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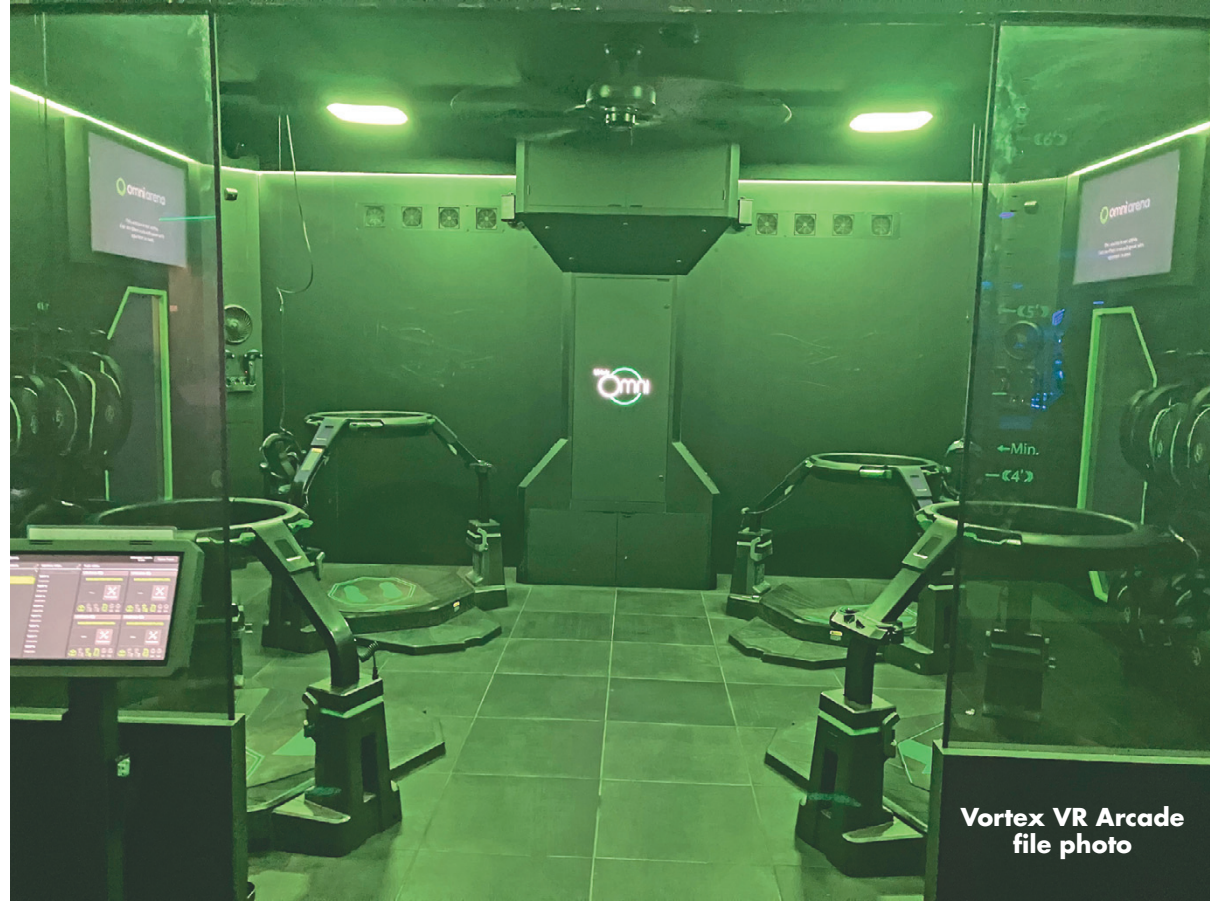
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Vortex VR holds official grand-opening



Vortex VR Arcade file photo

BY ELIJAH ROBINSON
Contributing Writer

Niagara Falls has a new hub for locals and tourists alike. Vortex VR Arcade, located on the third floor of the One Niagara Welcome Center at 360 Rainbow Blvd., held its grand opening Sunday with a Halloween party. As part of the opening ceremony, Mayor Robert Restaino cut the ribbon, officially opening the facility.

The flagship attractions at the arcade are the Dark Ride multi-sensory theater, and the Omni Arena.

According to Joe Grenga, arcade's in-house designer and marketer, The Omni Arena, developed by Virtuix Omni, based out of Austin, Texas, has four people playing eight different VR games on omni-directional treadmills. The VR Dark Ride, developed by Triotech, based out of Montreal, Canada, is a seven-dimension experience with 3-D glasses, seats moving in every direction, and simulated high winds.

As Grenga put it, these VR experiences are the closest thing to Universal Studios or Disney Parks in the area.

"To be able to physically run around in the games is something I've dreamt of as a kid, and now it's here in our city? 10-year-old me would have laughed in my face if I told him," Grenga said.

During the soft opening in July 2022, Vortex remained open to guests while the equipment was being tuned up.

Grenga explained his team worked with O-Watch, a virtual reality manufacturer based out of China, and Shaffer Distributing, based out of Columbus, Ohio, to help the arcade select the most fun games used at the arcade.

As part of the grand opening, a basket raffle was held to raise money, which Grenga said will go to Community Missions of Niagara in order to give back to the community.

Grenga runs the arcade with his father, operating partner Paul Grenga. According to Joe, the partnership couldn't be more fruitful.

