

# Artists turn old mansion into creative space

## NORWALK

By JILL BODACH

Hour Staff Writer

Behind St. Philip Church, in a building most people drive by without even noticing (even though it's a mansion) is the new home to a community of artists.

The newly-created St. Philip Artists Guild, which hosts the studios of five local artists, will open its door to the public for its first Open Studio the weekend of Sept. 26. The event will showcase the work of the resident artists who have created studios in the old bedrooms of the mansion (David Morico, Duvian Montoya, Deacon Frank Chiappetta, Ralph DiMarco

and Steve Bagnell), and three other local talents (Gary Recchia, Paul Favello and Tom Reilly). The work displayed at the gallery opening will consist of paintings depicting landscapes, colorful abstractions, portraiture, religious icons and social issues.

The vision of the guild and the art center has been a vision of St. Philip's pastor, the Rev. Michael Boccaccio, since 2000. Duvian Montoya, an artist and a parishioner at St. Philip Church, shared that vision with Boccaccio.

"Two years ago I was living in New Mexico and communicated with Father Boccaccio about every six months, and when he heard I'd

be coming back to Norwalk he said I should take a space in the mansion and do something with it," Montoya said. "When I came back in January of 2007, he offered the space to me and other parishioners who are artists."

Since then, the artists have taken up residence in some of the upstairs rooms of the mansion, creating their own creative spaces.

"We use the space to create our own work, but in addition to that we have to have a center for the arts there and have other artists around and invite the community in for events like the gallery opening," Montoya said.

To Montoya, the guild's build-

ing itself is a piece of artwork.

"It's this treasure that most people don't even know is there," Montoya said.

The mansion was built 104 years ago by Manis Lockwood Jr. Restoration of the mansion has been in progress for the last two years. The artists have used their creative talents to improve the building that houses them.

"There was some damage to the mansion because it used to be the Vitam Center, but we did a lot to it to bring it back up to code," Montoya said. "We did some clean-up, restored the floors and did

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Duvian Montoya, works in his studio at the St. Philip Artist Guild in the Lockwood Mansion on the congregation's property.