

Conversation with the Mayor May 7, 2007

Vicky Daly

Mastering Something New

It has been a very long time since I have attempted to master the basics of a field of knowledge about which I knew little or nothing. I earned my last degree in the early 1990's. I have, of course, learned new things every single day (It's the nature of this office.), but a whole body of knowledge is another matter. And to top it off, a good bit of what I thought I knew to be true is not. Fortunately, I know experts in the field who are generous with their time and patient in disposition, and so it is upward and onward to learn as much as I can about the preservation, protection and promotion of our historic assets in Palmyra. Why? Because our historic buildings, cemetery, parks, artifacts (flagpole) and even our houses can be the basis for economic development which, crassly stated, could translate into new jobs and money for the local economy if we want.

There are many pieces to this puzzle and some of them have not been turned over yet. This is what I know I know: The federal government considers any structure or artifact more than 50 years old and largely intact to be potentially historic. Therefore, Palmyra and Wayne County have an incredible number of historic structures - residences, commercial buildings, museums, parks, the cemetery, the bandstand, the flagpole, the Fairgrounds, the canal itself. The buildings and artifacts are a draw. People come to see them. Historic Palmyra and the Landmark Society can give you numbers. When people come they spend money. They shop. They eat. The Randall Travel Study said so.

There is funding out there, both tax credits and grants, to ease the cost of rehabilitating historic structures. Rehabilitation of historic structures creates jobs. The rehabilitated building has a greater value and a municipality can pass a local law which encourages rehabilitation investment by freezing a structure's assessment for five years and then increasing it at the rate of 20% (of any increase) per year until it reaches full assessment ten years after the work is done. What a difference that could make!

No one in Wayne County is taking advantage of these grants or tax credits. No one in Wayne County is eligible for them right now. We have great history here, but no town or village in Wayne County has a preservation ordinance. Very few people in the county know what is involved in creating and implementing an ordinance which would allow the jobs to be created, our 18th and 19th century structures to be preserved and our economic assets to be protected and promoted. The best part of this scenario is that, as we look at this as an economic tool, we are enhancing quality of life by preserving our identity as a community. The inscription on the flagpole plaque and on our mural says we are a community with 'pride in our past and faith in our future'. Palmyra is special and we want to keep it that way.

I also know that there is much to be learned and that this is a slow and deliberate

process. That means work and patience, but it seems to me that this is a topic about which we need to be knowledgeable. More people need more information about how these puzzle pieces come together so we can make an informed decision about going after the economic benefits which could, with everything else we are doing, make Palmyra an even better place to live and to work and to prosper. If you want to know more about the process, join me on Tuesday, May 29, 7:00 PM, in the Village Hall to talk with Cynthia Howk, of the Landmark Society of Western New York, on her third trip to Palmyra. The resources to acquire the necessary information are there just waiting for us to ask.