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Windt celebrates 20 years as executive director of The Marvin

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NORWALK — Mary R. Windt is celebrating her 20th year as executive director of Under One Roof at The Marvin located at 60 Gregory Blvd., where she first joined in 1996 — almost at its beginning.

“I feel like I am the ring-master of a circus working here — juggling and overseeing everything. I never thought I would be here for 20 years, but the residents make it all worth it,” said Windt. “I don’t know how much longer I will be here but I am not leaving anytime soon. These residents are my family.”

The Marvin is intergenerational — not only are senior citizens residents there, but there is a children’s preschool through kindergarten program as well. Many of the activities involve the seniors interacting with the children.

“Initially it was hard to integrate the two groups,” said Windt. “Not all the senior citizens participate in these intergenerational events, but the ones that do love doing it and the kids love it too. They run over and give them hugs and call them their ‘senior friends.’ Studies have shown that this interaction is very beneficial for both the kids and the seniors.”

Windt has admitted that over the years it has been a struggle to find funding for the program. The Marvin is primarily funded through fees from residents (which are all based on income), but are heavily reliant on the state of Connecticut for the subsidies towards the Congregate Housing Services Program. Windt has also received grants for both the senior citizens and children programs — the most recent being a grant to update their fire and smoke alarms so



Hour photo/Erik Trautmann

Mary Windt celebrates 20 years as the executive director of Under One Roof and The Marvin senior housing facility.

that the alarms are inside the seniors’ room so they are even easier to notice in case of an emergency.

“Compared to the private assisted-living and nursing

homes in the area, The Marvin really saves the state money. We are totally independent ... we are not connected to any other organization,” said Windt. “The not-for-profit (foundation) is called Under One Roof, meaning seniors and children under one roof, but the program is called The Marvin because this was formerly the old Marvin School.”

The Marvin has a total of 49 apartments for their 49 senior citizen residents — one of which is an original member from 1996. The ages range from 70 years old to 100 years old, with Betty Mayer turning 101 next month. The Marvin has four employees including Windt, but also uses contract companies for their security,

cleaning and other needs. The Marvin currently has a two-year wait list for an apartment opening in the facility. Over the last three years, only five to six spots have been open, which were quickly filled.

“It’s not always fun; there’s many challenges,” she said. “The hardest thing is when one of our residents pass away. I’ve been to more funerals and wakes than I could have ever imagined ... but I do this all for the residents and keeping them happy — its worth it.”

The apartments at The Marvin are all one-bedroom and are located across three floors (all of which are handicap accessible). A few of the apartments are a little

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Hour photo/Erik Trautmann

Resident Betty Mayer chats with Mary Windt, who is celebrating 20 years as the executive director of Under One Roof and The Marvin senior housing facility.

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bigger and were from when the program first started and couples were residents. However, now the two bedrooms are only occupied by one person each. The apartments feature a refrigerator, stove, oven and have electrical outlets that have been raised up for easier accessibility and spacious closets that have had their racks lowered for easier access. All the apartments feature emergency pull cords for the residents.

“What’s so terrific about the apartments is the big bathrooms,” said Ruth Court, resident of The Marvin. “(At this age) you need the room.” Windt originally found the executive director position in a two-line blind ad in the New York Times. She was previously the executive director at several Jewish community centers in Chicago, New York and Oakland, Calif. Windt, who is from Stratford, got her bachelors degree at UCONN and her masters degree in social work at New York University. For more information about Under One Roof and The Marvin program, please visit www.underoneroofinc.org or call (203) 854-4660 for senior care and (203) 854-6781 for the children’s center.