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(USA)

Touring Watchtower Farms



Wallkill - Touring Watchtower Farms in the Ulster County hamlet of Wallkill is an eye-opening experience.

Worker safety, cultural awareness and cleanliness are clearly high priorities to the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The grounds are immaculate, the people friendly and the facility is state-of-the-art.

Watchtower purchased the farm from the Goebel family in 1963, started expanding it in the 1970s when they maxed-out the Brooklyn printery’s footprint, and officially relocated it there in 2004.

The original farmhouse, which dates back to 1690, has been fully restored and serves as housing for the campus workers. Because the Wallkill Bethel is a large facility in a rural area, it even has its own small fire brigade.

Printing network

Wallkill Bethel is part of a regionalized printing network and serves North America, including 12,000 congregations in the United States. In 2008 the printery produced more than three million Bibles, 18 million magazines, 27 million books, and 236 million tracts, all of which are distributed free of charge.

The printery also produces magazines and bibles in Braille and offers American Sign Language videos.

Since it was first published in 1879, Watchtower Magazine has never missed an issue - not even during the paper shortages of the Second World War.

Quality control

The health and safety of workers is built into the design of the printery. Pipes rather than people transport ink and every major department graphics, pressroom, bindery and shipping has its own safety coordinator. Each station has quality control and checks are done every 30 seconds. The bindery has 70 machines and approximately 1,150 workers.

To minimize waste when shipping, barcode readers pick the right box, print labels and direct the box around the floor using a system of lights that lets pickers know what to pack. Inventory is automatically replenished. As of last year, all congregations order materials online. Most materials are shipped by rail.

Environmentally friendly

For all this paper one might expect to see trimmings on the floor or dust in the air. Yet Wallkill Bethel is an environmentally friendly printery complete with pollution

control units on the roof and a water treatment plant. Quiet automated cleaning machines sweep the floors and thousands of feet of overhead pipes suck trim waste into a central paper recycling area, which Watchtower spokesmen say saves \$500,000 each year on recycling paper.

In residence

In the 1970s, Watchtower officials constructed the first residential building on the campus consisting of studios and one-bedroom units. The residents have onsite optical and chiropractic services as well as a repair shop that services official vehicles and which residents may use to work on their personal vehicles. Laundry services are provided and to conserve water, the rinse water becoming the wash water for the next load.

Beyond the printery and residences along Red Mills Road are fields where the Witnesses grow sweet corn, blueberries, grapes for juicing and apples. Watchtower cowboys are responsible for more than 400 heads of grass-fed Black Angus cattle that are never sent to feedlots.

In the world

The efficiency with which the Jehovah's Witnesses operate was also evident in the aftermath of the earthquake that struck Haiti in January. The Watchtower's branch office building in Haiti, which survived the quake, served as a relief center and triage unit as did its three Kingdom Halls in neighboring Dominican Republic. More than 100 Witness missionaries were killed in the earthquake. But within one day after the natural disaster, Witnesses in Haiti distributed prepackaged three-day food supplies to 4,700 people, Watchtower officials said.

Take the tour

Visitors are welcome to tour Wallkill Bethel. More than 70,000 people tour

Watchtower Farms each year. Guided tours are available Monday through Friday from 8 until 11 a.m. or 1 until 4 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 until 11 a.m. Call 845-744-6000 for a tour.

Watchtower in Warwick

The Watchtower property in Warwick is the 253-acre site of the former Research and Development facility of the International Nickel Company that closed in 1983. Watchtower purchased the property from Touro College. Watchtower is widely respected among real estate dealers for its business acumen and the excellent condition in which it keeps its properties.

The Warwick property has always been targeted as a “high value Highlands property for maintaining continuity of protected land and habitat,” said Edward Goodell, the executive director of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference.

Although “it’s been for sale several times,” Goodell said, “the conservation community hasn’t managed to buy it.”

If the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society proposal goes through, it will have a minimal carbon footprint and “use all kinds of recycled materials with a vast amount of open space to remain,” said Warwick Town Supervisor Michael Sweeton. He also said members visiting the campus will stay in bed and breakfasts and hotels, eat in restaurants and shop, bringing tourism dollars with them.

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