



Service, Stewardship and Smiles

John Woodard Celebrates 50 Years as a Trustee

John Woodard was a young lawyer when he first joined the Board of The Boston Home (TBH) in 1971. He was recruited by John Gardiner, a longtime friend of his father and a TBH Trustee and later Board Chair, who felt the Board was in need of some “young blood.” Impressed by the mission of TBH, John agreed to get involved.

Today, John smiles warmly as he recalls some of his early Board meetings: *“In those days, the lady Trustees and the men Trustees had their own well-defined areas of responsibility, and one did not trespass upon the other. As a new Board member, I was eager to suggest some efficiencies, so I had the temerity to suggest that we contract out the laundry services rather than continue to do them on-site. One of the women on Board immediately rebuffed my suggestion, saying—‘I will not have my ladies sleeping on permapress sheets!’ Because, of course, it was an all-women’s facility then, and the residents slept on beautiful linen sheets.”*

From the start, John dedicated himself to getting to know TBH and its residents. Each time he visited, John spent time with residents who gradually became his friends. As his role on the Board grew, John became involved in several transformational projects. The first of these, completed in 1985, was the addition of the pavilion, connecting the main 1927 facility to the Charles E. Cotting Building, which had been built as staff housing in 1965. *“Believe it or not,”* John recalls, *“the whole project was completed for less than \$500,000. Even so, some Trustees were concerned about making the expenditure. We were all very conscious of our roles as stewards of an organization with a venerable history. We met with Mr. Cotting, who had been Chair of the Board from 1939 to 1974, to show him the plans. It felt important to have his blessing.”* The now familiar addition overlooks the TBH garden, and is home to the B.Fit! day program.

By the early 1990s, TBH’s mission was increasingly focused on serving people with multiple sclerosis. With this specialization in mind, John, then Board Chair, and Carol Lobron, Executive Director, led TBH to embark on a bold expansion of both the physical facility and the community it served. Ground was broken on TBH’s new wing in 1992. John recalls that he felt quite responsible for the tremendous changes TBH was undertaking: *“At that time, when I came to TBH for meetings, I took the number 21 bus from Forest Hills where I parked my car. Approaching the TBH campus shortly after construction had started, I was shocked by the sight of the enormous gaping hole in the ground, and, thought ‘What have we done?’ Up to that point,”* he laughs, *“we had just been looking at plans!”* By 1994 the new construction was complete, along with renovation of the existing facility. At the same time, TBH began admitting male residents for the first time since 1927. *“It was a transformational moment.”* says John, *“We were doubling the footprint, as well as the number of residents we served. Now, I look back and think, ‘Where would we be if we hadn’t done it?’ It was the right decision, and we made it with good guidance and careful analysis. It was exciting. As a Trustee, I value the importance of always thinking ahead of yourself, not standing still—always asking what more can we do? If you are not thinking expansively, you are doing yourself a disservice.”*

In addition to his service to TBH, John has served as a trustee and chair of Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, Faulkner Hospital and Dedham Country Day School. He also served on the Town of Dedham Personnel Board and Finance Committee and as warden of his local parish, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, all while also practicing law for over 40 years with a concentration in labor and employment. Reflecting on the role of service in his life, John shares, *“I think it made me a better lawyer, in that it made me aware of the larger world and the needs that exist. It helped me to see decisions not just from a legal perspective, but also from a human perspective. Conversely, being a lawyer helped me as a Trustee because through legal training I learned facilitation, mediation, and a whole variety of skills that could be applied in a Board context. Looking back, I don’t think my life would feel as complete as it does if I hadn’t been as involved as I have been. Service has been very much a part of my life, and my formation as an individual. As long as I can contribute, I would like to continue to do so.”*