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Pleasant Valley Library project enters capital campaign phase

by Kate Goldsmith

PLEASANT VALLEY—With approvals in place for its proposed renovation/expansion, the Pleasant Valley Library soon will enter the next phase of the project: launching the capital campaign. Library trustees are currently evaluating capital campaign goals and forming a volunteer fundraising committee.

The project's cost is estimated between \$1.5 and \$2 million. Because the library is a free association library – privately controlled but meeting the statutory definition for a public library – the project must be funded through grants and donations.

"[We're] not technically considered a public library, therefore [our] projects are not public works projects, therefore we cannot bond," said Library Director Daniela Pulice. Donations were already raised to pay for architectural plans and related costs.

In May, the Planning Board granted conditional site plan approval for the project, which will renovate the current 4,800-square-foot building constructed in 1972 and add a 1,600-square-foot expansion.

The project's primary goals are to make the library ADA-compliant; to upgrade outdated systems, such as heating, plumbing and electrical; and to offer more spacious reading and meeting spaces to meet the needs of the community.

"Our plan will accomplish these goals while creating an attractive addition to the center of town," said Library Trustee Julia Boone Kessler, who was school librarian at West Road School for 28 years.

"It's an incredibly well-used library,

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'City' of riders, volunteers set for Millbrook Horse Trials

by Curtis Schmidt



Rider Buck Davidson is aboard "Park Trader" as the horse leaps through a jump. This year's Millbrook Horse Trials are set Aug. 3-6 at Coole Park Farm on Bangall-Amenia Road. Photo courtesy of Brant Gamma Photos

Founder Louise Meryman says she has been running the Millbrook Horse Trials (MHT) for "way too long," but there is no stopping now.

The four-day event at Coole Park Farm on Bangall-Amenia Road in Eastern Dutchess County has become one of the largest competitions in the United States, drawing hundreds of riders from across the country, plus stewards, workers and local volunteers and thousands of spectators.

This year's event is set from Aug. 3 to 6 and is free to spectators, except for the VIP Water View section, which gives visitors the best views and expert commentary on riders and events. Passes to the Trevor Zoo on the property of the Millbrook School are included. Visit the website at millbrookhorsetrials.com for more visitor and scheduling information.

Meryman and her organizers have been hard at work for months, working to turn the farm into a "small city" of more than 4,500 horse show enthusiasts and the horses themselves.

Meryman, who started the event back in 1985, said the goal has always been to provide an educational and competitive event for horses and riders.

"We are all enthusiasts and we love what we do," said Meryman. "It's a true labor of love."

The MHT is a recognized event of the United States Eventing Association (USEA) and United States Equestrian Federation.

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Challenges await new Thorne Building committee

by Mary Keelan

Lost midst the muted euphoria that greeted the announcement of a new Planning Committee to solve the challenges of the deteriorating historic Thorne Memorial Building in the Village of Millbrook are the lessons learned from at least three earlier groups in the last two decades that tried to find solutions.

These include the Initial Thorne Building Committee, co-chaired by Oakleigh B. Thorne and George T. Whalen, Jr., Thorne Building Revitalization Committee, chaired by Elizabeth Baravalle, and Adhoc Millbrook12545 chaired by Barbara Milo Ohrbach.

That is not to say that the appointment of Charles E. Pierce Jr. as Chair of the Planning Committee, means touching on the past, present and future of the Thorne Memorial Building will not be addressed. The very experienced and credentialed Chairman Pierce, a longtime area resident with other successful community projects to his credit, exponentially increased the endowment of the Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum in New York City during his



A new Planning Committee must solve the challenges of the deteriorating Thorne Memorial Building in Millbrook. Photo by Curtis Schmidt

20-year tenure as Director, transforming that institution from very good to the very, very best.

One of his first challenges will be to disrupt the misleading conflation among many in the community of the Bennett College

structural collapse with the more recent, less noticeable disintegration of the Thorne Memorial Building. Though it is increasingly obvious, and most fortunate for Millbrook, that the solution to both situa-

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Challenges await new Thorne Building Committee

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tions is emerging from the resources and concerns of the Tribute Garden Foundation (TGF) and its board of trustees, they are distinct challenges with different histories, and, most importantly, different ownership.

The Thorne Memorial Building was gifted to the Village of Millbrook in 1896 and owned outright by the Village ever since. Bennett College was almost always in private ownership. The bankruptcy of the college in 1977-78 brought many development-oriented owners, as well as bank ownership, followed by a redemptive purchase in 2014 by the TGF and the Oakleigh Thorne family.

Conditions delineated in the 19th-century deed granting the Thorne Memorial Building to the Village have thwarted many mayors of Millbrook over the last few decades. The first condition necessitated the incorporation of Millbrook as a Village with the caveat that if it ever unincorporated, the building would revert back to the Thorne family and its descendants. This came to be known as the “reverter clause.” (For instance, consolidation with the Town of Washington is something periodically under consideration, especially when New York State offers incentive monies.)

The second ‘trigger’ was if the Thorne Memorial Building was no longer used as an educational resource such as a school, its first intended use, with a relatively broad interpretation of that term to include “cultural education” in its many manifestations: “...and generally for all purposes of education and the diffusion of knowledge, by the giving of lectures, concerts or otherwise, as may be deemed advisable by the said Board of Education...”

