Renovated therapeutic pool reopens in Palo Alto

By Pam Walatka, Special to the Town Crier

A warm-water, wheelchair-accessible therapeutic pool located at 3864 Middlefield Road in Palo Alto has been a critical alternative health-care and exercise resource for thousands of Bay Area residents. Clients old and young attest to the benefits of warm-water exercise and therapy as well as the expertise of the Community Association for Rehabilitation Inc. staff. For seniors, many of them stroke victims, the center offers effective and innovative services.

"The pool renovation at the Betty Wright Swim Center in Palo Alto is wonderful," said Los Altos resident Kimberly McIntyre, whose 2-year-old daughter uses the therapeutic pool operated by the center.

"The pool has had a complete makeover, locker rooms have been painted and a few other upgrades have been made," McIntyre said. "It's a joy to be at a swim center that is clean and new. It's a great place for swim therapy."

John Stidd of Los Altos began using the therapeutic pool after a stroke. He said, "I work with an individual instructor and I like it. Medical centers should direct more people there."

Founded by disability advocate and recognized aquatic innovator Betty Wright, the center first opened to the public in 1967. The pool has remained true to the founder's vision to serve people with disabilities or anyone who can benefit from the therapeutic effects of warm water.

The association celebrated the reopening Jan. 29 and showcased the pool's new state-of-the-art fiberglass shell, a luxury historically restricted to high-end hotels and resorts.

The fiberglass shell will ensure higher water quality and require less maintenance and fewer chemicals than the traditional concrete shell.

The reception area has also been renovated to better accommodate wheelchairs, and the walls are painted in tranquil tan and blue colors to create a calm environment.

By providing innovative aquatic services through the donations and volunteer hours of community members, the Betty Wright Swim Center has remained open to the public, while many similar therapeutic pools throughout California have had to close.

Donations from the Eva and Andy Grove Foundation and local philanthropists finance in-staff training, scholarships and operational expenses to help keep this community resource available.

"It is truly the coming together of community resources, solutions and optimism that enables the Betty Wright Swim Center to continue to flourish," said Renate Olaisen, director of the center since March.

Subsidized aquatic therapy for children and adults with cerebral palsy, autism and other neurological disabilities, as well as physical therapy, aquatics personal training, open swim and inclusive swim lessons for people of all ages and ability levels are also offered.

The swim center is open year-round, 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mondays through Wednesdays; open swim 6:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays; 8:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Saturdays. Physical therapy and personal training require reservations.

The Betty Wright Swim Center is located at 525 Charleston Ave., Palo Alto. For more information, call 494-1480.