

THE SECOND FRONT PAGE



Still awaiting its June coat of stain, the gazebo was renovated by Freed Construction in spring 2021. (Herald photo - Meiners)

Iconic Gazebo at St. Louis Library Receives Significant Upgrades

By William Meiners
Herald Staff Writer

It's fitting that on the grounds of a library — a place filled with stories and rich histories — that an edifice would be erected to honor the origins of a place. That had been the original idea, back in 1999, when the board from the T. A. Cutler Memorial Library in St. Louis sought to build a gazebo that replicated one that stood as a well-house over the flowing mineral spring on the banks of the Pine River more than a century ago. Now, with more time marching on, the gazebo has received some much-needed renovations.

Over the last two decades the gazebo has become a meeting place for library reading groups and various organizations, a spot for senior pictures and wedding photographs, and even a Geocache site. In recent times, in spite of some periodic touchups over the years, a leaking roof made the hangout inaccessible to the community. Originally made entirely of cedar, the gazebo needed to better withstand the elements, said library director Jessica Little. Now, new shingles on the roof made to look like cedar, will allow spring, summer, and fall gatherings, both formal and informal, to continue. And the refurbished structure will better withstand the harsh Michigan winters.

There are no plans for any grand reopening, but Little reported people gathering there a day after the scaffolding came down. After the weather warms a bit, they'll put a stain on it in June, making the whole thing look better than new.

Miraculous, healing water

The story goes that on a summer day in 1869, George Helmer, a traveling salesman, submerged his severely arthritic hand and wrist into the newfound mineral waters of St. Louis for four full minutes. Upon withdrawing his hand from the 50-degree water, he was amazed, as were his colleagues, to reveal that he could suddenly unfurl his fingers and flex his wrist. He was pain free for the first time in years.

The late David McMacken, a Gratiot County historian and teacher, detailed how that surprising reaction would forever change the town. In his book, "The Saratoga of the West: The Story of The Magnetic Mineral Springs and Park Hotel of St. Louis, Michigan," McMacken writes, "The discovery had been made. The water was

not merely water, but a miraculous, healing water. It was water that would push the small, backwoods settlement of St. Louis, Michigan, into the national limelight within months. Not only was the reaction immediate, but the discovery of this wonderful water would have a significant effect on the town for more than a century."

In addition to what seemed to be an accidental discovery of a natural painkiller, the water displayed some other traits, such as magnetic qualities. "A knife blade held against the well pipe would become a magnet capable of lifting screws, needles, and watch keys," McMacken writes. "This amazed St. Louis folks, but some other mineral wells in the state were claiming to be magnetic as well."

McMacken rediscovered the crowds that quickly made their way to St. Louis now 150 years ago. Many braved treacherous stage-coach rides — from Saginaw to the east and St. John's to the south — to drink from and bathe in the miracle springs they heard about. Certainly, good news traveled fast even back then. From backwoods to boomtown, the town's existing hotels soon "overflowed with patrons," requiring additions to be built.

People who had the resources to make money off the springs threw their irons into the fire. "Elias Smith turned his new home into a boarding house and added a sizable addition to hold up to thirty guests," McMacken writes. "He named it the St. Louis Magnetic Springs House, and it became the aristocratic boarding house in the village."

What spawned the crowds, of course, was the promise of a natural cure — for most anything. From Helmer's "loosened fingers" to an "old paralytic" in town who began showing signs of recovery after regularly ingesting and bathing in the water. The news, like wildfire, spread throughout the country.

Of the hotels, one stood out in particular. "The new hotel opened in September 1881," McMacken writes. "Called the Sanatorium, it was officially known as the Magnetic Springs Hotel. Since it adjoined the pleasant-landscaped approach to the bath house, it soon was known as the Park Hotel or the Park House."

St. Louis became a destination for people seeking relief from a variety of ailments — from cancer to kidney stones — as well as a pampered getaway for the rich, powerful, and famous.

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Ithaca Rotary Club Provides Entire School Staff with Gift Certificates

By William Meiners
Herald Staff Writer

The motto for the Rotary Club, in city chapters throughout the nation, has long been "Service Over Self." That selfless service was on display recently as the Rotary Club of Ithaca presented gift certificates to all staff members of Ithaca Public Schools.

Nora Colthorp, current Rotary president, as well as a club member since 2018, said the group wanted to acknowledge the sacrifices of the part-time and fulltime employees of Ithaca Schools who have navigated a very stressful year. The \$15 gift certificates, which expire on June 30, were given to 127 school workers in all.

The gift certificates can be redeemed at up to 20 Ithaca businesses — from the Hearthstone Oven to Burford Plumbing and Heating to various gas stations around town and more. Colthorp said the Rotary consulted with the city and the Downtown Development Authority, which had used a similar gift certificate program over the holiday season.

