

Piper sends thanks for Oakwood addition at Lewiston Cemetery

On Sunday, May 28, 2023, the bronze historical cemetery plaque was unveiled and dedicated in the Oakwood section of the Village Cemetery. A project I originally doubted would happen, it became a reality thanks to those who so generously donated to my plaque project.

Mayor Welch gave the opening statement, along with Tom Collister, curator of the Lewiston Historical Museum, who told about the history of the old and new cemeteries and how they became one. He was followed by Pastor Joyce Serianni, who gave the opening invocation. Following

that, Mayor Welch, Tom Collister and myself unveiled the plaque to the public for the first time. The honor guard from Downriver Post 7487 VFW presented colors, while Justin Higner, Town of Wheatfield historian, conducted the march of honor, laying a wreath in honor of all the veterans and those who also rest within its grounds. Another veteran volunteered his time to play taps for the wreath laying.

I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all for being a part of this special ceremony. I give my sincerest thanks to Pastor Serianni for officiating the dedication and

blessing of the plaque monument, as well as blessing those veterans and others who have come to rest there. Once more, the grounds have been blessed for those who come to rest in the future.

I give a special thank you to Claudia Carnes, aka the Widow Reverend Mrs. David Smith, widow of the first pastor of the Presbyterian Church. Her presence made perfect the tone for the event.

We were celebrating Justin Higner not only for his assistance with the ceremony, but for all he does to assist me in my historical endeavors.

In closing, once more, my heartfelt thanks to the VFW for their donation of the new flag that flies over the grounds, and the placing of flags on the veterans graves that have been unmarked for some time.

Lastly, I announced my next project in the cemetery. With specifically designated donations, two more memorial benches will soon be placed in the Oakwood section. One was donated by Joan Dominick Sheusi and will be placed in honor of her mother, Berniece S. Dominick, who passed away earlier this year at the age of 103 – making her the oldest living village

resident at the time. The second, donated by Pastor Joyce Serianni, will be dedicated to those who served our country and others who rest, both now and in the future years to come.

A special thank you from my heart to all who have encouraged, thanked and complimented me on my quest to record and preserve the history of the village for now and the future to come. It touches my heart to know my work is appreciated.

Thank you all. God bless.

*Russ Piper
Village Historian/
Cemetery Caretaker*

Questions design philosophy in Lewiston

As I rode down Center Street on my way home from the airport last week, what should I be greeted with but one of the ugliest buildings I have ever seen, the so-called “wellness center” next to the gas station.

What an absolute horror. This structure violates not only one of the tenets of good architecture that “form follows function,” but it is an insult to aesthetics and good taste. Frank Lloyd Wright once stated that a building should “grace” the land it is built upon, not “disgrace” it. What we have here is disgraceful architecture, a pretend two-story building whose upper level is nothing more than open space with a cosmetic façade at either end.

The only occupants of this void will be gaggles of geese or committees of turkey vultures spreading their wings to warm themselves in the noonday sun. In appearance, this building offends the eye and churns the stomach. There is nothing tasteful about it. Not shape. Not cosmetics. Not materials. Not size. Not mass. And especially not color.

If there were a local counterpart to a beautification award, such as an uglification award, this nightmarishly designed thing would take top prize. An appropriate plaque could be affixed to the front and include the names of everyone responsible for its existence, from the architect to the contractor to every village official who voted to approve it.

Will the spread of this creeping kitsch come to an end, or is there more to come?

There are three parcels of land left on Center Street, the lot next

to Vincenzo’s, the Frontier House and Academy Park. Are they vulnerable? To view the future, look at the past. Consider the recent history of Center Street development. Look closely and what do you see?

Starting on North Fourth, there is the Gallo building, a fine example of the use of Quonset hut corrugated steel, and gray at that. A little way further, we find a two-toned gray behemoth occupying the space where the old firehall stood. What a hulk it is. Not only is the shape weird, the mass of the building overwhelms the site, as do the neighboring restaurants. All bulk; no restraint. Neither of these gray structures seems to represent any particular architectural style. Rather, they are oddly formed concoctions that brutally contain the spaces they occupy.

Further along what do we see on the south side, but – gasp! – another corrugated steel beauty, the bloody red Como building that formerly housed two now unoccupied retail stores. This use of steel roofs and siding may be trendy, but this material is more appropriate to an industrial rather than a retail setting. It is certainly misplaced on Center Street. These buildings are better suited for

resorts or ski centers, not to a place that considers itself historic. In fact, the very historicity we so dearly value has been damaged by poor urban planning by village officials.

As we trek closer to North Seventh, we find ourselves in Ellicott Development Land. Such a vista! What was once a stand of trees and green space is now a barren plain punctuated by bland structures. Landscaping is an afterthought here. An occasional tree and shrub do not soften its grim appearance. With foresight and a good landscape architect, this place could have been a pocket park where people could congregate. Perhaps a gazebo? Benches? Greenery? A water feature? Anything would be better than asphalt and emptiness. There is no there, there.

It appears that these buildings have few occupants. Except for two, the only signage I see is for Pella Windows.

Here’s an idea: because of its non-occupancy, maybe the site’s owner could erect a sign welcoming refugees from oppressed lands to move in, establish themselves, open mom-and-pop retail stores, restaurants and the like and thereby identify the Village of Lewiston

as a multicultural place to live, a local cure for the wan paleness malady that appears to afflict it.

Such a bold move could alleviate Niagara County’s depopulation problem. Unfortunately, instead of a welcome mat, county officials have put up a figurative wall by declaring a state of emergency. The only humanitarian voice about refugees I have heard is that of Mark Poloncarz, a man who displays the courage of his convictions. I have not heard a peep from anyone in either the political or the faith communities in Niagara County or in the Village of Lewiston.

So much for simple compassion. But I digress.

I have written in the past and will do so again in the future as the need arises that Center Street is overdeveloped and that improvements are few, while tasteless detriments are many. The few include Carmelo’s, Gather, DiCamillo’s, KeyBank and Northwest Bank, and the Hurtin’ 4 Curtains building, among others. They are

invitational to passersby.

But both in appearance and in effect on the viewer, the detriments are sad and depressing by either overpowering space or voiding it.

Where have good taste and sense and sensibility gone? As the song laments, “Gone to graveyards, everyone.” But we can learn. I suggest future developers should visit the Presbyterian Church and walk through the graveyard, where they will be educated in Federalist architecture and efficient site planning, as well as in the art of headstone design and etching.

From the 19th century, the voices of the dead – the Porters, the Scovells, the Tryons – speak to us through the legacy they left us, that of vision and design, and all of it aesthetic and lasting.

What is the legacy that we in the 21st century will bestow on future generations? Look around for the answer.

Frank Scelsa

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