



TBH president and CEO Marva Serotkin with client Janice Kushner.

Jewish CEO keeps Home at forefront

The Boston Home celebrates 125th anniversary

By Kristin Erekson

As president and chief executive officer of The Boston Home (TBH) in Dorchester, Marva Serotkin helps residents find “hope over hardship.”

For nine years Serotkin has been at the forefront of boosting services at the non-profit, which functions as a specialized care facility for adults with advanced multiple sclerosis and other progressive neurological diseases.

As TBH reached its 125th anniversary in 2006, Serotkin said she was able to look back

at all of the positive accomplishments made that past year, including the advancement of technology and the establishment of The Boston Home Institute, a unique program in New England that aims to set standards of excellence, conduct research and share knowledge on MS care.

“Growing up in a Jewish family, one thing that has always been a priority for me is the value of education,” Serotkin added. “We are working to bring people in to [TBH to] demystify them about [these diseases].”

TBH was established in 1881 by Cordelia Harmon, a trained nurse, as a place for only nine permanently dis-

abled individuals who could not be cared for in their homes or accommodated in area hospitals.

Now with 96 occupants – six percent of whom are Jewish – living at the institution, the staff works hard to be at the cutting-edge of providing the best assistance, according to Florence P. Rawls, the director of community development at TBH. That mission is fulfilled as officials at the facility employ in-house staff to repair electronic wheelchairs, encourage the use of the hi-

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tech computer center, provide hands-free equipment systems for environmental controls in rooms, and even offer a spirituality and wellness program that uses meditation and relaxation to nurture the needs of the mind, body and spirit.

The institution also teamed up recently with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Central New England Chapter, to design B.Fit!, an innovative, therapy and social-based day program for adults with MS and other advanced neurological diseases, Rawls said.

“For me, both personally and professionally, I feel that the role of TBH is to help people who

have particular challenges enjoy life,” Rawls added.

Approximately 400,000 Americans have MS, a chronic, unpredictable, neurological disease that affects the central nervous system, according to information on the National MS Society’s Web site. Most people are diagnosed with the ailment between the ages of 20 and 50, figures also show.

Janice Kushner, 61, a resident of TBH for eight and half years, said she was struck with symptoms of the disorder when she was 25 years old.

“I was very passive and I didn’t perceive there was a problem,” Kushner added. “I was overtired. I

went blind in one eye after my son was born and then I had bladder problems. I went to see a neurologist and learned that I had MS. At that time, I didn’t even know anything about the disease.”

Kushner, who is currently confined to a wheelchair, moved to TBH after she had difficulty taking care of herself in her Needham home. Now, Kushner is one of the most active residents at the institution, where she participates in photography classes, outdoor adventures and art lessons.

“My life has changed so much,” Kushner said. “I couldn’t see myself anywhere else.”