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LEWISTON LOOKS A LOT DIFFERENT THIS SUMMER



Instead of a sea of people listening to concerts at Artpark, this summer finds folks in cars, socially distanced, and wearing masks (vendors, too), as they watch drive-in movies at the Lewiston venue. (Photos by K&D Action Photo & Aerial Imaging; see more from the Tragically Hip event at www.wnypapers.com)

Festivals, concerts canceled, but life goes on for community

BY JOSHUA MALONI
GM/Managing Editor

Four-and-a-half months after New York state went on "PAUSE" to prevent the coronavirus from spreading, organizations are still cancelling events. In fact, it's been a pretty steady, rather depressing stream of "See you in 2021 - we hope" messages sent to this newspaper each week.

Of course, the most notable cancellations involve the Village of Lewiston's myriad summer festivals, as well as Artpark & Company concerts.

Normally, the Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce staff would be recovering from the Smelt Festival and Taste of Lewiston, and busy preparing for the Northwest Jazz and Harvest & Hops festivals.

"The summer of 2020 has certainly been one for the books for many reasons. Walk down the sidewalks of any of our River Region communities and the vibe just feels different," President

Jennifer Pauly said. "We miss the weekly concerts, large festivals, 5Ks, tourists, bike runs, and outdoor dining and patios spilling over with people enjoying summer days and nights. We miss the live music on the street or in the park, the favorite vendor in the spot we know they are usually at, and blocking off parts of the calendar because of the 'must do' events, concerts or race we had to be a part of.

"From May through September, there are six major festivals that take place in the Village of Lewiston. The Village of Youngstown has several anchor attractions and smaller/park events that keep the main street humming. The speedway fuels the summer nights and creates energy in Ransomville. The hamlet of Sanborn has antique shops and events at the farm museum that have led to positive growth."

Without fail - in a "normal" year - Lewiston business owners and restaurateurs are out in full force



on festival weekends. Many say the proceeds from these events carry them through the leaner, quieter winter months.

What's more, the festivals are used to generate funds for civic projects, community beautification, and nonprofit and educational organizations.

"The chamber is involved in all of the major festivals in Lewiston, either in promotion, volunteering

or coordination. The loss of these events has had a major impact on the organizations that generate them for sources of revenue, as well as the many businesses that benefit from the influx of people and consumer spending," Pauly said. "The economic impact of all of the missed festivals, tourist spending and attractions is easily at a loss in the millions of dollars

SEE EVENT, continued on Page 8

State audit

'Poor financial management' leads to financial woes in NT

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Interim Tribune Editor

A scathing audit released Aug. 7 from New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli says that North Tonawanda is in "a vulnerable financial position" due to "the Mayor's and City Council's budgeting practices and poor financial management."

In key findings, the audit says, "The mayor and council did not adopt structurally balanced budgets, properly monitor the city's financial operations or take appropriate actions to maintain the city's fiscal stability. The general and sewer funds experienced operating deficits from 2017 through 2019. Despite the City's deteriorating financial condition, officials did not establish a fund balance policy, multi-year financial plan or capital plan."

Between 2017-19, the city incurred operating deficits totaling nearly \$3.1 million in the general fund and nearly \$2.4 million in the sewer fund. During the same time, city expenditures increased by more than \$2.9 million.

During that period, the city saw increases in its property taxes and sales tax revenue. And while sewer taxes have seen no increases since 2010, the report points out sewer operating expenditures have increased by nearly \$1.3 million (32%) over the past three years.

To cover its deficits, the report found the city (at least since the beginning of the audit period) was borrowing cash from its reserve funds to address its cash flow problems. The report goes on to say city officials "routinely 'borrowed' cash from the capital projects fund to ease cash shortages in the general fund."

These decisions were ultimately buoyed by the fact the *SEE NORTH, continued on Page 7*



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