"I always have the opportunity to seek advice or counsel from my father and his experiences, and with the new technologies that myself and my siblings and cousins grew up playing, we have the experience to show him on what is fun and exciting for the arcade," he said. "The challenge – and I feel this goes with any parent and child relationship – is that there are moments where the parent looks at you as their child, when that child could be in their 30s. However, the trust is always there without question."

Also helping out with the arcade is former Village of Lewiston Mayor Richard Soluri, who Joe refers to as his third grandfather, who advises on community involvement.

"Meetings at city hall or meetings with the small business as-

sociation, he would often go with us (as) someone with experience we could kind of fall back on. He's been one of our biggest supporters for as long as I can remember," Grenga said.

Formerly the headquarters of Occidental Chemical Corp., Grenga said work is ongoing to expand onto another wing of the third floor, anticipated for 2025.

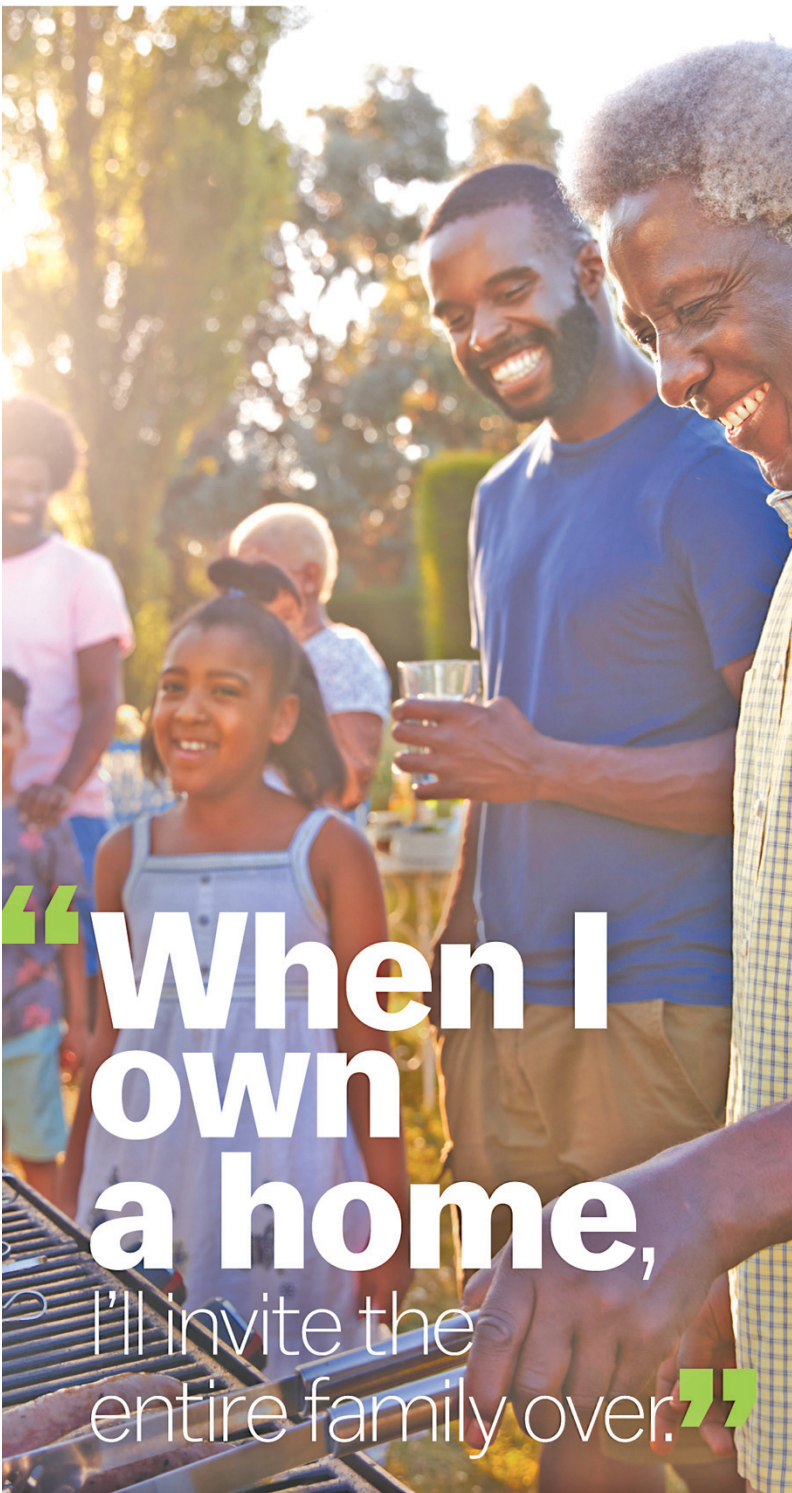
"While I can't give out any surprises yet, I can say that we sure as heck aren't done yet. Vortex still has room to grow and improve, and I do hope everyone is excited for what we have in store," he said.

Grenga noted the arcade is working with the state to receive a grant to install energy-efficient windows, in an attempt to modernize the arcade and cut down on costs.

"These windows would obviously improve the look of the place, but it would help with the heavy costs of heating, cooling throughout the year," he said.

Now fully open, Grenga looks forward to the arcade being present in the community, and making everyone happy.

"When everything slows down in the winter months, I think it will be good for there to be an active presence in the downtown area, for the immediate community and WNY as a whole," he said. "Even more important, I'm glad we were able to come together as a community."



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