

# GREENFIELD HILL NEIGHBORS

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The Rowe-Ward Family  
Living Their Best Life



## The Rowe-Ward Family: Being Extraordinary!

By Lara Hoey

*We would like to thank the Vanderblue Team for bringing you this month's cover story*

The undeniable beauty of Greenfield Hill is obvious to those fortunate enough to reside in or visit this special part of Fairfield. Canopies of green embrace endless stone walls. Winding roads lined with dogwood trees surround manicured gardens. Lush rolling lawns are highlighted by some of the grandest homes in Fairfield County. Greenfield Hill's beauty is an inherent part of its very definition. Atop the hill, with distant views of Long Island Sound, sits a picture-perfect white clapboard church. Creaking pews, crooked floors, awe-inspiring 18-foot windows and a dramatic white steeple seem to fit as effortlessly as the historic landscape itself. Quintessential enough for a classic Norman Rockwell New England scene, this church is the visual icon of this part of town and it is here, just a stone's throw away from the front vestibule, that the Rowe-Ward family make their home.

Meeting Alida and David, it is easy to feel as though they are old family friends. The lack of formality and ease of being in their presence feels familiar and comfortable. Which in turn, is how they appear to feel in each other's company. Quick to laugh and finish the other's sentences, they seem like most married couples;

a little humor, a lot of support, some soft jabs and an inherent closeness that comes with being together for many years. An ongoing musical competition between Green Day and Bruce Springsteen aside, there is not much unusual about the two at first glance. What makes them unique however, is almost everything else. This married couple work together sharing equal positions as Pastors of The Greenfield Hill Congregational Church (GHCC). Leading a congregation of just over 1,000, their work is as strong a thread to this community as the thousands of dogwood trees that grace the hill with pink and white blooms every spring.

**“There may be something to this,  
this may be too important not to try.”**

A blended family of 6, Alida and David met each other at the office, as they say. Alida came to GHCC following her graduation from the Yale Divinity School in 1989. An accomplished mathematician, coming from a legacy of UVA Math professors, Alida quietly stumbled upon her profession. Post under-grad at Bryn Mawr, while in pursuit of a teaching degree in religion, her

life was forever altered by an insistent Dean whose gentle (albeit frustrating) push into a church internship proved life changing. An admitted math "geek" and avid reader growing up, she had not imagined for herself the life she now lives or the work she now loves. Spend even a small amount time with Alida however, and it is hard to imagine her doing anything else other than serving and enhancing the lives of so many around her. Calm and disarming, her strength and wisdom seem lit from within. A doctorate of Ministry from Princeton Seminary makes her official title Rev. Dr. Alida Ward. She is on her way to becoming the longest running pastor ever in the churches 300 year history and arguably, as beloved as any to come before her.

David's journey to GHCC came many years later. Raised in New York City, he came from a pastoral lineage of clergy with a Father, Grandfather and Uncles all committed to the profession. While initially shrugging off taking up the family business, David experienced a profound moment of clarity one afternoon while working a part-time job giving away free Bibles. A bit of a topsyturvy day led something in his own soul to whisper with great clarity – there may be something to this, this may be something too important not to try. A Colgate graduate, his seminary training was completed at Andover-Newton and he ultimately received his Doctorate from Palmer Theological. Author of a dozen books and a past President of Habitat for Humanity, his resume shows his unabashed passion for his chosen life's work. After pastoring churches in both New York and Massachusetts, David found his way to a job opening at GHCC in 1997.

And there it was... fate would step in again and prove fortuitous. Alida and David initially lived in separate parsonages across the street from the church. Where friendship and mutual respect began, love soon emerged and wove its way into the fabric of their relationship. They share a deep faith and a mutual admiration for the church and community they have wound up calling their home.

**“We are an old church. We have uncomfortable pews and a tiny little band box. We are not high tech, but we do have beauty. Everyone in the world deserves a little beauty.”**

The two married in 2011 in front of their adult children and step-children, family, friends and their entire congregation. Not one wedding, but 2; their day kept true to the dual fellowship times that the church hosts each Sunday. Each child parishioner was invited with flower in hand to be a participant in their weddings. The day was as memorable to them as it was to the community.

Life has been busy together. There is much to do. As service oriented pastors, David and Alida are dedicated to their congregation as well as communities well outside Greenfield Hill proper. Active participants in Operation Hope and the Community Supper Program, their service to Bridgeport and other local communities in need is consistent and strong. Their outreach programs have spanned the world and the church remains committed to the Appalachia Service Project (ASP), a wildly successful mission overflowing with local high school students and their families

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who participate in life-changing home construction for families in Appalachia. Having been given so much through life experience, education and travel, Alida and David feel a tremendous responsibility to give back. This philosophy seems to bind and guide them along this journey together.

**“It looks like a quiet little community, but it’s not parochial at all. People are very interested in what’s going on around them. This community actively seeks ways to stay engaged and give to others.”**

The property is a bustle. Many a teenager can be seen shooting hoops in front of the famed barn where youth meetings are held on weekday evenings and the non-sectarian nursery school fills the halls and playground with daily squeals and laughter. Children are a constant in this place and all the noises, energy and wonder that they bring; something that the couple seem to adore. Weddings, baptisms, funerals, penning the next sermon, Confirmation Class... all a part of their never-ending pastoral duties. As with most of us, it can be a challenge to fit everything into a day’s work. There are quiet moments as well... feeding the wild life and feral cats that live in their back yard, a stroll through the Memorial Garden for a dash of serenity, David fits in work on the next book and Alida fits in editing it. The depth of character these two people possess can be directly correlated to the important work that they do between these walls, in this neighborhood and for the world around them. Modest as they are kind, they will humbly point to their community as the true champions. Having traveled the world and worked at churches across the country, David insists he has never seen anything like Greenfield Hill's neighborhood families and their inherent openness to care deeply for humanity, demonstrate tremendous compassion for the world and willingness to make a difference. Far from small-town provincial, this theme that resonates amongst their neighbors is one of the cornerstones that sits at the heart of the philosophy that Alida and David practice.

**“I have never seen anything like this community in all my travels. They care deeply for humanity and have a tremendous willingness to make a difference in the world.”**



As we finished our conversation, when discussing what their family motto might be, David mentioned “Carpe Diem.” Well know, it is a phrase that means something extra special to this Greenfield Hill family. They find that the simple phrase brought famous by the late Robin Williams character Professor Keating in Dead Poet’s Society, is something that is important to them and in turn to all the people that look to them for support including their 4 children and now 2 grandchildren. To so many, Alida and David are leaders, healers, confidants and an indelible support. By the nature of their work and the commitment to their neighbors, Alida and David must seize each day and personally walk the talk. Being the very best they can be each day and living their best life, has a trickledown effect to those fortunate enough to find themselves part of this family’s journey. Professor Keating goes on to say in his oft-quoted speech to his students... be extraordinary. Something else that this little church in the beautiful rolling hills of Fairfield aspires to do. There is very little doubt in this tight-knit neighborhood amongst those who make up the GHCC congregation and countless others in receipt of their service and goodwill, that these two amazing, selfless people are extraordinary.

*Do you know a neighbor who has a story to share? Nominate your neighbor to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Contact us at [lhoey@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:lhoey@bestversionmedia.com).*

