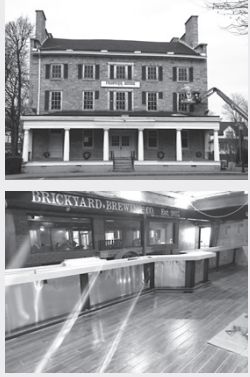


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VFW provides update on Memorial Day activities

VFW Post 7487 would like to take this opportunity to thank all the essential workers for your perseverance during this time of crisis in our community.

This year, the Memorial Day Remembrance Committee Inc., in accordance with the current COVID-19 restrictions, has decided to forgo the parade and luncheon. Although many in the community enjoy the parade and luncheon, the major reason for the ceremony is to honor those who served and are no longer with us.

VFW Post 7487 will conduct a celebration and a ceremony on Memorial Day beginning at 11

a.m. The celebration and ceremony this year will look a little different from previous years. The VFW, along with the American Legion, will, as in the past, conduct the Memorial Day ceremony. Our program will include a guest speaker along with a short program. Those who plan to attend would be asked to adhere to the current COVID-19 restrictions as per the state on Memorial Day.

Since VFW Post 7487 dedicated the Circle of Honor Monument in Academy Park on Nov. 11, 2019, names have been added. We were again scheduled to add names before Memorial Day, as originally

stated when the monument was dedicated. Because of COVID-19, we had to adjust these plans in 2020 and will have to repeat the process in 2021. The local company that has agreed to add the names and make corrections will not be able to complete this task before Memorial Day. However, the company has agreed to do so before Veterans Day. We would ask those that have submitted names that are not on the monument to please be patient.

During Memorial Day weekend, VFW Post 7487 will again be distributing poppies at DiMino Lewiston Tops Market on Friday,

Saturday and Sunday. All contributions collected will go into our post's scholarship fund. Please stop by Tops and receive a poppy to wear on Memorial Day.

Veterans who have not received your COVID-19 vaccine, the VA Hospital in Buffalo is currently scheduling vaccines for veterans. Call the Buffalo VA hospital for more information.

Thank you for your continued support.

*William Justyk
Commander
VFW Downriver Post 7487*

Youngstown Library board addresses continued closure

Editor's note: The following is an open letter to the mayor and trustees of the Village of Youngstown, and to the residents of Youngstown and the Town of Porter, from the board of trustees of the Youngstown Free Library

Dear friends,
It is now a year since the force of worldwide pandemic hit our village and closed the doors of our beloved library. Those measures were necessary, then. But much has changed since those days, not the least of which is our understanding of the virus, and of what can be done to mitigate its threat.

In that context then, I believe that it cannot be clearly stated enough: your library board of trustees would like to see your library opened immediately. In fact, we have been pushing for that for many months now. We are hobbled, however, by the reality that the Youngstown Free Library functions as a tenant of our landlords, the Village of Youngstown, and that we do not have the final say.

Director Sonora Miller's library safety plan far exceeds the requirements of New York state for such a space. For example, masks must be worn at all times, even when seated. (It is worth considering, in contrast, the requirements that need to be followed in restaurants.)

As a library, there is no boisterous speech, no shouting, no vigorous singing – water droplets are not going to indiscriminately escape. We have installed an air-purifier that refreshes a space of 2,400 square-feet every hour – a

50% or even a 100% occupancy rate should not pose any challenge for that capability. The presence of the air-purifier, plus the wearing of masks at all times, should offset any concerns of the village regarding the HEPA-inadequacy of its installed hot air system.

Communal surfaces such as door handles and stair rails, etc., are continually being cleaned. Our director, staff, and all library guests have been wearing masks at all times – and will continue to wear them until they are no longer necessary – even as some village employees and law enforcement regularly go in and out of the building wearing no PPE at all.

Contrary to the stated opinion of village leadership that the booked half-hour slots that they allow are sufficient, residents tell us that these slots simply do not allow them to properly use their library. We are dismayed by news that a number of residents simply are not using their own library anymore. Some, because they are unable to practically access the materials that they have directly and indirectly funded over many years, are instead visiting neighboring libraries. Those other libraries have had the liberty to responsibly adapt their policies as needs change, and have been doing so without incident for many months now.

The Youngstown Free Library is the only library in New York state that has not opened its doors to regular browsing. It begs the question: Is our situation really so different from every other library in the state?

It is disappointing that an organization that should be at the vanguard of helping members through this pandemic has been unable to support its own community during a time where they really needed it. Residents were stuck home and couldn't get books to escape into; parents who were forced to home-school had limited and delayed access to materials; and kids no longer had movies or virtual programming to be stimulated by.

We have lost much of our connection, and it's time to get it back.

It may, of course, turn out that, due to a rise in infection rates, the library will have to again restrict access or even close its doors to the public. If that is the case, then so be it. But that does not negate your board's belief that Youngstown's Library should be able to open its doors to residents as is appropriate to the given moment. The plans developed by Sonora Miller, our library director, reflect an informed scientific consensus, and were designed to have the flexibility necessary to deal with changing circumstances.

Our director's library board-approved reopening plan has been ready to go since last October. We already have the safety equipment and the cleaning supplies needed to implement the plan. The only thing that's keeping the building closed is the Village Board's decision, as stated by the mayor, that all "building doors would remain locked."

We sincerely appreciate the efforts of Sarah Ambrosia via her

Change.org petition to "Open the Red Brick." Thank you, Sarah, and thank you to the 368 community members who have voiced their support for this humble and most reasonable request. And we thank our library members, whose patience has been stretched more than I care to think about.

If we, your board, have not been as forthcoming about our position as we could have been – as you have hoped for – I do apologize. But we are, as I hope the preceding paragraphs show, in somewhat of a difficult position. We are required to follow the directives of the mayor, and the Village Board.

The science that closed the library over a year ago is the same science that has, for months now, said libraries may safely open and allow patrons real access. It is that advice which we are taking into consideration when we ask that the library be allowed to function in a manner reasonable to the times in which we find ourselves.

*Signed,
The Board of Trustees of the
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