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Redefining the Mummers Museum

The parade might come once a year, but a Pennsport shrine is taking a fresh approach to keeping the spirit intact year-round.

By Mark Moss

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The Mummer's Museum, 1100 S. Second St., opened in 1976 and is in the midst of a three-phase refurbishment that will keep the group's storied history intact for centuries to come.

Museums collect historical artifacts for viewing and study. The Ennigaldi-Nanna in Mesopotamia is the earliest known museum dating back to 530 B.C. Philadelphia has a wide range of places for art and history buffs to explore, but one, dances to the beat of its own drummer: The Mummer's Museum, 1100 S. Second St.

Mummers are part of a centuries-old, European tradition, starting as small plays done in exchange for food and drink. The Mummer's of today are experts in production, orchestration, beautiful costumes and social commentary.

The Mummer's Museum, which is a nonprofit opened in April 1976 and "was dedicated to the Mummer's and memorabilia," its Executive Director Palma Lucas said.

Thinking of iconic Philadelphia, people think, cradle of Liberty, cheesesteaks and Mummer's. In '74, its

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then-president Connie McHugh and the Pennsport Civic Association presented the idea to City Council to preserve Mummer tradition.

The multi-level building has several award-winning costumes, including some of historical value dating back to 1901, on display. The main floor features first-prize costumes from the various Mummer divisions, as well a gift shop, offering the how-to's and whatnots of Mummery. The second floor houses costumes worn by the greatest Mummies and The Broad Street room where a novice can learn the parades signature dance, The Mummies Strut.

The community outreach program facilitates teaching Mummer history at schools and in-house programs focusing on mask making and history for seniors and children. There is an extensive video library on the premises while the hour-long tour offer stops at the esteemed Mummer Hall of Fame.

With today's financial atmosphere being volatile, the museum has not escaped the downturn of our economy. It sustains itself on membership fees and donations, which have trickled to a disturbing halt.

"Yielding to economic stress is not an option," Chris Edge, a museum board member, said.

He has joined Lucas, board president Rocco Gallelli, board member James Bradley, at-Large Councilman James Kenney, 1st District Councilman Mark Squilla, the Mummies, the Fairmount Park Commission, SugarHouse Casino and PHL17's Steve Highsmith to forge a plan that would help the museum achieve long-term sustainability. They have come together to reinvent what the museum is about.

"There are endless possibilities for the growth of the Museum," Gallelli said.

Lucas' hands are full running the massive building with only a staff of Ronny Kenny Sr., Debbie Glovac and Eileen Garbarino as well as a few volunteers. Through three phases, the plan is to refurbish the museum by 2020. The capital improvement started in January. Squilla pledged funds for the necessary upgrades to restore and maintain the outside of the building. New outside lighting was done, compliments of Dougherty Electric. New flag poles, trees, concrete and a stage for the Summer Concert series have been completed with funds from Squilla, local business leaders and others, including Willie Adams, Mike DiBella and the Local Masons union.

Inside, new bathroom stalls were completed by long time Mummer David Holmes who drove up from Maryland and donated the materials. Energy saving light bulbs have been installed. Carpentry and painting was done courtesy of the carpenters and painters unions with the paint donated by Bud Emig and Sherwin Williams. Other donations and volunteers came from the Mummies community.



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Phase two started with the cleaning of the Mummer club banners, as well as a donation from PHL17's parent company Tribune. The station donated five, 50-inch televisions to be used in various capacities. Once the existing video in the museum's library has been digitized, it will be shown around the building. For a time, locked away, the rare footage of long forgotten parades will again be available for a new generation to enjoy.

Marketing had been done in a gorilla format, like flyers and media announcements. A new plan is being developed to include corporate sponsors, social media campaigns and popular fundraising programs like Kickstarter and Indiegogo to help reach a larger and untapped market, nationwide.

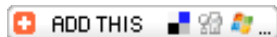
Full restoration is the last phase. Its goal is to bring together the Mummer community and entire city to offer a must go to place for music, education, socializing and Mummer history. Hopes are to encourage area colleges and universities to offer course credits for music, design, history and other relevant classes taught by certified instructors at the museum.

"A Mummer University," Gallelli said.

There's hope the museum can become the "social center of the community," Gallelli said, by offering a Mummer Cafe with music and integration of the surrounding communities.

The smart TVs will allow patrons to search Mummer history by touching the screen and selecting a topic. Each Hall of Fame member's likeness, history and background also will be digitized. A green screen will add an unlimited jolt to the imagination. A museum visitor stands in front of a green screen and immediately is transported to Broad Street or City Hall. Once utilizing this technology, the reveler is given a copy of their Mummer experience, without having left the building

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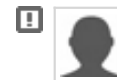
1. **Anonymous said...** on Oct 25, 2012 at 12:28PM

"Great article. Great to see the community coming together for this cherished institution"



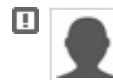
2. **Brothers Keeper said...** on Oct 28, 2012 at 06:12PM

"Too Bad so many of those guys are unemployed. For Christ's sake get a job feed y our family . You



got balls to go down to a club and drink beer with your friends and you are not working. You should be embarrassed.”

3. Maureen said... on Oct 29, 2012 at 12:30PM



“It should be "guerilla" marketing. Not "gorilla"! :)”

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