

Minot Daily News

Prairie Village expands efforts to showcase history



Submitted Photo Each spring school children from throughout the region tour Prairie Village Museum. This group gets a lesson in how a telephone switchboard works from former operator Jan Norsby.

RUGBY – Prairie Village Museum will always be a place to learn about history, but the new ways that history is being served up these days would make the early pioneers smile.

“Every year we have added more programming,” executive director Cathy Jelsing said. “We have just grown that part of the museum.”

During the next two years, programming will center around a World War I theme, in observance of the war’s 100th anniversary. The museum will bring in speakers to talk about World War I subject matter and will partner in the fall with the local library to host a community book discussion. There will be a display of World War I related photos, letters and other memorabilia. Veterans of subsequent wars will have opportunity to share their stories and get involved with their families in each event.

Other organizations partnering on the project include the Rugby American Legion Post 23, Heart of America Library, Lyric Theater and Dakota Territory Air Museum.

Prairie Village Museum was selected as one of 65 museums, libraries and universities across the country to participate in Library for America’s World War I and America program. A traveling exhibit, multimedia and

large collection of writings from Americans who served in the war are part of the program that Prairie Village Museum will be hosting.



Submitted Photo Dean Hagen, Maddock, and his apprentices demonstrate blacksmithing at Prairie Village Museum during the 2015 Museum Comes Alive event.

The World War I and America project is supported by the National Endowment of the Humanities, which awarded a \$550,000 grant. Prairie Village Museum will receive \$1,800 of that amount.

The museum also will be continuing the Village Fair tradition that's been around more than 30 years. This year, the one-day fair on the second Sunday in August is being expanded to include a concert Saturday night, featuring the band Wild Hands of Minot. There also is discussion about having a beer garden and craft beer tasting and providing separate children's activities – all part of encouraging families to get to know the

museum.

Encouraging young people to visit and develop a love for history is key to ensuring the museum's future. Jelsing said the museum strives to offer activities that attract young families.

Part of that effort has been the successful children's camps for the past few summers.

"They love the museum," Jelsing said of the campers. "If we give them any free time, then they are off exploring."

Funding also is important to longevity, and the board of directors is tackling that issue, Jelsing said. The museum has been fortunate to receive some major gifts, which is allowing for major renovation of a reception area and plans for a facelift to the museum's front.

The remodeled reception area is being readied for the museum opening, which occurs May 1 for school tours May 1 and May 15 for the general public.

Design plans for the museum's front would bring the village atmosphere to the forefront of the museum grounds and create a more inviting and visible entrance into the village. Some of the work and landscaping will start this year, with the major share of the work to be done next year, Jelsing said.

Another longer term project is a potential multi-purpose facility that could host meetings, reunions, wedding receptions and other events. It will be easier to turn the museum into a center for community activity now that the museum office and an indoor gallery will be open year-round. For the first time, the museum will not be completely closing in the fall.

Whether programming, planning or upkeep, nothing could happen without volunteers. Volunteers have been the museum's backbone from its inception.

"That's the story of the museum really. When you think of what they did and what they built, it's incredible," Jelsing said. "This museum exists because of those individuals who had the vision to build it and were so dedicated to it."

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