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Museum celebrates 30 years

December 5, 2010
By NANCY TULLIS (ntullis@reviewonline.com)

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EAST LIVERPOOL - Members and friends of the Museum of Ceramics on East Fifth Street gathered Saturday to celebrate the museum's 30th birthday, two years after a deep slash in state funding threatened its survival.

"We're still here," said Sarah Vodrey, museum director. Her family owned Vodrey & Bros., one of the many potteries in the area in the late 1800s and at the turn of the 20th century. She said the Museum of Ceramics was the last major project, her grandfather, Atty. W.H. Vodrey, worked on before his death.

The title of the anniversary program was "Thrilled to be Thirty." She said after the Ohio Historical Society funding was drastically cut by the state, the trickle down effect of those cuts meant a 93-percent cut in the Museum of Ceramics funding in seven weeks.

Article Photos



This commemorative plate is one of two created by Hall ...

Vodrey said members and friends rallied, trying first to write letters to state politicians and officials holding the purse strings. When those efforts failed, Vodrey's father, Jackman Vodrey and her husband, Jeff Hendrickson, both of whom are attorneys, scurried to create a non-profit organization.

After reviewing the non-profit paperwork, including a board that also included Dr. Marc Hoffrichter and Atty. Tim Brookes, the Ohio Historical Society was satisfied the Museum of Ceramics was in good hands. Sarah Vodrey said the group still has some support from OHS, such as recent efforts to provide the Museum of Ceramics building with storm windows, but most of the support now comes from memberships and donations.

"This area is still the pottery capital of the world, even though so many of the potteries have come and gone," Sarah Vodrey said. "Both by the number of potteries, and the amount of product produced, we still have that distinction."

Returning to the city for Saturday's celebration were William C. Gates Jr., first director of the museum, George Kane of the Ohio Historical Society, and Marie and Marden Blackledge of Ohio Valley China Collectors Convention. The Blackledge's are from Cleveland and schedule the convention, a gathering of 50 to 60 china collectors from

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all over the country, each year at the Museum of Ceramics

Besides celebrating the Museum's 30th birthday, Sarah Vodrey said Saturday's event also was a celebration of the Homer Laughlin China Co.'s upcoming 75th anniversary of its popular Fiesta Dinnerware with the unveiling of a new Fiesta exhibit.

A variety of Fiesta pieces from different periods and a limited edition Raspberry presentation bowl are part of the exhibit. Sarah Vodrey said the Raspberry presentation bowl is No. 118 of 500. The bowls were produced to mark the production of the 500th million Fiesta piece in 1998.

The exhibit also includes an advertisement from March of 1939, offering a 109-piece Fiesta service for eight for \$15.95.

Museum members are now working on funding to make the museum more handicapped accessible, Sarah Vodrey said after all the work by many people to get the Museum of Ceramics open and then keep it going, she had two encounters the past few weeks that show its importance. She said even people who are part of and close to the pottery industry in the tri-state area still learn new things every day.

She said she recently had an email from out of state in which a man wanted history on a pottery that was once in the area. Sarah Vodrey said no one had heard of the pottery, so there is work to be done to research it.

It is likely the pottery may have been one of the many backyard potteries prevalent at the turn of the century, when potters would work all day at one of the large potteries, then go home and make their own pottery.

Also recently a woman brought a vase into the museum and wanted to know if the museum volunteers knew anything about it. It was cracked in several places at the top.

The woman said she bought it at a garage sale for \$1.

"It was damaged, but all of us standing there immediately recognized it as a Craven Art Pottery piece," she said. "We have six pieces in the museum collection."

Also a part of the museum's history are photographs and news clippings which chronicle the museum's evolution. One such clipping is an editorial from this newspaper, then known as "The Evening Review." The June 3, 1980, editorial "Part of the Family" stated in part: "More than a decade of labor - mental, political, physical and spiritual - went into converting the old Post Office on Broadway to a lasting tribute to the ancient pottery craft and the people of East Liverpool who worked in the trade since the 1840's.

"The building is not a collection of moldy things on dusty shelves; it is a familiar old friend, speaking out to us, showing us the community of yesteryear, putting the present into perspective, inspiring a sense of accomplishment and pride - and hope."

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