



0425.04  
August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2004

## **Housing staff help city man's legacy to blossom**

A Coventry man's dying wish is being turned into reality in the shape of a communal garden at the city hostel where he spent 20 years of his life.

Work has started on a residents' garden at the Chace Hostel in Chace Avenue, Willenhall, after former tenant Peter Szczepka left £14,000 to owners Whitefriars Housing Group.

The 84-year-old, who fought in the Polish Free Army in the Second World War, came to Coventry in the 1980s and remained there until his death in January 2003.

The work is part of a £250,000 makeover at the hostel which is now nearing completion.

Improvements carried out on the property include the refurbishment of the snooker room, redecoration of the television lounges, internal works to all four buildings and a new study/library.

In a fitting tribute to Mr Szczepka, a former derelict area has been transformed into an oasis of peace, with two patios, path and re-turfed lawn.

Hostel manager Peter Browne said the cash legacy was a pleasant surprise to staff and tenants.

He said: “Mr Szczepka was a lovely man. He kept himself to himself but everyone liked him. He was the kind of man you would want to live next door to.

“It was a shock to find we had been left the money. Mr Szczepka really thought of Coventry and the Guildhouse as his home and the garden is a fitting tribute to him.

“The area was all overgrown but it has all been landscaped and the residents can’t wait to get out there and enjoy the sunshine.”

Resident Ray Higginson, 66, who has lived at the hostel for more than 20 years and was Peter’s near neighbour and friend, said the garden was a real oasis.

He said: “Peter was a very sociable person, you couldn’t wish to meet someone nicer. The donation was a typical generous gesture.

“The work so far looks fantastic and I’m sure Peter would be proud of it. It is a real contrast to how it was before. It is a real oasis and a place where you can grab a few quiet minutes to yourself.”

A hostel has existed on the site since 1939 when it was used to house up to 1,250 factory workers during the war. Today it is home for up to 200 residents.

Whitefriars Housing Services Manager Neil Evans said the improvements would see the next stage of the hostel’s development.

He said: “There have been a number of significant changes at the hostel, and many more to come. These changes have been introduced to support our residents, who are 100 per cent behind us.

“We look forward to the official opening of the community garden in a few weeks.”

**Ends**

**For further information please contact Nikki Newall/Michelle Hallmark at The  
Bridge Group on 02476 217 398 or [n.newall@bridge-  
group.co.uk](mailto:n.newall@bridge-group.co.uk)/[m.hallmark@bridge-group.co.uk](mailto:m.hallmark@bridge-group.co.uk)**