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Keene reaches summer goal of 100 stories

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KEENE VALLEY - Alice Boutte sat in the audience on the second floor of the Keene Valley Library Saturday afternoon, Sept. 14, with a white sticker on the front of her red sweater. Instead of her name, it had a number: 61.

More than 40 people were in the room to celebrate a milestone for the town's new history project, "Adirondack Community: Capturing, Retaining and Communicating the Stories of Who We Are." The people with numbers had already recorded stories. The ones with names had not recorded stories, and they were encouraged to do so.

In June, the project's leaders held a similar public information session, celebrating the 34 stories they had collected and setting a goal of at least 100 stories by Sept. 1. On Sept. 14, they had 123 stories, according to Jerry Huntley, volunteer grants manager for Adirondack Community. Huntley gave an update on the project along with story aide Bethany Garretson and Olivia Dwyer, who is in charge of public relations, marketing and recruitment.

Article Photos



Alice Boutte of Keene Valley poses at the Keene Valley ...

Huntley said she's secured more funding from some of her neighbors to keep the project going for three more years in the town of Keene. It is expected that expenses beyond three years would be minimal and could be assumed by the library.

Huntley also reported that she will be offering lessons about the project for grades 9 to 12 at the Keene Central School, and she plans to work with the Keene Library, Keene Historical Society and the



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Adirondack Center for Writing.

Adirondack Community is a multi-year local history project that collects and organizes audio stories and related photographs from the town of Keene residents and visitors through an online platform to share the social and cultural history of this community.

Stories are first-person accounts - 3 to 5 minutes long - by people in their own voice about their own experience and those of their ancestors. The stories are recorded in a story booth at the Keene Valley Library.

The stories and the "My Adirondack Story" podcast can be heard online at www.myadirondackstory.org. The eight categories are Arts & Culture, People, Outdoor Activities, Catastrophes, Community, Daily Life, Work and Natural and Man-made Environment.

Adirondack Community is funded by Humanities New York with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Glenn and Carol Pearsall Adirondack Foundation, the Northern New York Library Network, and community supporters using Memria.org.

Moving forward, Huntley said she now has to write a manual based on what the team has done in Keene. Then she will travel to other libraries that may want to replicate the project for their own communities, starting with the Adirondack Park and then going to other communities in the state and elsewhere. New funding will pay for printing the manual, travel for training and technical assistance so they can replicate the project.

"We know we have an amazing rich history," Huntley said. "Other world communities do, and a project like this can help those communities in their cohesiveness and help them through tough times, recognizing what great resources they are."

That history comes from community members - people such as Alice Boutte - and the stories they share. Boutte, a mother of five, shared two stories, both about her middle son Homer.

The first story is titled, "Keene Graduation of 2000 Holds Surprise." During Homer's graduation from the Keene Central School in June 2000, there was a guest scholarship announcer. It was a hoax with a happy ending.

"It was my oldest son," Alice said about Tierson, who had graduated from KCS in 1997. "He's kind of a play guy. He loved to pull jokes on things."

Alice's second story is titled, "Town Legacy of our Son Homer."

In 2002, Homer and his friends helped clean a local park - which became Point Park in 2004 - and that event has since become a spring cleaning ritual called Clean Keene. The community founded the annual project after Homer died in June 2003 during a rock-climbing accident at Roaring Brook Falls.

Alice has some advice for people who have not yet told stories for the Adirondack Community history project:

"I think they should just get over their fears and discover that the people that are listening to the story are very good listeners and they respond to your storytelling. So it's not like you're speaking to a machine."

Town of Keene residents and visitors may contact myadirondackstory@gmail.com to share their stories about life and times in the town.

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