

# 'Magic Rocks!' for people looking for something to do 'between dinner & fireworks'

## Niagara Falls Magic Theatre now open year-round

BY JOSHUA MALONI

GM/Managing Editor

Sleight of hand dexterity and misdirection is magician Leon Etienne's bread and butter – but it was mathematics that enabled him to open a new venue in downtown Niagara Falls last summer. He discovered adding something to nothing could create everything for people “between dinner and the fireworks” on the U.S. side of the falls.

Etienne, an award-winning Utica performer and late-night TV guest, and his business/life partner, Chelsea LaCongo of Cheektowaga, “noticed when we visited – we went up one summer; just kind of looked around; what’s going on our side; went to the Canadian side; saw some shows on the Canadian side; and then it kind of was like, ‘Well, there’s nothing going on, really at night, after you’ve done Maid of the Mist, Cave of the Winds – there’s nothing that families can go and enjoy, or even people celebrating their honeymoon, or celebrating their wedding anniversary 30 years later. What do they do after dinner, between dinner and the fireworks? So, if we could find a spot to open up a theater where we could host our show, that would be perfect.’”

“That’s really the decision, and the background that went into it, was we identified a need in Niagara Falls, on the New York side, to have a live event.”

Etienne and LaCongo spent nine months over 2024-25 converting a space adjacent to the Comfort Inn into the Niagara Falls Magic Theatre. The hip-yet-family-friendly club debuted late last June.

“We’ve been touring nonstop for the last decade,” Eti-



Leon Etienne's unique "Magic Rocks!" show now has a permanent home in downtown Niagara Falls. "We're very grateful for the local support. It's really been overwhelming," he said.



year will change, we are going to have shows year-round," Etienne said. "We are actively setting up partnerships for the winter with hotels, so that they 1) know we're going to be open; and 2), we are already planning events together. Like, 'Oh, we're going to do this special package over winter break. Let's include the magic show with that.' 'OK, great; we'll be open that night as well.'"

Etienne will still travel, so, "I am curating and hand-picking another performer to fill in for us when we are not there," he said. "The

enne said. "We were looking for a spot in Western New York, which is now home for me and has always been home for Chelsea. We were looking for a spot where we could set up a theater – and to do that, you have to have turnover. And right in our own backyard, right down the highway from Orchard Park, is one of the world's greatest wonders, which has a ton of tourism."

Etienne and LaCongo worked tirelessly in networking with local tourism leaders, attending conferences and events, and building something people could experience without leaving the area.

"We've gotten several quotes from people, and just reviews of, 'Hey, we came for the falls, but when we saw that there was an award-winning show here, we stayed for the magic,'" Etienne said. "We're really trying to embrace that, just to let people know we are here to enhance the overall experience in Niagara Falls. We're here to hopefully convince people to stay in the area longer, whereas maybe they would have done their morning and afternoon at the big attractions, and then either headed back home or to their next stop on their summer vacation, or whatever it may be. But now they're staying overnight because there is other things to do."

As word of mouth grew last summer, the Niagara Falls Magic Theatre began to fill up fast.

"Towards the end of the season, it was actually kind of sad that we had to go, but I had contracts that I had to fulfill – and I'm a man of my word, so I wasn't going to back out on those contracts," Etienne said. "The momentum really did pick up. People started noticing, 'Oh, there's a theater.'"

At a recent tourism industry preview night, Etienne announced the Niagara Falls Magic Theatre would "not be closing the doors again."

Regular shows began running this week and, though "the schedule throughout the

quality will be controlled. It will be world-class, state-of-the-art, and it's obviously in the space that we built and that we love. ...

"I do still have a very lucrative touring career, so I can't just give that up. But we are going into year two. We are extremely dedicated to the area. I attended New York state tourism conferences this year just to let the New York state tourism professionals know that, 'Hey, we're up here now; we're dedicated; we're here for the long haul.'"

