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LOCAL NEWS



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Sunday, June 18, 2006

'Sneak peak' draws a crowd at History Center

By David Hannula
Contributing Writer



THE SPEECHES. Kurt Kragness, Executive Director of the Sherburne History Center, concluded his remarks by introducing Minnesota Secretary of State Mary Kiffmeyer. (Photo by David Hannula).

Invitees filled the new Sherburne History Center this week for a "Sneak Preview" of the facility which will stage a gala public opening today beginning at 10 am.

Preview Night

In his opening remarks, the Center's Executive Director Ken Kragness spoke of the dedication of the volunteer workers and help from local governments that saw the project through from the original idea to the opening of the doors of the completed facility.

He also cited Bill and Margaret Cox for their vital donation of the land on which the center sits, and praised the work of Capital Campaign Chair Linda Paulson before introducing the Honorary Chair of the Building Legacy Campaign, MN. Secretary of State Mary Kiffmeyer.

In her remarks, Kiffmeyer noted the Center exhibits provide a look at the lives of the pioneers and early residents of the area, and give current

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residents an understanding of the challenges that needed to be overcome to create the world she called the center "a living, historical place," with "first-class exhibits" that are "bringing forward the legacy and sending it into the future." Commenting on the project and the resulting completed facility, she said: "What better spirit of America can you have?"

Michael Fox of the Minnesota Historical Society also noted the effectiveness of the capital campaign for the project, and predicted that the Sherburne History Center effort will become "a model project that other communities will look to for their own programs." Fox, who is deputy director of historic programs for the society, pointed out that most other states simply do not have historical societies that are as fully developed and funded as we do in Minnesota. He cited the Sherburne County Board for the high level of financial support they have provided.

Dr. Tom Woods was the final speaker of the evening, and he described the intent of the exhibits section of the Center, on which he served as consultant. "Making Sense of Place" is also the name of his museum business, and the goal of the exhibits is to give residents a look at their past through the use of "non-human language," that is, communicating through images and artifacts. Sherburne County has always been "on the edge of things" in terms of location, Woods said, and the exhibit's main theme is "Living on the Edge."

Displayed artifacts touch on such diverse topics as the prehistoric, the land in the time of the Ojibwa and Dakota tribes, the oak savannah encountered by the first settlers, sandy soil and the strawberry and potato fields that thrived in it, the 1930's "Minnesota Dust Bowl" days, rural electrification and the modern era.

Woods said the challenge now is to determine whether these images tell the story of the land to the modern viewer as they visit the Center.

The Opening

Sherburne County Commissioner Rachel Leonard wielded the scissors at the ribbon cutting ceremony marking the opening of the Center. Sherburne County Board Chairman Terry Nagorski, who would normally do the cutting at events like these, graciously ceded the task to Leonard in honor of her years of work on the project.

Leonard, a past president of the Sherburne County Historical Society, noted that the project succeeded due to the work of "lots of ordinary people" around the county who made donations and volunteered to serve on the many committees. Funds were also raised through sales of engraved bricks in the Legacy Plaza area at the Center, where individuals and families can become a permanent part of the facility, and sales of books published by the Historical Society, such as "Lighting the Fire" which chronicled the one-room schoolhouse days, and "The Ox Cart Trail," a history of Hwy. 10. Leonard noted her home area in Zimmerman had only three historical society members when she began her fund raising and development efforts, and the area now boasts 100 members.

Leonard is also active in fund raising and design efforts for a Veteran's Memorial to be raised on the Sherburne History Center site in the future.

The Entertainment

"The High B's" provided traditional Irish music for the evening, which generated some brief but spirited jig steps from the crowd.

The attendees also enjoyed some refreshing "mocktails" from the bar and a delicious parade of savory appetizers like skewered sweet and sour chicken, stuffed mushroom caps and salmon puffs created by A Catered Event of Big Lake.



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