

# Sharing Niagara's history: County funding allows StoryAmerica series to expand

**BY TERRY DUFFY**  
Editor-in-Chief

Last week, Niagara County Legislator Irene Myers visited with local tourism officials and historian interests from Youngstown and Ransomville to present \$3,000 in county funding intended to further expand the area's historical past to outside visitors.

Known as the "Great American Story Search" (storyamerica.org), this Kevin Costner-inspired project has expanded locally into a partnership of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area (NFNHA) and the Discover Niagara Shuttle. Sara Capen, executive director of the NFNHA, together with Youngstown resident Aaron Dey of the Discover Niagara Shuttle, provided insight on this offering that delves into local history like no other.

"We focus on those stories surrounding our history and culture. As a National Heritage Area, our focus is here in Niagara County," Capen said.

According to Dey, the project entails the compiling of local accounts provided by contributors

Niagara County Legislator Irene Myers (second from left) at last week's check presentation to further develop the StoryAmerica project in Niagara. Joining, from left: Aaron Dey of the Discover Niagara Shuttle, Porter Supervisor John "Duffy" Johnston, Doty Riordan and Karen Noonan of the Porter Historical Society, and Sara Capen of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area. (Photo by Terry Duffy)

— be they historical interests, area officials or local residents. These are typically personal reflections, interesting tidbits or expanded details into the people, places and events that shaped the region's history and its past. The accounts are further researched and then developed into what is known as "audio" stories for sharing with the public via an iPhone app.

Storyamerica.org is a project the NFNHA offers as part of its alliance with the U.S. National Parks Service. The local accounts, or "audio stories," are produced by the NFNHA for sharing with listeners. The program works via available funding sources within the particular Na-



tional Heritage Area.

Capen said the Buffalo Niagara Region is unique in that it has two such entities — the Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor covering Albany to Buffalo, and the NFNHA covering Niagara County.

"To become a National Heritage Area, we go through three different acts of Congress, and it's because our history is so significant," she said. "New York City does not have a National Heritage Area, we do. We are one of the two (areas in the country) that has two — the Erie Canal and us. (It) is a tribute to

the Parks Service coming in and saying this area is very rich.

Locally, this StoryAmerica offering has become part of the experience availed to tourists and riders on the 17-destination Discover Niagara Shuttle tour.

"The genesis of this was the shuttle," Dey said. "We have drivers, but they're not docents. If it wasn't for the shuttle, this initiative would not have happened."

"It's an entity that (we) developed with the shuttle," Capen said. "It's really important for us to extend the stay for visitors. You do that by connecting with places like Youngstown; people

do that in different ways, by looking out, by connecting with their phone and listening to a story. By the story telling. Our goal by the end of this year is to have stories all along the shuttle route, so that (the visitor) can spend time with us."

Dey said there are 105 stories on the audio app with a working list of 150 additional stories in development — dependent on funding sources.

"They (the NFNHA) created an initiative to research and write over 100 important local area stories," he said.

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