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New Coast Guard station breathes life

By Jim Gilbert

Provincetown West Enders don't generally agree on everything, except, perhaps, for the almost universal acclaim now being showered on the recently finished Coast Guard Station and pier.

The station culminates a 10-year planning effort, including a three-year design and construction phase, which has resulted in a complex that not only blends beautifully with the surrounding neighborhood, but actually preserves and enhances the historic qualities of the surrounding area.

An added bonus for those who like to see new buildings blend into an existing environment is that the station has solar heating panels, the first government buildings in Massachusetts to be furnished with such alternative features.

One old-timer in the neighborhood summed up many thoughts on the entire project when he said, "For once, the government did it all right."

The praise now being heaped on the Coast Guard is in marked contrast to the downright animosity that has characterized some attitudes toward the Coast Guard in recent years. Fishermen and town officials have complained bitterly not only about response time for search and rescue calls, but about the seeming indifference of the Coast Guard to the town's waterfront problems.

The old Coast Guard station is at Race Point, nearly four miles from the boat at MacMillan Wharf. The Coast Guard is proud of its ability to get rolling within 10 minutes of a rescue call, despite the distance between the Race Point and MacMillan Wharf. But that distance has often translated socially and emotionally into a wide interpersonal gap between the "Coasties" and townspeople.

Both now share a hope that the old differences, the old animosities are at an end. The fact that the Coast Guard is moving into a new building that is already gratefully accepted by the town gives impetus to a hope for better and closer relations.

Subsistence Specialist 2nd Class Jephrey Boisvert, the cook at the Race Point station, is happy for other reasons. Most of the men in the service here "are not hung up over popularity with the townspeople," he said. "We have a job to do, and we do it."

But the prospect of moving into the new building enralls him. "Most of the restaurant owners in town," he said, "would prefer my new kitchen to theirs."

Dick Mullin, of the Cambridge architectural firm Symmes, Maini and McKee, was the design supervisor for the project. Much of the credit for the final plan falls on his shoulders, although he said he did little of the actual drawing.

Part of the sensitivity of the design to the neighborhood may be due to the fact the Mullin himself is no stranger to Provincetown, particularly to the West End. His brother owns a home on Tremont Street in the West End. Mullin said he has spent quite a bit of time there over the years.

One of the interesting features of the design process is

that the architectural firm was asked by the Coast Guard to draw three different plans for the building. One, Mullin said, was a conventional, straight barracks much like those seen on Army bases anywhere.

The second design was intended to maximize the efficiency of the solar collectors and minimize the cost of the buildings. That option would have meant one large, square building "with a huge sloped roof," Mullin said.

The third plan, the one recommended by the firm and finally accepted by the Coast Guard, attempted to "break down the scale to be consistent with the houses around it." Materials were chosen that were similar if not identical with the houses in the neighborhood.

The attention paid to detail in the project is evidence of the sense of purpose behind the design. Even the clapboard stains were chosen so that the building will soon weather to the same hue and tone as many of the older shingled homes in the neighborhood.

The main building consists of a series of wings that house the barracks, operations rooms, galley mess halls, recreation rooms and an entryway. Each wing is on a different scale, although the lines are identical. The result is a long, rather narrow building that looks more like a group of smaller Cape Cod-style buildings tacked together that in many ways resemble the architectural development all along the Provincetown waterfront.

On the other side of the complex, beyond the wide, green lawn and curving driveway is the "boat house," which is to be used for a variety of purposes, including storage. That building is the carefully reconstructed remains of the old cold storage cannery building that once occupied the lot.

