



PORTSMOUTH
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
10 MIDDLE STREET, PORTSMOUTH, NH 03801
603.436.8433 • WWW.PORTSMOUTHISTORY.ORG

June 11, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Meredith Affleck, Manager, Exhibitions & Programming

Phone: 603.570.2493

Email: meredith@portsmouthhistory.org

Caption to attached photo:

Past Portsmouth Rotary president Cleo Villaflores (left) and current president Leo Gagnon (right) at the new doors on the second floor of Portsmouth Historical Society's Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center. Photo courtesy Portsmouth Historical Society.

PORTSMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO OPEN NEW DOORS

The Portsmouth Historical Society's Discover Portsmouth Center will welcome back residents and visitors with brand new doors. The three sets of plate glass doors leading into the exhibition galleries are a major upgrade to the 1810-era brick building at 10 Middle Street.

"The tricky part is being able to say exactly when we can re-open the Welcome Center, although our current expected date is Friday, July 10th. With the new gallery doors leading into our Academy Gallery, as well as our brand new public restrooms," says PHS executive director Brian LeMay, "visitors and residents will discover a more accessible, more secure, and more attractive facility."

Portsmouth Historical Society, which also operates the 1758 John Paul Jones House Museum, is cautiously optimistic about its plan for a phased re-opening, but "stay tuned for updates," LeMay says. Meanwhile, staff and volunteers are creating the new "Threads" quilt exhibition, stocking shelves in the Museum Shop, assembling facemasks and filling hand sanitizer dispensers. The official re-opening will be determined by declarations from the state, and by guidelines issued by the CDC and by museum authorities, to ensure the safety of the Society's guests, staff, and volunteers. "The 'Threads' exhibition may not be ready to open immediately," says LeMay, "but you'll still be able to see our curators at work hanging quilts through the new glass doors leading into the Academy Gallery."

Known as "The Old Town by the Sea" in the Victorian era, Portsmouth rebranded itself in the 20th century as "The City of the Open Door." That slogan is slowly becoming true again as businesses and Portsmouth's many historic and cultural venues begin to re-open. The Historical Society's Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center and Academy Gallery will once again become the hub of local history and culture, open to visitors Friday through Monday to start, and then with increased hours, as allowed.

One set of new swinging plate glass doors at the Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center will open to the first floor of the Academy Gallery. The city-owned downtown brick building was originally home to the 19th-century Portsmouth Academy and later the 20th-century public library. Two sets of doors frame the upstairs lecture and event space. Spearheaded by the Portsmouth Rotary, this \$48,000 portion of a larger Rotary-inspired facilities improvement project gained special support from donors Bob and Sue Thoresen and Portland Glass. Donors to the Fund-A-Need effort at the Society's annual fall fundraiser last year also had a significant impact on the "open

door” project, as their contributions supported the Society’s efforts to make the new doors universally accessible at the building complex.

The accessible doors are accented by the completely renovated “hands free” public restrooms at Discover Portsmouth, a \$200,000 project co-managed by Portsmouth’s Community Development Department and the Department of Public Works with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a grant from the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts and the “Mooseplate” license plate program, with additional support from BPS Construction, and The Design Center at Ricci Lumber.

“It’s an amazing project,” says Cleo Villaflores proudly. Now past president of the Portsmouth Rotary, Villaflores, along with her successor, current Portsmouth Rotary President Leo Gagnon, championed the “open door” project beginning in December 2018. “We worked with a lot of businesses to get it done and there were many busy weekends. It’s a great feeling having it ready in time for the reopening—whenever it happens,” Villaflores says.

According to exhibition manager Meredith Affleck and curator Gerald Ward, the new doors will allow for better climate control and added security in the galleries, both upstairs and down. That means the Historical Society can better care for objects on display in its continually changing museum exhibitions. And that greatly increases the Society’s ability to apply for grants and object loans for future shows.

When it opens, the “new and improved” Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center and Academy Gallery complex will feature the Society’s latest exhibition, entitled “Threads, A Community Quilt for 2020.” The exhibition will include historic quilts and bed-coverings from the Society’s collection, and the rich New England stories they tell. An impressive line-up of experts on historic textiles will offer online Zoom and live lectures—“circumstances permitting,” cautions Affleck.

“And don’t forget to turn in your quilt squares,” Affleck adds. The public is invited to create fabric squares featuring something they have especially loved about the seacoast and New Hampshire. These squares will be combined to build a post-pandemic quilt that will be displayed sometime late this summer behind the new open doors at Portsmouth Historical’s Academy Gallery. Instructions and guidelines for adding to the “Threads” quilt are available online at www.PortsmouthHistory.org/threads/.

About the Portsmouth Historical Society

Founded in 1917, the Portsmouth Historical Society is a nonprofit devoted to the history, arts, and culture of the Portsmouth region, through acquisitions, preservation, museum exhibitions, programs, and publications. It operates the Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center, with the adjacent Portsmouth Academy Gallery, and the 1758 John Paul Jones Historic House Museum, a national historic landmark. The Society also serves as the home of the Portsmouth Advocates for Historic Preservation, and the Portsmouth Marine Society Press.