

HOUSE RAISING

Branford home
raised during
epic winter

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ON A COLD, CLEAR AFTERNOON IN EARLY MARCH, Sean Payne and his crew lifted a 50-ton, three-bedroom Branford house and slid it 55 feet back onto its new foundation. Later that night, as is the custom, the owner of the house, Paula Brown, threw a party in honor of all involved in the months-long completion of the project.

Except it isn't the custom at all, said Dennis Pantani, president of B. Pantani and Sons Builders and the general contractor on the structural relocation. In fact, there was little that was customary about any of it.

"A homeowner might give you a bottle of wine or send a thank-you note," said Payne, co-owner of New Hampshire-based Payne Building Movers, of the increasingly common practice in this post-hurricane age of lifting a house or moving it back from the water to meet federal flood standards and prevent further flood damage.

"But for Paula to have a party for us and invite her friends and neighbors, that's pretty much unheard of."

Nonsense, according to Brown, a retired Anheuser Busch executive with a perennially sunny disposition. "It was a wonderful experience," she said, uttering five words rarely heard from anyone who's had work done on their home.

From the August 2013 afternoon Brown consulted with Pantani and Payne, to be specific.



Mara Lavitt/New Haven Register photos

Paula Brown watches her house on the water in Branford as it is moved, in eight-foot increments, back on its lot by Payne Construction of Strafford, N.H., after it had been raised and moved 55 feet toward the water in December.

Before then, she had watched the waters from Hurricane Irene reach the front steps of her beachfront Indian Neck home in August 2011; she had seen Superstorm Sandy exact more damage 13 months later. Her house was close to the ground. The threat of severe weather loomed.

Over the next several months, she worked with an architect and a structural engineer to ensure

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This house-raising was quite an engineering feat and it was done during a punishing winter.



House raising: Branford waterfront home moved during epic winter

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her house could withstand another storm. The cost seemed prohibitive. Then, on the autumn 2013 afternoon, Pantani and Payne set her straight. The recommended design would support the Empire State Building and survive a nuclear blast, they told her. It would also cost \$95,000 more than what she needed.

It wasn't just the money their decades of experience and know-how saved Brown that proved cause for celebration recently. It was the peace of mind afforded by Payne. The house-raisers Brown had interviewed projected "doom and gloom," with "a lot of talk about how dire the situation was," she said. Payne put her instantly at ease. "We'll raise the house

and move it toward the water," he said simply. That way, "it'll be easier to build a new foundation and then we'll just roll the house back.

According to Payne, there was nothing else exceptional about the project. In early December, his crew wedged itself under the tiny crawl space, hand-digging a space 1 foot deep, 2 feet wide and 45 feet long. Into this space they installed steel beams, using them to raise the house and roll it out of the way.

Nor was it out of the ordinary when, from the original footprint of the house, Jimmy Boyd of J.G. Boyd & Sons Excavation, excavated 8 feet and 40 truckloads of unstable soil in the week after Christmas. Into the 800-cubic-yard cavern,



The underside view of the house.

Frank Izaguirre, owner of East Haven's Grants LLC, poured a concrete foundation, installed 38,000 pounds of steel wires to sustain the concrete, and built 37 concrete piers. Once the piers were up, Boyd used 45 truckloads

of snow storms, ice squalls and bone-chilling temperatures.

"I'd stop by several times a day and, no matter the weather, everyone was there," said Brown, recalling Pantani on the site each day, orchestrat-

ing the work. "All these guys take such great pride in what they do, in getting the job done right, down to the last detail."

Just business as usual, except all this was done in the midst of an historically punishing win-

ter of snow storms, ice squalls and bone-chilling temperatures.

Still, when Winter Storm Maximus socked the Shoreline in early February, its immovable snowbanks narrowing the streets and preventing Payne from bringing his trucks in for the final move, there was nothing to do. Through 15 days and six snow storms, Izaguirre's majestic concrete piers, bearing the look of an abandoned Greek temple, waited to meet Paula Brown's house.

On the night of the party, Payne seemed a bit

awestruck at how well it worked out. "The house lined up on the piers perfectly," he said. "That's very uncommon."

So, it seems, was Brown's presence to everyone involved in the project. Boyd remembered her bringing out platefuls of sandwiches and questioning why they wouldn't go home when temperatures dipped into the single digits.

"It means so much to have your work appreciated," added Izaguirre, as Brown uncorked another bottle of champagne amid the animated chatter of the partygoers. "It makes everything worth it."