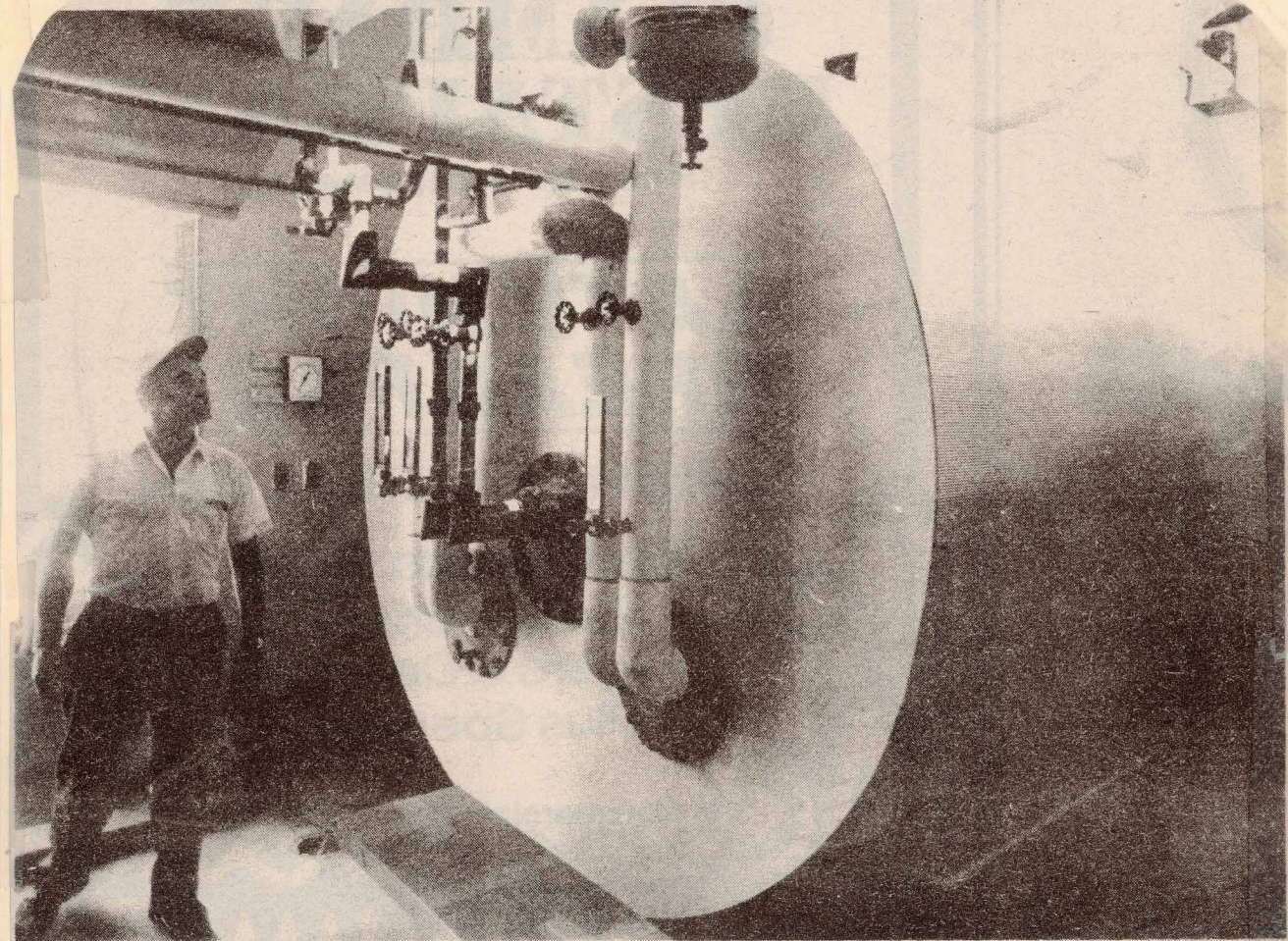
Mullin said that one entire wall of the building had to be removed and the entire support structure of the building had to be rebuilt. The result is worthwhile, however, and gets a stamp of approval from even the most critical eye.

One such eye belongs to Josephine DelDeo, artist, nearby restaurant owner, and chairman of the town's historic district study committee when the station complex was being designed. The Coast Guard and the designers, DelDeo said, "deserve a great deal of commendation" for the project. She described the new station as "a showpiece."

The station really does blend into the community, DelDeo said, and will have a positive psychological impact on the neighborhood. She also appreciates the restoration work, which captures even the smaller details of the original cannery, such as the little towers on the top of the building. The cannery, she said, was a recurring motif for artists in Provincetown since the town's first years as an art colony.

Another positive aspect of the project said Mary-Jo Avellar, neighbor as well as chairman of the board of selectmen, is that the Coast Guard has made good on all the promises made at public hearings before construction was made.

... into old West End



Advocate photos by Jim Gilbert

Construction foreman Joseph Silveira checks gauges in station's solar-powered hot water tank.

She said the station does not block anyone's view, the wood picket fence was built along the lines recommended by neighbors "and the pier looks terrific." Avellar said she has noticed neighbors painting and sprucing up their houses, something she attributes to the new station.

To her, the station has another psychological advantage. She said walking home late at night the neighborhood was usually dark and scary. The lights and presence of the station has changed all that.

"I feel safer," she said. "It's almost like having a police station there."

Further testimony to the success of the project comes from the construction supervisor, Joseph Silveira of the J. L. Marshall and Sons contracting company of Seekonk. He said the Coast Guard "went first class with all details of

construction.

For example, the stairways and bannisters are finished in beautiful oak. The huge, multi-paned, 16-foot-high windows of the recreation room are framed in solid mahogany.

Silveira said that the design is so nice, so unlike a Coast Guard station, that people actually come by and want to buy the building. He said just last week an elderly woman "who looked like she sleeps on \$100-dollar bills," asked him if she could buy the new station. "Price is no object" Silveira said the old woman told him.

From the Coast Guardsmen's point of view, moving to