

Clark's Manor: Mind, body and soul wellness for people with chronic mental illness

August 25, 2021



Co-founders Chuck and Barbara Widger of Berwyn in front of Clark's Manor. Their son, Clark, has lived there for the last year.

Behind the black shutters and fieldstone walls, something very special – groundbreaking, in fact – is happening at this stately Media home.

People with chronic mental illness live here. One is Conestoga alum Clark Widger, 38, and the property bears his name: Clark's Manor.

But Clark and his housemates aren't under lock and key. Far from it.

They play sports, music and video games; they run errands, take classes, go to concerts and ball games, and each night cook and enjoy dinner together in the gourmet kitchen.

But they live with exceptional supports in place: behavioral health professionals from Elwyn who hold master's degrees at a minimum.

Therapy is woven into their daily routines but it's subtle, respectful and encouraging. Clinicians don't live on site but one or two are always on the property to offer guidance and support.



Music enthusiast Clark Widger, Conestoga '02, jams in the Music and Arts Studio (above), one of many subtly therapeutic spaces at Clark's Manor.

Clark's Manor is the first program of its kind in the tri-state area, modeled after an innovative "milieu-style" program, Wild Acre, in Boston. After cycling through other facilities, Clark Widger had thrived at Wild Acre but wanted to move closer to his family in Berwyn. His parents couldn't find a place like Wild Acre here, so they created one. They bought a 10,000 sq. ft. farmhouse on four acres off Providence Rd. and tapped nearby Elwyn for its therapeutic expertise.

When it's fully occupied, eight men and women, stable and committed to their treatment, will live at Clark's Manor. For some it will be a forever home, for others, a stepping stone to independent living.

Open for a year, the property is continually evolving to accommodate residents' interests.

A huge music fan, Clark loves jamming on guitar in the new sound-proof music studio in the converted garage.

An adjacent art studio – where the new art therapist helps residents express themselves through drawing, painting and other fine arts – is rounding into form. And a brand new fitness center is taking shape on the lower level, replacing the indoor pool.

"People with chronic mental health issues really benefit from movement," says Art Fastman, director of operations at Clark's Manor. "It's great for mental health, physical health, sleep, mood, digestion – you name it."

Next to the gym, a media room with a big screen and comfy seats is coming this fall. Residents will be able to screen and discuss movies, play computer games (including cognitive remediation exercises) and just hang out.

Staff is always willing to experiment with new activities. A recent conversation about Bruce Lee movies led to regular Tai Chi classes in the living room.

"We give them a safe space to try things they might have been afraid to try before," Fastman says. "It builds confidence."

Safe, homey, expertly staffed, exceptionally well-equipped and attentive to individual needs, Clark's Manor has it all.

Families interested in learning more about Clark's Manor are invited to contact Art Fastman, Director of Operations, at Art.Fastman@elwyn.org or call 610-675-7669.

*This article first appeared in Savvy Main Line: Caroline O'Halloran, 2021, Savvy Main Line, "Clark's Manor: Mind, body and soul wellness for people with chronic mental illness", Savvy Main Line, August 25, 2021.



An indoor pool was filled and the space is being converted to a gym/sport court for basketball, pickleball, volleyball, dance, yoga and Clark's favorite past-time, skateboarding. The sport court will let Clark skateboard comfortably year round.



A gentle fountain and serene sitting area on the spacious grounds of Clark's Manor. A vegetable garden will be planted soon.