shareholders — well, our family wrote the book.

*Mitchell-Wiedefeld  
Funeral Home, Inc.*

Funeral Directors

6500 York Road • Rodgers Forge

410-377-8300



STAFF PHOTO BY SARAH NIX

The Azola family has turned the long-abandoned Ruscombe Mansion in Goldspring-Newton into offices, now called Stone Mansion. Posing there Nov. 28 are, from left to right, Marty, Lone, Matt, Kirsten and Tony Azola.

The building officially reopened in October and has five tenants at \$17 a square foot, including a certified public accountant, a travel club, two eateries and the headquarters of the Jones Falls Watershed Association and Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, a watchdog group.

There are a couple of spaces available on the first and third floors and Azola hopes to rent the entire 3,000-square-foot second floor to one firm.

His company specializes in challenging rehab projects, Azola said. It's best known one was the Bromo Seltzer Tower downtown, now called the Bromo Seltzer Arts Tower.

"We usually take on projects most (developers) don't want," Azola said.

The Stone Mansion involved not only preserving the historic elements of the house, but also gutting modern additions, such as drop ceilings.

The mansion, built in 1863 for James Wood Tyson, is considered the "sister mansion" to the nearby Cylburn Mansion, which was a summer home for his brother, Jesse.

Ruscombe was a residence until

'It's the type of  
building we look for  
... We usually take  
on projects most  
(developers) don't want.'

Tony Azola, project developer

1948, when Bais Yaakov, a Jewish girls school, moved into the building. The school remained there until the late 1970s. The property was sold to the city in 1978 and leased as office space, but by the fall of 1997 it was vacant and in disrepair. In July 2004, the city put out a request for proposals to local developers. Azola's bid was accepted the next year, but Azola didn't gain full control until 2006.

The house needed new ground floors because the existing ones had deteriorated to dirt. The main staircase, damaged by a fire in the 1950s, was now destroyed. Pipes had exploded and left the base-

ment under three feet of water. The top floor held the biggest surprise, Azola said. As he climbed the stairs to check out the condition of the third floor, a large vulture swooped out of the dark and almost knocked him down the stairs.

The vulture made an already difficult rehab even more difficult. For six months, workers took on other parts of the house until the vulture and its young left, presumably to migrate south.

The company went to great lengths to restore the building to its original state, even consulting a rabbi — here from Israel for a wedding at the time — who had worked at Bais Yaakov when the school used the mansion, Azola said.

Together, they went through the school's records to get a clearer idea of what the house used to look like, Azola said.

It was all part of their zeal to restore what Azola called "the forgotten mansion" to the prominence that its sister mansion, Cylburn, enjoys.

"Our passion is to restore historic buildings," Azola said.