

## Jamesville Community Museum hosts holiday festivities



JASON KLAIBER

Jamesville celebrated the season with its annual holiday festivities, which included a tree lighting, story readings, and lots of merriment.

BY JASON KLAIBER  
STAFF WRITER

The Jamesville Community Museum brought in people of all ages as it hosted its annual holiday festivities on Dec. 7.

Recently renovated with a more accessible sloped walkway to go along with its newly repainted exterior, the museum at 6492 E. Seneca Turnpike operates out of the building formerly used as St. Mark's Church.

With assistance from the museum's 13-year-old junior docent Travis Mueller, the "Light Up Jamesville" event included a raffle drawing for a handmade queen-size quilt with a handmade table runner as the prize for the second ticket pulled and a choice of one of the museum's publications for whoever's name was on the third ticket drawn.

All through the evening, Jamesville resident Susan Titus was in character as a schoolmarm supervising the kids who were writing on the museum chalkboard and coloring in reindeer pictures on the desks, while Luana Impellizzeri came dressed as Mrs. Claus to ask who's been naughty and who's been nice this year and to read from her collection of pop-up books by Robert Sabuda.

Impressed with the turnout of people that evening, Impellizzeri said the kids are wowed by the pop-up designs in the books she brings and the way they so easily fold back up into the pages.

"This is just fun—I look forward to this every year," said Impellizzeri, who has played the role for the hamlet for about 15 years now.

Staff members from the Community Library of DeWitt & Jamesville were there as well with the opportunity to sign up for library cards and a table full of games and holiday-themed books to borrow like one covering gingerbread house decorating.

Next to them, folks from the local Fiddlers Green Park Association were set up inside to help kids decorate ornaments cut from a maple tree branch that they could take home as souvenirs and to also inform people about their mission to preserve and improve Fiddlers Green on Solvay Road as a recreational space.

During the event, which was held from 5 to 6:30 p.m. that night, visitors could also check out the different displays up at the Jamesville Community Museum, including one about the history of Mueller Farm and one called "Scouting in Jamesville" exhibiting vintage uniforms, badges and Boy Scouts literature.

Jack Conlon, a trustee for the museum, always brings his old-timey lanterns on posts to the yearly event to create the air of Walton's Mountain. Conlon said he appreciates that Jamesville's annual holiday season event has been kept alive for decades.

"The essence of this event is to keep the fiber of the community together and to have the young kids share in memories they might have 50 years from now," he said.

The museum also had plenty of cookies and apple cider to share with attendees, and as always, to conclude the festivities Santa Claus came down the hill on one of the Jamesville Fire Department vehicles to light the Christmas tree on the corner property with those gathered outside.

## Front Row Players stage Christmas musical



JASON KLAIBER

The nonprofit Front Row Players staged "A Dickens of a Christmas" Dec. 7 and 8.

BY JASON KLAIBER  
STAFF WRITER

For its Dec. 7 and 8 performances at Temple Adath Yeshurun on Kimber Road, the all-inclusive theater group Front Row Players staged a holiday-themed musical likely to be familiar to the audience.

Not only is the storyline of "A Dickens of a Christmas" a spinoff of Charles Dickens' 1843 novella "A Christmas Carol," but it was also a yearly staple for Syracuse's own Salt City Center for the Performing Arts, which, incidentally, was located at the temple's former site on the corner of Harrison Street and Crouse Avenue.

With music composed by its late in-house music director and co-founder Pat Lotito and a book written by her director friend Ken Prescott, that playhouse premiered "A Dickens of a Christmas" in 1994 and continued it every holiday season for the next decade or so.

The original local production was revived this year to coincide with the 30th anniversary of that debut performance, this time helmed by Front Row Players, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that seeks to put a spotlight on the abilities of adults with physical, intellectual and other developmental disabilities while providing them with a true theatrical experience complete with professional lighting, boisterous musical accompaniment and elaborate costuming.

The full-scale musical followed Ebenezer Scrooge, played by Nick Johnson, as he goes from shouting "humbbug" with the stomp of his cane to a changed man who comes to his senses after being visited by the spirit of his business associate Jacob Marley (Timothy Ranger) and the ghosts of Christmas Past (Kathleen Coughlin), Present (Nicholas Courgi) and Yet to Come (Joshua Nowlin)

All throughout, audience members

whistled and whooped at the sight of all the skipping, twirling, tap dancing and leg kicks during the musical numbers, and they laughed heartily at the jokes and clapped plenty between scenes, eventually giving a standing ovation at the very end.

Making it its mission to have those with special needs front and center in prominent, visible onstage roles, the organization is all about showing what is possible rather than what isn't and changing perception with every performance.

"I always say Front Row Players takes a big village to be what we are, and it's truly the case," the nonprofit's founder and president Deb Cavanagh said into the mic at the start of the "Dickens" production's Sunday matinee.

Cavanagh, an East Syracuse resident, went on to thank the mentors and family members who supported the 39 actors throughout this semester—the largest ensemble the group has had out of its 13 total shows—as well as everyone in the wings backstage, the creative team in front of the stage, and the rest of the helpers for allowing the actors to "shine" and flaunt their talents.

The cast encompassed an age range from 19 to someone in their 50s with the exception of the child playing Tiny Tim, and there were outside thespians from the community brought in to lend support as roaming wassailers.

Shannon Tompkins, the artistic director and choreographer for Front Row Players, had been one of the original wassailers in the 1990s and she portrayed the Ghost of Christmas Past during Salt City's successful run of "A Dickens of a Christmas." She came up to the mic as well before Act 1 to share why the show holds such a special place in her heart.

Boasting more than enough roles for her friends in Front Row Players, Tompkins said it was one of many musicals

conceived by Pat Lotito, whom she called "a Syracuse treasure" and "a tiny little ball of humor and kindness, laughter and encouragement."

The part of middle-aged Scrooge was written back then specifically for now-pastor of Pat's music Bob Brown, who was in attendance that Sunday of Dec. 8.

The Front Row Players production this fall was dedicated partly to the man that originated Salt City's elder Scrooge, Bill Molesky, referred to as a "pillar of the Syracuse theater community" with an "enormous presence," and partly in memory of that center's Christmas Present Robert "Tank" Steingraber, a man with big shoes to fill who was light on his feet. Both men passed away in 2022.

To benefit the memorial fund in his name, donations were being collected in Molesky's Scrooge hat, which was set out in the lobby during the intermission.

Cavanagh additionally expressed appreciation for the temple's executive director and facilities coordinator for making space for the weekend performances and their work during show week, as well as premium sponsor for the production HALO Branded Solutions, set and scenery sponsor Select Express Auto, and corporate sponsors Caruso & Sons Plumbing and the Darwin On Clinton sandwich shop.

To continue operating year after year, Front Row Players is reliant on corporate sponsors, grants, a performance-based fundraiser taking place in April, the occasional 50/50 raffle, and individual community donations to offset its expenses.

Coming from all over the area to audition, returning members of the dramatic theater group are given first dibs at joining every semester right after Labor Day before registration opens to the wider public.

More information about the nonprofit can be found at frontrowplayers.org.

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