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KV Library honors volunteer storytellers

By ROBIN CAUDELL Press-Republican

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OLIVIA DWYER/PHOTOStoryteller Hilary Papineau (center) attended the Keene Valley Library event with her mother, Barbara Papineau, and her son, Evren Vanderbles. Papineau grew up in Keene, and recorded a story about the 13 years she spent as a student at Keene Central School.



KEENE VALLEY — Jery Huntley had visited Keene Valley for 35 years before she purchased a house there six years ago.

A former association CEO and politician, her latest project, “Adirondack Community: Capturing,

Retaining, and Communicating the Stories of Who We are,” takes her back to her educator/school librarian days.

“So, I have kind of come full circle in my retirement to things having to do with libraries and schools.”

“I had been helping the library here to get grants for a few years. Then, I got this idea. When I raised funds for grant money, both to plan and implement it I decided I wanted to implement it myself because it would take a lot of work over several years.”

CAPTURING STORIES

Her goal was two-tiered.

“The first was that the Town of Keene in the High Peaks has this unique history going back to the late 1800s,” Huntley said.

“Summer people, year-round-population, arts, culture, outdoor activities, architecture, music it's pretty amazing. Sometimes it feels like anybody who has ever been famous since the late 1800s. Has visited or lived in this part of the Adirondacks.”

Project organizers felt many locals had the stories they could tell going way, way back from reading a grandmother's diary or something would be gone soon. “We wanted to get those stories,” Huntley said.

“We also felt we needed to have stories of the present day, so we would have a snapshot of the present day. We felt this community has incredible spirit of giving to each other and helping and capture that.”

INSTILLING PRIDE

They also considered the community's K-12 school of about 160 students, who almost all go to college.

“Some come back because they haven't made it, and they need to find their place in the community,”

she said.

“Some in the digital age, come back and work from here because they can with the internet. We wanted the students to recognize that they can be proud of where they came from.”

Returning home would be more enticing and help them become productive members of the community.

“Especially in light of the challenges we face now with drugs, opioids, the large gap between the rich and the poor,” Huntley said.

“We want these kids to understand this is an amazing place. If they came back, not going to college or after, they would have very rich lives. It was getting pride in our students.”

EASY PEASEY

The project has an interactive website: www.myadironackstory.org

The page, “Hear the Stories Now!,” allows visitors to listen to three-to-five-minute audio stories with photographs in eight categories: arts and culture, catastrophes, work, people, outdoor activities, daily life, community, natural and man-made environments.

The people category includes “From the Old World to the New World” by Pete Bisesemeyer, “Olympic Dream Fulfilled” by Tommy Bisesemeyer and “Loving Being the New Girl” by Lacey Lawrence.

“As you listen to the story, photos scroll across the screen that are related to the story,” Huntley said.

“Many of them come from our archives in the library, but some come from family photos that people have.”

Some of the stories have been stitched together in podcasts, “Social Justice and Social Change in Keene” and “Catastrophes & Community Reaction: Water (Part 1).”

RESOUNDING SUCCESS

The website was released on June 15.

“We had recruited people to tell stories with the goal of getting 30 stories before we opened it,” Huntley said.

“We got 34. Then, we spent the summer publicizing it, asking people to do stories. It started getting so popular that people asked us if they could do stories.”

Right now, the project has netted 131 stories.

“We had a goal of 100, and we have 131,” she said.

“We have raised enough money to continue without an end in sight.”

Yesterday, she visited the school to have students listen to some of the stories to get them interested in their history classes.

“They are talking about this project daily,” Huntley said.

“They are talking about it at the dinner table. They are talking about it with relatives. They are offering to tell stories. They are understanding how unique and beautiful this community is.”

Huntley spent two years planning the project and raised enough money that she now has two part-time helpers.

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](https://www.memria.org).

“It’s been really gratifying to the point where our next step will be trying to bring this project to other Adirondack communities, so they can do it as well,” she said.

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