



Photos by Joe Larese/The Journal News

Steven Block of Westchester Fences and Iron Works is framed by the ornate iron gates his company refurbished that were once the entrance to the Briarcliff Lodge in Briarcliff Manor. The resort hotel hosted a veritable who's who of the rich and famous, including Hollywood stars Sarah Bernhardt and Tallulah Bankhead. Below, a close-up of the manufacturer's plate.

## Resort's history preserved in iron

### Senior community will have old gates of Briarcliff Lodge

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**BRIARCLIFF MANOR** — Refurbished wrought-iron gates will declare a new era at the former Briarcliff Lodge, a famed resort opened in 1902.

The developers at The Club at Briarcliff Manor resurrected these rusted, pitted 9-foot-high gates from the village's public works facility.

"We wanted to incorporate elements from the old design into the project," said Matthew Phillips, president and CEO of the Chicago-based Integrated Development Group LLC. "We thought, 'Wouldn't it be interesting if we could find the gates because they would connect the site to its past?'"

In its heyday the hilltop Lodge welcomed Babe Ruth, Tallulah Bankhead, Johnny



Weissmuller, and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. It closed in the late 1930s. The decorative gates remained as the 60-acre property became a girls' school, then a college campus. They were removed after a Sept. 20, 2003, fire destroyed the main building.

The property is under development as a \$350 million community for seniors with care options and luxury amenities. It is expected to open by 2013. To date, the developer said he has commitments on 60 units and hopes to pre-sell about 90 units, half of the first construction phase. The full plan is for 325 independent living residences, amenities and services, and a 60-unit Supportive Living Center. Units will cost from about \$600,000 to \$1.3 million, with monthly maintenance estimated at \$3,400.

Phillips didn't have to venture too far within Westchester to find this wrought-iron piece of history.

The gates were removed from the Lodge's Scarbor-

ough Road entrance and installed at the village's recycling center for safekeeping, village officials said.

"It would have been truly a shame if they disappeared or were scrapped," Village Manager Philip Zegarelli said. "Now they will be brought back and grace that site again. It is a good outcome."

A small plaque identifies the original creator as J.W. Fiske Iron Works of New York, considered to have been a high-profile American manufacturer of decorative gates and cast-iron garden fountains, furniture and statues during the second half of the 19th century.

"These are every bit of 100 years old. They are pretty top of the line," said Steven Block, owner of Westchester Fences & Iron Works in Port Chester. The company spent nearly a month restoring the gates and primed them pale green before adding coats of black paint.

The gates are in two parts, each about 1,000 pounds and

7 feet wide. Both sides are hinged with decorative posts and interiors feature curlicues that meet when the gates come together. There aren't any seams but solid iron posts that were presumably heated and bent into shape, Block said. The parts were not welded but held together with bolts and clips.

He expects to install the gates today and a formal dedication is planned for 11 a.m. Wednesday.

Local historian Rob Yasinac said decorative gates stood at the entrances of many Hudson Valley estates.

"They were formal and functional," said the writer-photographer of "Briarcliff Lodge" from Arcadia in its Images of America series.

"The gates are coming back and going to a different state of mind," said Tom Vincent, co-president of the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society.

This part of the site's past will signal a new entrance. If only these gates could talk.