

# Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Hilarie Burton invest time, energy at Astor

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Thanks to the initiative of Hilarie Burton and Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Astor Services will be able to refurbish some of its residential units. Alex H. Wagner/Poughkeepsie Journal

(Photo: Alex H. Wagner/Poughkeepsie Journal)

*Through the end of the year, reporters will be looking back at and following up on stories and topics that were the most popular with our readers in 2017, according to metrics on [poughkeepsiejournal.com](http://poughkeepsiejournal.com). This story is part of that series.*



Together, actors and Pleasant Valley residents [Jeffrey Dean Morgan](#) and [Hilarie Burton](#) have caught the attention of millions of television viewers.

But the devotion from some of the couple's biggest fans has nothing to do with Morgan's role on "The Walking Dead" or Burton's history with "One Tree Hill," "White Collar" and MTV's "Total Request Live."

The bond that Morgan and Burton maintain with a special group of fans in Rhinebeck is linked to ghost stories, hammers, saws and cans of paint.



Actors and married couple, Hilarie Burton and Jeffrey Dean Morgan, who live in Pleasant Valley, show off plans for the first phase of the renovation of the Astor Service’s residential treatment center in the spring of 2017. (Photo: Courtesy photo)

“I think they’re nice,” said Arcadio Wharton, a 12-year-old resident of Astor Services for Children & Families in Rhinebeck. “I’m thankful for having them here.”

Morgan and Burton in April coordinated the renovation of eight rooms at Astor, which since 1953 has provided behavioral and educational services for children, some of whom have suffered trauma and psychiatric illness, and their families. Plans are in place for additional renovations set for completion in 2018.

Astor in Rhinebeck provides a home and school for 64 children, while 15 kids only attend school there during the day. Astor, which is based in Rhinebeck, operates throughout Dutchess and Ulster counties, as well as in the Bronx and Orange County.

Wharton is one of the 11 children now enjoying the coziness generated by new lighting; new paint; new beds and bedding; and new and refinished furniture.



A view of the first unit to be refurbished thanks to the efforts of Hilarie Burton and Jeffrey Dean Morgan at Astor Services in Rhinebeck. (Photo: Alex H. Wagner/Poughkeepsie Journal)

“When I first came on this unit, it was nice,” he said. “But I think it was nicer when they came and fixed everything up. It’s nice knowing you have people here who care about your comfort.”

Jim McGuirk, executive director and chief executive officer at Astor, said the work that Morgan and Burton have taken on for Astor strikes “at the core of what we do and what these kids need.”



Jim McGuirk, left, executive director and CEO of Astor Services for Children & Families, speaks with resident Joshua Stalter, right, 11, in the newly refurbished unit in Rhinebeck. (Photo: Alex H. Wagner/Poughkeepsie Journal)

The project also underscores how invested Morgan and Burton remain in Dutchess County.

Another example can be found on East Market Street in Rhinebeck. In 2014, Morgan, Burton and actor Paul Rudd, their fellow Hudson Valley resident, were part of a group that purchased Samuel's Sweet Shop.

As 2017 draws to a close, Burton and Morgan can look back with satisfaction on the renovations at Astor and the \$71,000 they raised at Bard College in November for the next phase of the project. A similar renovation plan is in place for three more housing units at Astor, which serve another 30 children.

McGuirk lauded the couple for the attention they lavish upon the children during visits. And he praised Burton for her managerial skills — and her hammering, sanding and painting.



Actors Jeffrey Dean Morgan and Hilarie Burton at Astor Services for Children & Families in Rhinebeck on Apr. 11, 2017. They were on hand to discuss a renovation project. (Photo: Ricky Flores/Poughkeepsie Journal)

“She was in charge,” he said. And, he added, “She was as dusty as anybody.”

As details unfold for the next phase of work, Burton is already planning the third edition of “Ghost Stories,” the storytelling fundraiser for the renovations held at Bard College in 2016 and 2017, McGuirk said.

The 2016 edition of “Ghost Stories” raised more than \$27,000 for Astor and featured Morgan, Burton, Dutchess County resident Mary Stuart Masterson and actor and producer Griffin Dunne.

The 2017 edition was held in November, raised \$71,000 and featured Rudd as a surprise guest. Both the 2016 and 2017 events featured children from Astor.



Actors Hilarie Burton, Paul Rudd, and Jeffrey Dean Morgan answer questions for the audience with the help of Marcia Currier, far left, a tarot card reader, during "Ghost Stories," a fundraiser for Astor Services for Children & Families held at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College. (Photo: Alex H. Wagner/Poughkeepsie Journal)

McGuirk said Morgan and Burton "are really giving their heart and soul to Astor. This is about something that they're really committed to and they're really going to do whatever they can to make this work."

For the renovation project in April, Morgan and Burton brought in contractors and companies involved with work on their own home who then donated their time and services for the Astor project.

In some cases, advance work for the project was done at the Morgan and Burton home, then brought over to Astor for installation.

Neither Morgan nor Burton could be reached for comment. But speaking to the Journal in April, Morgan called the undertaking, "...a great opportunity for us to kind of give back to the community that, obviously, we love."

As with the completed renovations, the scheduled work will also bring new electric wiring; light fixtures; kitchen renovations; and new rugs. As they were with the project in April, the children at Astor will be consulted on their favorite colors, sports teams and cartoon characters in conjunction with the upgrades.

Asked how the renovations made him feel, Joshua Stalter, an 11-year-old Astor resident, said “happy.”

Speaking of the children, McGuirk said, “They’ve suffered a lot of trauma in their life. They’ve been told they are bad — don’t do this, don’t do that. They are not sure of themselves. They’re not sure who cares about them. This really reflects to them what people think of them. It really goes to the heart of their self esteem.”

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## How it all began

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Simple curiosity set the stage for actors and Pleasant Valley residents Jeffrey Dean Morgan and Hilarie Burton becoming involved with Astor Services for Children & Families in Rhinebeck.

Morgan said the couple’s involvement with Astor began with a curiosity regarding the building and what transpired inside. That led them to a friend who was involved with the Families for Astor Committee, a fundraising group.

An informal discussion followed at Samuel’s Sweet Shop, then a visit by the couple to Astor. That led to Morgan and Burton participating in the 2016 “Ghost Stories” fundraiser held at Bard College in Annandale.