Ithaca city manager Jamey Conn said the DDA Dollars Program was "something we implemented when we were unable to host our annual appreciation dinner due to the COVID-19 restrictions."

The City Council approved designating those funds to the DDA Dollars program to show appreciation to staff and volunteers and to help stimulate the local businesses. "We are happy to run this program again for the Rotary," Conn said. "It's a wonderful gesture they are giving to the school employees while helping local businesses. The DDA Board is unanimously on board with the program."

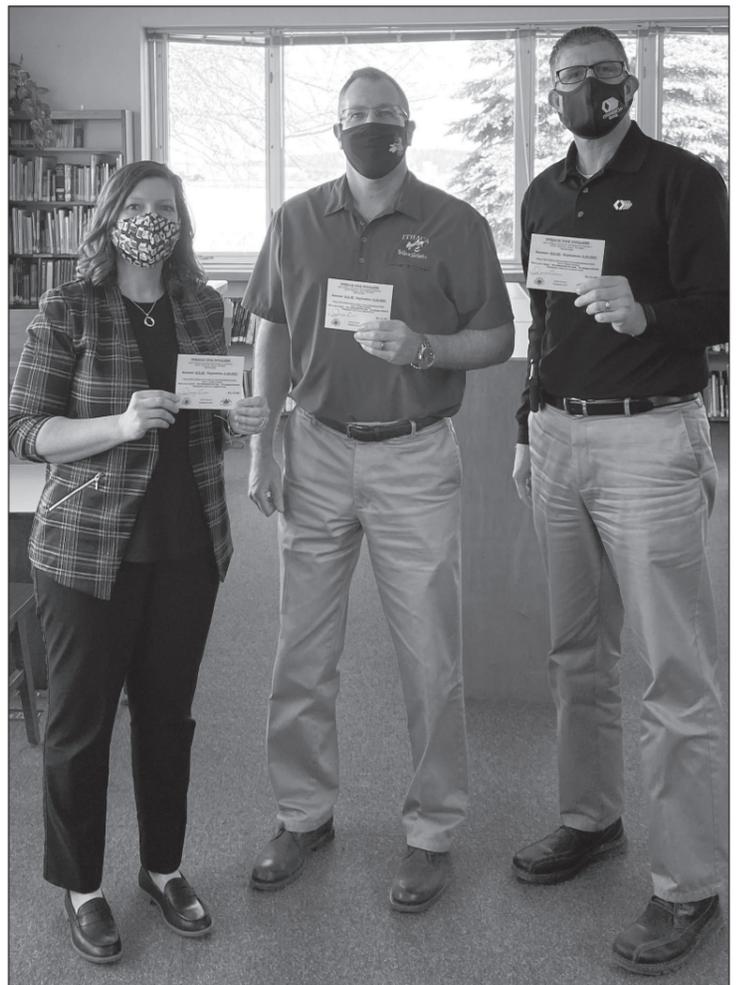
In addition to being a "good neighbor," Colthorp echoed the two-way benefits of the gift cards. "This project not only highlights the efforts of the staff at Ithaca Public Schools," she said. "It also supports the local small businesses in the Ithaca community."

Steven Netzley, superintendent of Ithaca Public Schools, is well aware of the efforts of his people. "The staff at Ithaca Public Schools has gone above and beyond the call of duty this year in order to provide our students with the option of attending school in person or virtually," he said. "Preparing for and teaching both face-to-face classes and virtual instruction at the same time is very challenging. It really shows our teachers' commitment and dedication to providing the best possible education for all of our students during a pandemic."

Netzley also said the staff appreciates the recognition and generous donation from the Ithaca Rotary Club.

Everyone in the community — schools, businesses, city council members — had to negotiate COVID-19. Even the Rotary Club was put on hold at the outset of the pandemic. "Initially our club stopped interacting with each other as we tried to figure out the best and safest approach," Colthorp said. "In the summer months, we started meeting outside so we could social distance, but still have an opportunity to get together."

Like many other entities, the club took to Zoom when the weather turned in the fall. A commercial loan officer at Isabella Bank by day, Colthorp is also Breckenridge resident. A business reality is that commerce is surely entwined with the community. Along with some 30 members in the Rotary Club of Ithaca, Colthorp was happy to recognize schooling accomplishments while giving local business a boost.



Ithaca Rotary Club members, including president Nora Colthorp (left); Steven Netzley, superintendent of Ithaca Public Schools (center); and Corey Bailey, Commercial Bank; display the \$15 gift certificates donated to all staff at Ithaca Schools. (courtesy photo)

