

Town of Ridgeway

2019: Year in Review



This image of Bent's Opera House in December captures the confidence and positive energy which marked this year.

Weather

The first storm of the year coincided with the Martin Luther King holiday weekend. A heavy snowfall and bitterly cold temperatures necessitated a travel advisory as well as a wind chill advisory. February brought a “polar plunge”, an altogether delightful mix of bitter cold (felt like -23 degrees), snow, winds followed by a rapid thaw, 50 degrees (Feb. 4), then freezing rain, freezing drizzle, and 60 mph winds. The month ended with more wind (Feb. 24 -25), strong winds with gusts of up to 70 mph which downed trees and powerlines and left an estimated 4,500 National Grid customers throughout the county without power at one point.

Overall, it was a wet year which caused problems for farmers in every season. Precipitation was 7” above average. Nearby Lake Ontario water levels were the highest ever recorded. Easter was chilly even though it was late, April 21. Remarkably, Memorial Day was gloriously sunny and warm, a picture-perfect day for parades and picnics.

On Monday, June 10, an inch of rain added to the already saturated ground. Hail and rain on August 16 caused a great deal of damage to apple orchards on the Howlett Road area of Knowlesville and nearby, a roof was blown off and a barn destroyed.

Overall, it was a difficult year for farmers. Waterlogged fields delayed planting in the spring, and prevented the harvesting of lower yields in the fall.

On Halloween, a heavy soaking rain dampened the excitement of trick-or-treaters. This was followed by overnight winds of 30-40 miles per hour with gusts of 60 to 65 mph which resulted in the loss of power to almost 1,000 National Grid customers.

Winter came before “Winter” officially arrived. We experienced the first frost and snow Nov. 7-8. A Veterans Day storm brought 6-10 inches of snow and a blast of arctic air, a high of 24 degrees on Nov. 12 and temperatures plummeting to a low of 13 degrees overnight on Nov. 13.

Seasonal temperatures returned, December weather was unremarkable, Christmas was “green” and the year ended quietly.

Bridges

Crews repaired electrical cables to the Knowlesville Lift Bridge in May. The bridge was closed for two days, according to the New York State Canal Corporation.

In November, the New York State Department of Transportation announced that the bridge along Bates Road over the Erie Canal would close to vehicular traffic for approximately six months as part of a previously announced project to rehabilitate seven Erie Canal bridges throughout the county.

Business

Sierra Biological, a niche agri-business which began operations on Swett Road in 2017, continued to expand its market, to the point where it required a larger building. The company is building a brand new 20,000 sq. ft. facility on six acres adjacent to its original location. An additional 10 jobs will be created, bringing their total to 18. Sierra manufactures microscopic nematodes and other biological organisms which are used by the commercial greenhouse industry. The nematodes are a highly effective and economical alternative to using pesticides in the growing process.

Installation of the largest solar project in Orleans County began in the summer. Livestock farmer, Kenneth Baker leased 16.5 acres on Beals Rd. to Borrego Solar Systems which will install 11,745 solar panels on the site. This will generate 3.5 megawatts. A nearby installation on 29 acres on Allis Road will have 18,295 panels and generate 5 megawatts. Borrego is in a 15-year PILOT with Orleans County, the Town of Ridgeway and the Medina Central School District.

Snappy, a manufacturer of galvanized pipe and fittings for the residential HVAC industry, announced plans to relocate from its 214 Commercial St. location to a larger facility, the former Bernzomatic/Worthington Cylinder plant at 1 Bernzomatic Drive in Medina.

The front wall of the building at 331 North Main St. collapsed on Oct. 19, 2019. The building, which is owned by Rita Zambito, was being taken down, it’s structural integrity having been compromised by the previous demolition of the Starlite building.

Zambistro, located at 408 N. Main St. completed a renovation and addition project which doubled the kitchen space, reconfigured the entrance area and added a new dining room with seating for thirty guests.

Several new businesses opened on Main St. The Downtown Browsersy, located at 413 N. Main St., site of the former Journal-Register newspaper building, opened in October. Over 30 vendors offer an array of handcrafted items, antiques and collectibles. Liz Groat is the Browsersy President. The co-operative also has a location in Albion.

Coppersmith Timothy Dunn opened the American Craftsmen Gallery at 419 N. Main St. The gallery features his copper creations as well as work by twenty other artisans from throughout the United States.

Downtown Medina hosted the Fourth Annual Farm to Table Dinner on Thursday, August 8 when about 225 patrons enjoyed a six-course, gourmet meal prepared by chefs and staff from Zambistro, Sourced, Mile 303, Mariachi de Oro, the Shirt Factory and Bent's Opera House. Diners were seated at a block-long stretch of beautifully arrayed tables set up on a closed off section of Main Street.

The event is hosted by the Orleans Renaissance Group, Inc., as part of the annual activities of the Canal Village Farmers' Market, a Medina enterprise also sponsored by ORG.

The ORG also organized the return of renowned tenor Ronan Tynan and his accompanying pianist Billy Lewis to Holy Trinity Parish Church on October 5, 2019, where they played to an appreciative audience.

The newly popular sport of axe-throwing was introduced in August at 810 Meadworks and it quickly attracted many enthusiasts. This new entertainment option is made possible by Tim Elliott and Meadworks owners Bryan and Larissa DeGraw.

Village of Medina officials were notified in October that the \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative grant which they had applied for had been awarded to Seneca Falls.

Elections

At the Orleans County elections held on November 5, 2019, incumbent Brian Napoli (Ridgeway Reform), who has served as Town Supervisor for fourteen years, was re-elected, with 833 votes. Democrat Michael Maak received 187 votes and David Stalker, who was endorsed by the Conservative Party, received 117 votes

Incumbent Councilwoman Mary Woodruff (R) was re-elected, with 868 votes.