Though Mayor Rodney Brown has not raised this issue of the “reverter clause” in any discussions on the Thorne Memorial Building, his predecessors, especially Mayor Laura Hurley and Mayor Andrew Clferri, spent considerable meeting time and some Village funds over the years trying to resolve it.

At the Village meeting on Jan. 8, 2013, according to archived minutes, “Mayor Hurley offered a motion which was seconded by Trustee Spagnola to authorize the law firm of VanDeWater and VanDeWater to commence an Article 15 proceeding seeking Quiet Title to the Thorne Building property. Furthermore, VanDeWater is authorized to begin research identifying the heirs of Thorne at a cost not to exceed \$2000. All ayes were recorded and the motion carried.”

Since no explanation for this action and no final report were recorded, Adhoc Millbrook 12545, the most recent citizen group focused on the Thorne Memorial Building before the current one, placed a letter into the record at the October 8, 2013 Village meeting with the request: “Please clarify if there is a current or contemplated proposal under discussion by the Village of Millbrook governing body, or any other interested parties, that is necessitating legal action and attendant Village monies to expedite the Reverter Clause for the Thorne Building and properties.”

No response was ever forthcoming. Three years later, Adhoc Millbrook12545 submitted another request for public information on the sale of the building, requesting the following: 1. “any such discussion to sell the Thorne Building, or otherwise transfer ownership, be discussed and vetted with the public in a timely and transparent fashion;” and 2. “the mayor and trustees report to the public any discussion and decisions about the sale of the Thorne Building made outside regular public meetings, including via emails and/or during executive session.”

What Mayor Brown does applaud is “this (new) effort, because it would get the Thorne Building out of the Village cost structure ...” When at the June 27, 2017 regularly scheduled Village meeting, Brown announced the formation of the Thorne Building Planning Board, which

evolved out of three privately held workshops he organized and which met in the Village Hall in the late Spring 2017, the Mayor also lamented the ongoing costs to the Village of maintaining the building with no benefits accruing to the community.

Some residents find these comments quite perplexing. At least two Village funds exist, which are specifically allocated for the maintenance of the Thorne Building: The Thorne Revitalization Fund, approximately \$375,000 granted from the Tribute Garden Foundation in 2001 with about \$230,000 reported as remaining, and the original fund for upkeep established by the 19-century Thorne family and held by JP Morgan Chase as securities most recently estimated at a value of \$550,000, the interest from which is deposited in the Village accounts. Traditionally, income and expens-

es related to the Thorne Building have not had separate accounting or financial reports from those of the Village of Millbrook.

Although the new Thorne Building Planning Committee is well positioned for the acquisition of the building, anticipating such in the creation of a new 501.c 3 non-profit organization to accept ownership, such a “transfer” of ownership is fraught with challenges. The committee anticipates surveying the community so as to understand the wishes of the public. As Chairman Pierce has commented: “... we are committed to conducting a very public process that will include open community meetings so that everyone’s ideas can be heard.”

After the “reverter clause,” one of the most obvious challenges for any transfer of ownership and one an earlier Village Board tried to resolve is - exactly what is the

Thorne Memorial Building worth? Mayor Brown’s predecessor, Mayor Hurley, started the process for an appraisal, but it faltered over the method of choosing the appropriate professional certified appraiser for such an historic building.

The only known published appraisal is that in the Dutchess County Parcel Access file where the current assessment is listed as \$2,811,000. (As government owned, the Thorne Building is exempt from taxes). According to the former Town assessor, Jim Tyger, the condition of the building and estimates to renovate it will influence any future appraisals. The final decision to sell/transfer ownership rests with the Mayor and Trustees, presumably voicing the will of the community.

Related story on page 6

CARY LECTURE ON MOSQUITOES SET JULY 28

On Friday, July 28, join the Cary Institute for a lecture by scientist Shannon LaDeau. LaDeau will discuss one of summer’s most formidable pests: mosquitoes. Discover which mosquito species spread illnesses, why invasive Asian tiger mosquitoes increase our risk of getting sick and lessons learned about effective mosquito management.

For the past five years, LaDeau has investigated how urbanization shapes mosquitoes and disease risk. The Mosquito Project, based in Baltimore,

Maryland, blends mosquito monitoring, disease transmission modeling, and community engagement - with the goal of improving public health. By unraveling how built and green spaces influence mosquito numbers on a block-by-block basis, LaDeau is advancing the science needed for effective mosquito management.

The event will be held in the Cary Institute auditorium, at 2801 Sharon Turnpike (Route 44) in Millbrook. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Seating is first-come, first-served.

Antonín Dvořák’s

DIMITRIJ



American Symphony Orchestra,
Conducted by Leon Botstein, music director
Directed by Anne Bogart

The first fully staged American production of Dvořák’s grand opera. With masterful choral writing and a plot rife with Russian political intrigue *Dimitrij* resumes where Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* leaves off—vividly depicting the uncertainty, tribal loyalties, and struggles for power in the wake of the revered tsar’s death.

July 28 – August 6
Sosnoff Theater | Tickets start at \$25

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