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NF Underground Railroad Heritage Center launches virtual 'Freedom Conversation' tours



The Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center is launching a new virtual "Freedom Conversation" tour program this week. "Freedom Conversations" are the signature program at the Heritage Center. Pre-COVID-19, they were offered twice daily on site.

Interim Director of Education Chris Bacon said he is thrilled to offer the thought-provoking tour virtually to the public.

"Freedom Conversation" tours have always been at the forefront of our mission as a pivotal program that ties our past to our present," Bacon said. "Rooted in the stories of the Underground Railroad in Niagara Falls, these tours spark conversation and offer a space to consider the relationship between race, human rights, and freedom."

The public can book their spot for the virtual "Freedom Conversation" tour at <https://www.niagarafallsundergroundrailroad.org/events/>. The tours will last approximately 60 minutes and are led by trained facilitators, offering a way to foster empathy, increase knowledge, and encourage action. All tours will be hosted via Zoom and participants will be sent a password upon registration.

The Heritage Center is offering two tours per week: Wednesdays at 7 p.m. and Saturdays at 2 p.m.

Prices are \$25 for a family, \$12 for a couple, and \$8 for a single.

"Freedom Conversations" are sponsored by a Humanities New York Action Grant.

The Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center opened in May 2018 after 11 years of plan-

ning. The center is located inside the former 1863 U.S. Custom House attached to the Niagara Falls Amtrak station. The center sits adjacent to the location of the former International Suspension Bridge, a point of crossing for many freedom seekers including Harriet Tubman.

The Heritage Center preserves the historic role of the people of Niagara Falls in facilitating freedom for the oppressed. The places and stories associated with this network of freedom seekers, free African Americans and abolitionists, evoke powerful themes in American history, and celebrate the bravery of the men and women who risked their lives to achieve the most basic rights of liberty. Learn more at niagarafallsundergroundrailroad.org.

Deposits for Food makes latest donation to local pantries

Seven years ago, Deposits for Food began collecting returnable containers and scrap metal, giving all its proceeds to three Niagara County food pantries and shelters. Since that time, the total amount donated has grown to over \$82,000.

Recently, Deposits for Food presented checks totaling \$2,000 to two of the pantries: Heart, Love & Soul and Community Missions. D4F founder and administrator Angelo Sarkees of Lewiston would like to thank everyone who has supported his efforts over the years.

Sarkees recently secured additional donation revenues from two local restaurant projects. Eric Matthews and Ken Bryan of the Brickyard/BBC donated many hundreds of pounds of scrap from the rehabilitation of the Brickyard after a fire at the adjoining BBC, including a large amount of plumbing and HVAC-related scrap. Ken Scibetta and Ed Webster, owners of the Griffon Pubs, also donated hundreds of pounds of metal, including refrigeration-related metals, from their efforts of converting the IGA/Melloni's site into a restaurant in Youngstown. From these two projects, D4F was able to donate close to an extra \$1,000 more than was anticipated.

Sarkees would also like to thank Rob and John from Collision Enterprises, along with everyone in their shop, for all the scrap donated from their auto repair business. Other contributors included Carmelo Raimondi and the staff of Carmelo's Coat of Arms in Lewiston, Michael Hibbard of Gallo/Gather restaurants in Lewiston, and all the individuals who have donated bottles, cans and scrap over the years.

Finally, Sarkees extends a special thank you to Doug Adamson and his staff at Porter Empty Return Center in Ransomville, where the returns are processed.

Sarkees would like to encourage everyone to support the local pantries and shelters, especially during these times and during the upcoming holiday season. He would also like to thank all the staff at the pantries for their dedication and efforts year-round.



From left: Joe Sbarbati, associate director at Community Missions; Sister Beth Brosmer, former executive director at Heart, Love & Soul Food Pantry and Dining Room; and Angelo Sarkees, Deposits 4 Food founder.