Duane Payne (R) received 821 votes to become the newest member of the Board.

Town Justice, Joseph Kujawa was re-elected, with 981 votes.

John Olinger, who was appointed Interim Highway Superintendent on March 22, received 922 votes to become Highway Superintendent.

Fire Dept.

At the Ridgeway Fire Company's Annual Installation Banquet on Jan. 26, 2019, Patrick Kelly was installed as Chief, Jason Bessel as Deputy Chief and Kristin McAdoo as 1st Asst. Chief.

Harriet Petrie was recognized for her 50 years of dedicated service to the Ridgeway Fire Company Ladies Auxiliary.

Tyler Luckman and Kyle Morgan were named "Firefighters of the Year".

On Feb. 11, 2019 the home of Larry and Corina Sword at 3358 Bates Rd. was completely destroyed by fire, there were no injuries.

On Sept. 20 2019, a fire badly damaged a house at 3157 Niagara-Orleans Countyline Rd.

Parks

The centerpiece of the World War I memorial at State Street Park, a 60 Pounder B.L British field gun, which had been sent away for extensive restoration, was returned to Medina on May 1 and repositioned on a new display base. The restoration, which took over a year, was completed by Seed Artillery Reproduction and Resistance of Altoona, PA. On Memorial Day, a wreath was placed on the canon and it was re-dedicated.

In August, the Friends of the Medina Dog Park announced that it had raised \$10,000 out of a \$15,000 goal for the proposed dog park, the first such park in Orleans County, which is to be located on about 1 acre of land adjacent to the compost plant on North Gravel Road.

The Medina Local Revitalization Program worked diligently to envision possible improvements to the waterfront area. Eighteen projects were identified, ranging from wayfinding signs to mixed use development. The plan was submitted to the state for review.

Despite bone- chilling temperatures, crowds lined the sidewalks along Park Ave. and Main St. on Nov. 30th to delight in the colorful 11th Annual Parade of Lights, the highlight of the Old Tyme Christmas celebrations. The Railroad Museum float was awarded the Grand Champion prize.

People

Medina resident Florence "Fuzzy" Posson turned 105 on January 19, 2019.

Shirley Nellist passed away on Jan. 26, 2019. Active in the Medina Historical Society, Shirley also worked on deciphering and recording cemetery records.

Colin Huwyler, founder of Optimus Technologies, a Pittsburgh based company which develops biodiesel conversion systems for trucks, was awarded \$1m grant administered by the New York

State Energy Research and Development Authority to assist in his plans to establish a manufacturing plant.

Mark Goheen retired as Highway Supervisor on March 31, 2019. He had ably served in the position since 2010 and had been re-elected three times.

Councilwoman Sara Fisher concluded her term and chose not to run for re-election.

Laurie Kilburn was hired as First Deputy Clerk for the Town of Ridgeway on March 1, 2019.

Restoration

Restoration work on Bent's Opera House, Main Street's iconic structure continued. A team of construction workers have been working on the project for over a year. The building is still swaddled in scaffolding. For several weeks in the fall, the unlikely sight of construction cranes was a delight to behold, while workmen with brightly colored safety clothing could be seen on the roof. Building owner, Roger Hungerford of Talis Equity, has clearly invested a significant amount of money in this project.

Talis Equity is also invested in the restoration of the former Medina High School Building as well as the stately residence at 304 West Center St.

Matt C. M. Contracting Inc. worked to restore several homes including the home at 200 West Center St.

The Walsh House, a local landmark which has served as a hostelry and tavern since the 1850's, was sold in March 2019. ParkCenter Acquisitions LLC is renovating the building.

The former Knowlesville United Methodist Church was deconsecrated in December. The building, which is in need of restoration, is currently on the market

Schools

Data presented by the Empire Center for Public Policy in Albany noted that student enrollment in the Medina Central School District declined 22.6 per cent in the ten year period between 2008-9 and 2018-19. The enrollment decline for Orleans County for that time period was 20.7 per cent.

The Medina Central School District announced in January that the sale of Warren P. Towne Primary School had been finalized. The building, which had been closed for consolidation in 2012, was purchased by Rainbow CCX, Inc. for \$900,000. The Chinese based educational firm plans to develop the facility into an international school for Chinese students.

The Class of 1969 had the rare honor of touring their alma mater, the highlight of their reunion weekend. The tour was hosted by classmate, Roger Hungerford, who in conjunction with Talis Equity is in the process of restoring the building and creating apartments.

Veterans

Mary Woodruff spearheaded Hometown Heroes, a deeply moving tribute to honor the contributions of community veterans. With the support of the Towns of Ridgeway and Shelby and the Medina Village Board, she organized a banner project and soon had the families and friends of 38 soldiers invested. The double sided vinyl banners which include a portrait of the featured veteran as well as the veteran's name and details of service as well as sponsor information, were hung along Main and Center Streets between Memorial Day and Veteran's Day.

The Company F Memorial, a bronze statue commissioned to represent the soldiers who trained at the Armory and bravely served on fields of war, was dedicated on Saturday, Sept. 7, 2019. This moving event was the culmination of a thirteen year project. The statue, which was put in place in front of the YMCA in April 2019, weighs 1,400 pounds and was created by sculptor Brian Porter. It also features the names of the 550 soldiers

Water

Work on Water District 14, which will cover 4 miles and serve 30 homes along Culvert Road (between Rt. 104 and Portage Rd.) and Porter Road (between Culvert Rd. and Knowlesville Rd.) began in December 2019. Sergi Construction of East Aurora bid \$735,964 for the project. Rural Development awarded a \$720,000 grant and also approved a \$334,000 loan.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Cooper
Town of Ridgeway Historian,
January 2019