To that end, "People that have been established in Niagara Falls told us, 'Hey, let's talk this year, because last year you were kind of the new kid on the block. We've seen people come and go. ... We wanted to make sure you're for real before we actually partnered with you, and you've proven that you are. So, here, let's talk, and let's make some stuff happen,'" Etienne said.

Off stage, "We have big plans," too, Etienne added. "If everything goes smoothly, we are going to be expanding that lobby area by September or October."

"We've already put up some new stuff," he said. "We're very excited we have our beer and wine license now. We have our popcorn machine. So, really kind of adding some little things to the existing space that's just going to take it up another notch has been already very rewarding."

"But we already have plans to expand the lobby to almost double in size, and then some walls will disappear, so it'll actually open up the space more. We're super excited for that."

"And we're really curating that lounge experience a little more this year. So, when people come, our doors open at 6 o'clock for a 7 o'clock show, they're going to actually get to see some more close-up magic this year. We may install a little stage in there ... so I can say, 'Hey, everyone, welcome. Thank you so much for supporting a locally owned, family business.'"

"The show's about to start." For tickets or more information on "Magic Rocks!" Leon Etienne and the Niagara Falls Magic Theatre, visit <https://nfmagic.com/>.

# Lewiston Artisan Farmers Market starts summer run



Clockwise from left: Lewiston Artisan Farmers Market owner/operator/promoter/baker Rachel Jolbert. • At the Lewiston Artisan Farmers Market. ...

BY JOSHUA MALONI

GM/Managing Editor

Though the weather more closely resembled fall, the summer edition of the Lewiston Artisan Farmers Market kicked off Saturday with large crowds at Academy Park. Once again, vendors were in a T-shape, with merchants lined parallel to South Ninth and Cayuga streets. There, they offered produce, honey, bread, jam, oils, soaps, created works, prepared meals and an assortment of beverages.

"I truly love being a vendor at the Lewiston Farmers Market," said Alicia Archambeault, owner of Buffalo Freeze Dry, prior to the season premiere. "Every week, it's amazing to see how the market brings people together. Neighbors catching up, families spending time together, and the community supporting one another in such a genuine way. The support for local businesses has been incredible, and we are so grateful for everyone who chooses to shop small and support local vendors."

"A special thank you to the market owner (Rachel Jolbert) for giving us the opportunity to be part of something so special. It's more than just a market – it's a community – and I am proud to be a part of it."

Narji Evans, owner of Inner Yogi Designs, said, "I love participating in the Lewiston Artisan Farmers Market because it's located right in the heart of the village and brings together such a wonderful mix of locals and tourists throughout the season. The atmosphere is always welcoming, the people are friendly, and there's a genuine sense of community and positive energy that makes the market feel special each week. It's a beautiful place to connect with people, share my handcrafted jewelry, and be surrounded by so many talented small businesses and artisans."

For Jolbert, who has been a merchant at the market for seven years (with Three Little Hens Baking Co.), and overall owner/operator for three years, the goal is simple: "I originally wanted to participate in the farmers market because I love Lewiston, I love small business, and I love connecting with people."

She explained, "Farmers markets are known as a 'third place.' Ray Oldenburg coined the term, which refers to 'informal gathering spots where people can relax, connect with the commu-



nity, and socialize.' I believe this is exactly what the Lewiston Artisan Farmers Market provides for our community."

"Over the past seven years, I have gained more than I ever could have imagined: two successful businesses, an appreciation and better understanding of local agriculture, and a commu-

nity of like-minded small business owners – many of which have become close, personal friends.

"I am grateful for the incredibly hard-working farmers, bakers, makers and artisans who show up week after week to provide high-quality, local, home-grown and homemade products

for our market.

"To our community: Thank you for showing up every week. We would not be where we are today if not for every person who comes out to shop local with us on Saturdays!"

The summer edition of the Lewiston Artisan Farmers Market operates from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. each Saturday through Oct. 10 – except for two Peach Festival-related weekends in September.

For more information, and a list of each week's vendors, visit <https://www.facebook.com/lewistonartisanmarket>.



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