

The Daily Item (Lynn, MA) - Lynn Neighbors

Bridgewell celebrates opening New state-of-the-art building will feature programs, clinic LYNN

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ITEM PHOTOS/REBA M. SALDANHA

PHOTO: Cutting the ribbon at the new Bridgewell mental health day activity facility on Boston Street in Lynn on Tuesday (from left) State Rep. Robert Fennell, City Councilor Paul Crowley, Bridgewell Board of Directors President Gordon, Mayor Edward J. Clancy Jr., Bridgewell CEO Robert S. Stearns, Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation Commissioner Elin Howe, and State Rep. Steven Walsh.

As it marks 50 years of connecting people with possibilities, **Bridgewell** celebrated the grand opening of its newest, most efficient, custom-designed facility last week when it cut the ribbon on its Boston Street Center. The Boston Street Center is serving a variety of purposes for **Bridgewell**, including hosting its Day Habilitation and supported work programs, a satellite mental health clinic, and serving as a home base for the transportation and maintenance departments.

"It's a state-of-the-art building," said **Bridgewell** CEO Robert Stearns, who was joined in the ribbon cutting by Mayor Edward J. Clancy Jr., Elin Howe, commissioner of the Mass. Department of Mental Retardation, Mandy Chalmers, Region III Director of the Mass.DMR, state Reps. Robert Fennell and Steven Walsh, state Sen. Thomas McGee and other city and company officials. "It has allowed us to centralize operations in Lynn and respond to a tremendous need for the services we provide."

The Day Habilitation program offers a variety of services to individuals age 22 and up with mild to severe developmental disabilities. The program addresses issues such as self-care, nutrition, household skills, communication, and sensory, motor, behavioral and social development and provides opportunities for community experiences. The program also offers mobile day habilitation services to individuals with developmental disabilities living in nursing homes who otherwise would not have opportunities to engage in social and educational experiences in the community.

Job training is one of the main components of the Employment Services division, according to **Bridgewell** Chief Operating Officer Kelly Johnson. "Work is brought in for people to do on site, while others work with job coaches and are taken out to various jobs in the community," Johnson said. In addition to the Day Habilitation program and Employment Services division, there is a mental health clinic that serves as a satellite facility for similar clinics **Bridgewell** runs in Danvers and Lowell. Individuals come for psychiatry, individual counseling, group therapy and medication management.

The transportation department and fleet management had been operating out of two other Lynn locations before they were consolidated at Boston Street. **Bridgewell** operates 26 transportation runs out of Boston Street every weekday morning and afternoon, bringing passengers with disabilities to and from Boston Street and other area day programs. The maintenance department had been renting space in Peabody for its base of operations prior to relocating to Boston Street.

Bridgewell bought a building that had formerly been home to Boyd's Potato Chips, but had been vacant for more than five years. The renovation project included a total rehabilitation of part of the building and tearing down and rebuilding another section. **Bridgewell** invested \$3.5 million into the project.

"We have experienced great cooperation from the City," said **Bridgewell** Director of Housing Elaine White, who is in charge of finding sites for the agency's programs. "We worked with the Conservation Commission, the City Council and the Inspectional Services Dept. Everything worked out very well."

Bridgewell was founded in 1958 as Greater Lynn Mental Health, an agency committed to coordinating services for children and families struggling with emotional difficulties.

With the deinstitutionalization movement in the 1970s, it began operating residential programs.

It changed its name in 2005. Today, **Bridgewell** has 1,100 employees working in more than 100 locations in 18 communities in Essex and Middlesex counties serving more than 3,000 individuals a year.

Bridgewell will hold a 50th anniversary celebration on Nov. 7 at the Seaport Hotel in Boston. The agency will honor Joseph Gibbons, president and CEO of Salem Five Bank, and Gov. Michael Dukakis and his wife, Kitty Dukakis. Major sponsors of the event include Salem Five, Sentenia Systems and Caruso & McGovern Construction.



PHOTO:
Massachusetts Department of
Mental Retardation Commissioner
Elin Howe spoke at the opening of
the new Bridgewell facility on
Boston Street

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