



# Dwelling Place

NONE OF US ARE HOME UNTIL ALL OF US ARE HOME

## GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT

**LIKE THOUSANDS OF OTHERS** Jim Ray had fallen through the cracks at one point in his life. A serious, untreated mental illness had led him to be disenfranchised from his family, and living in various half way houses in Seattle. He was just barely a step off the curb of living on the streets; one more broken and struggling soul in that city.

Jim had no money and had been kicked out of grocery stores for shoplifting items to sell for cigarettes. He was utterly humbled by the experience. Just a few years prior, he was remodeling his first home in Telluride, organizing jazz festivals – a bon vivant amongst the skiing elite in the mountain hideaway in Colorado. And now he owned one pair of bib overalls, a couple of T-shirts, and little else, living on the brink of homelessness.

During those years, Jim would often tell people he met that he was a multimillionaire. They would nod and chuckle, grin and walk away. No one stayed around long enough to listen to him talk about his life. But in fact, James Widener Ray was heir to a fortune. His ancestor, Joseph Widener, owned the first rail lines between New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.

Reviewing Jim's medical records, the terms "grandiosity," "inflated self-worth," and "delusions of grandeur" were not uncommon, all referring to Jim's statements about his family's wealth. This was an understandable mistake. It is rare for a multimillionaire to walk into a hospital ER wearing rags and rambling incoherently about John Singer Sargent painting portraits of grandmothers and great uncles and cousins drowning on the sinking Titanic.

Through the efforts of a psychiatrist who listened and believed Jim's story, Jim agreed to a professional guardian who initially worked with a couple of Jim's family members. A care system was developed, and Jim began his arduous journey back to the life he was more familiar with, only now, more understanding of some of the realities of life that most of the very wealthy are sheltered from knowing.

**JIM HAD COME TO KNOW** well the plight of those who were homeless, under-served, ignored, and rejected. His heart was moved by the marginalized, because he himself was marginalized. His experiences led Jim to found the Raynier Institute &

Foundation. During his lifetime, Jim focused the Foundation's support on efforts to improve the lives of youth in the Seattle area. After his untimely death in 2005 at the age of 57, the Foundation's directors decided to honor him by expanding funding to efforts to alleviate homelessness and mental illness both in Seattle and Philadelphia.



***His own experiences of suffering were a taproot of compassion for others.***

James Widener Ray's story touches us at Project H.O.M.E. in many ways. His life-long struggle with bipolar disease reminds us of the vulnerability that is part of the human condition. His life also witnesses to the amazing gifts, dignity, and beauty that are present even in persons who go through profound hardships. We also believe his own experiences of suffering were a taproot of compassion for others, which took the form of his astounding generosity to so many.

**JIM'S STORY ALSO TOUCHES** us in a very tangible way. The Raynier Foundation, which he founded, has pledged a significant contribution to Project H.O.M.E., in large part to fund our newest residence on Venango Street. This residence will open its doors later this month to provide safe, dignified, and affordable housing. It will include 53 efficiency apartments, including 33 for formerly homeless persons, 7 for veterans, and 13 for low-income persons. And it will have

a fitting name: The James Widener Ray Homes – a wonderful legacy to the triumph of his spirit.

We are excited to welcome home 53 new persons as part of our ongoing efforts to end homelessness in Philadelphia. The project would not have been possible without the Raynier Foundation, Barbara and Bob Ryan, and a transformational leadership gift from Leigh and John Middleton. The Middleton Housing Partnership supplied start-up capital funding and enabled Project H.O.M.E. to access federal stimulus dollars. We are deeply grateful to all of these supporters. And we are grateful for the inspiring story of James Widener Ray, whose name the residence will proudly bear, and to all those who bear witness to the power of transformation and the resilience to turn suffering into hope and possibility for others.

*In our next edition of Dwelling Place, learn more about The James Widener Ray Homes and our new housing initiative to help end homelessness in Philadelphia.*

*Above: James Widener Ray, whose name will be given to our new 53-unit residence on Venango Street.*

A CELEBRATION OF THE OPENING OF  
 JAMES WIDENER RAY HOMES



# ABOUT JAMES WIDENER RAY



James Widener Ray was one of those rare human beings filled with the challenges of life and enthralled with the possibilities of what could be. He had boundless energy and a hearty, from-the-gut laugh. Everyone was his friend; he invited people into his life with no judgments and recognized goodness and potential where others didn't see it.

But like thousands of others, James Widener Ray had a serious, untreated mental illness that led him to the streets of San Francisco, living in various halfway houses – barely a step off the curb of living on the streets.

Jim, as his friends knew him, would often tell people he met during those years that he was a multimillionaire. They would nod and chuckle, and walk away. But in fact, James Widener Ray was heir to a fortune. His grandfather, Peter Widener, owned the first rail lines between New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. At his death in 1915, Peter was the wealthiest man in Philadelphia.

Reviewing Jim's medical records, the terms "grandiosity", "inflated self-worth", and "delusions of grandeur" were not uncommon, all referring to Jim's statements about his family's wealth. But one psychiatrist believed Jim's story. A support system was developed, and Jim began his arduous journey back to the life he was more familiar with – but now with more understanding of some of the realities of life for the most vulnerable in society.

**Jim had come to know well the plight of people who are homeless, the underserved, the ignored, and the rejected. His heart was moved by those on the margins, because he himself was marginalized. His experiences led Jim to found the Raynier Institute & Foundation.**

Jim's life-long struggle with bipolar disease reminds us of the vulnerability that is part of the human condition. His life is a testament to the fact that with a home and caring support, those who are struggling can achieve their fullest potential. His Raynier Institute & Foundation is doing just that for the residents of James Widener Ray Homes.



# JAMES WIDENER RAY HOMES

The first development of the Middleton Partnership is named after the founder of the Rainier Institute and Foundation. The homes provide 53 units of permanent, supportive housing for formerly homeless men, women and children, as well as veterans and low-income families.

## Background:

- This project is located in the Tioga and Nicetown neighborhoods of Philadelphia, and is bounded by an industrial zone at Allegheny Avenue along the R-8 and R-6 rail lines at the south, the Broad & Erie transportation hub and Temple University Health complex at the east, Hunting Park Avenue at the west, and Erie Avenue at the north.
- The Tioga and Allegheny West neighborhoods, situated immediately to the south, experienced a 7% and 13% decline in population, respectively, from 1990 to 2000, resulting in a high number of houses being vacated and abandoned. This decline and resulting vacancy, combined with the mortgage foreclosure crisis of 2008, was a major deterrent to housing development in these neighborhoods.
- In an effort to combat the decline in population and resulting vacancies, the City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth directed federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) funds to this project and to the area, to support development efforts in the neighborhood.

## Building Design and Resident Services:

- The property consists of a 42,522 square foot building on a 10,012 square foot parcel, comprised of 53 efficiency apartments, elevator, a management office suite, a lobby/mail area, a community room with kitchen, an exercise room, a laundry room and supportive services offices.
- Each efficiency apartment is between 450-550 square feet, has a full kitchen and bath, a living area, a bedroom area, and a large closet.
- The facility will be LEED-Certified at the Silver level, and environmental components include highly insulated walls, high-efficiency mechanical systems and lighting.
- Residents have full access to Project H.O.M.E.'s health care initiatives, including medical care services, immunizations, check-ups/physicals, health education, blood pressure screenings, connecting people to resources, diabetes screenings, health-related workshops, fitness classes and home visits.
- Residents also access Project H.O.M.E.'s employment services program, and all programs at the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs, including adult education classes, computer skills classes, tutoring, afterschool programs, and the College Access Program.