

The Suffolk Times.

The sale of the Sound View is a big change for Greenport

By Jen Nuzzo and Grant Parpan | January 17, 2016

Since 1953, one of the North Fork's most picturesque commercial properties has been owned by the Levin family. That's the year patriarch Jack Levin and his wife, Donna, built the Sound Shore Motel on Route 48 in Greenport.

They later expanded and renamed the motel and also purchased the neighboring Sound View Restaurant.

The businesses have been in the family ever since — until this week.

Eagle Point Hotel Partners, a five-year-old hotel investment firm based in Manhattan, closed on its purchase of the 5.5-acre Soundfront complex on Monday. The company has completed previous projects in Maui, New Orleans and the Napa Valley, among other prime tourist destinations.

When the Sound View reopens for the season, likely in March, it will be operated not by the Levin family but by Filament Hospitality, the hotel management branch of Eagle Point.

"Circumstances change, family needs change, and we have found it necessary to make this change at this time," sisters Rachel Levin Murphy and Ellen Levin Wiederlight wrote in a statement Tuesday. "It is our hope and expectation that the Sound View will continue to grow and to serve our local residents and visitors to the North Fork communities."

That expectation is shared by Eagle Point, co-founder Erik Warner said Tuesday evening, shortly after the Levin sisters announced the sale.

"We like to find properties that have history and a sense of place," said Mr. Warner, who started the company in 2011 with Stephen Chan. "We want to ultimately create an experience that allows our guests to walk away from their stay at the Sound View and have an emotional connection to what we create. Having those two criteria are two of several key ingredients to how successful we will be."

What that means for the long-term plan at the Sound View remains to be seen, but in the short term, Mr. Warner said, visitors won't notice too many immediate changes.

Eagle Point plans to upgrade bedding, pool furniture and other items right away. But no reconstruction plans are in the works and Mr. Warner said most of the Sound View staff has been rehired for the 2016 season.

"We need to better understand the community and how the Sound View fits into the community," he said. "The experience we have over the next year will help us to understand what direction we should go with the property. The macro plan is to embrace and enhance what we purchased ... not to do too much to take it too far from what it is today."

The Sound View first hit the market in 2012 with an asking price of nearly \$14 million, which many believe would have been a record commercial sale on the North Fork. However, the final sale price has not yet been disclosed.

Hal Zwick of Town and Country Real Estate in East Hampton was the property's listing agent for the duration of the three-year process. He described negotiations with Mr. Warner and Eagle Point as being handled with "respect and integrity from the beginning."

"It meant something to the family that someone would preserve it as a family resort and didn't turn it into a Montauk-type place," Mr. Zwick said Wednesday.

Ms. Murphy and Ms. Wiederlight, the most recent operators of the family business, declined to be interviewed about the sale, referring instead to the statement they released. In it, they wrote that all four Levin children worked in the family business over the years and felt "blessed to have been born into a job that we have loved for our entire adult life."

"Throughout all those years, we have operated the enterprise just as our father taught us: Give good value, charge a fair price and reach out to your community neighbors when they need a helping hand," they wrote. "Our family business was always just that — a family business — inspired by our father, nurtured by our



mother and operated by a loyal staff that is as much a part of our family as our own bloodline."

Jack Levin, who was Greenport's oldest resident when he died in 2014 at 105, launched the Jack's Shack concession stand at Southold Town Beach in 1935 before opening the Sound Shore Motel. It was the start of an 80-year stretch that saw the Levins rise to prominence among the most respected business families on the North Fork.

In 2006, the Sound View was named Business of the Year by The Suffolk Times, primarily for the way the Levin family worked to give back to the community. The local Rotary, hospital auxiliary, Cub Scouts and CYO were among the many organizations listed as having benefited from the family's generosity, according to the article, which also referenced assistance provided through fundraisers hosted by the Sound View to help several local residents deal with medical costs.

Many community members who hosted or attended events at the Sound View over the years turned to social media Tuesday to share their thoughts on the sale, which ranged from sad to nostalgic and bittersweet.

"My heart is heavy hearing the news. My family spent many years at the Sound View and Pebble Beach, as a child and then with my children," one woman wrote on The Suffolk Times Facebook page.

"You deserve some rest and relaxation and your retirement years with your families," another woman wrote to the Levin sisters. "You have taken care of this business and employees for years."

When it first opened as the Sound Shore in 1953, the business was just a 10-room motel. The Levins purchased the neighboring Sound View Restaurant in 1968, eventually expanding that to include a banquet room. The motel has also been renovated over the years and now features 45 rooms. In December 2004 the motel was forced to rebuild partially after an electrical fire destroyed several rooms.

The business, which lives up to its name with some of the area's finest views of Long Island Sound, continued, reopening for the season several months later.

The Sound View complex isn't comparable to many North Fork properties that have sold in recent years. Perhaps the closest is the former Santorini Beachcomber Resort in Cutchogue. But while that property is 17.4 acres, compared to the Sound View's 5.5, it includes only 534 feet of Soundfront shoreline. The local chapter of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers purchased the Beachcomber for \$12.65 million in January 2008, months before the real estate market collapsed. The IBEW now runs that property as a private training facility, it has said.

Mr. Warner and Eagle Point, who own no other properties in the area, said they are "looking at other [locations]," but that keeping up the tradition of the Sound View and the North Fork is a priority.

"We are attracted to the people and culture of the North Fork," Mr. Warner said. "There is nothing like the North Fork anywhere and the experience we ultimately create will embrace what we love."