

PROGRESS CHENANGO



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Serenity Hobbies a place for imagination, face-to-face gaming, and a sense of belonging

TYLER MURPHY
MANAGING EDITOR

NORWICH - Walking into Serenity Hobbies in downtown Norwich, you see a full hobby-and-gaming shop at work, but more than just selling products, you'll discover a hub of the local community.

On a normal busy day at Serenity Hobbies in Norwich, the store doesn't just fill up, it compresses. Tables are occupied, chairs slide closer, and a line can form counter while others lean over display cases looking for single cards or the right pack.

The store turns tabletop gaming into a fun place to gather beyond home and work. It fits into a pattern of a strong independent hobby shop run by people who genuinely care about what they sell.

The business is located at 10 South Broad Street with shelves of trading cards, models, board games, and role-playing merchandise. It's a store where precious resources are measured in imagination, dice, cards and camaraderie.

"It's standing room only," said co-owner Eric Cunningham on a recent Friday night, with roughly two dozen or more players at the tables at any given moment, plus customers hovering over shelves and cases

of board games, miniatures and cards.

The store sells an array of interesting items, including board games, card games like Magic: The Gathering, Pokémon, Yu-Gi-Oh!, One Piece, Lorcana; role-playing books, such as Dungeons and Dragons; dice, model wargaming, such as Warhammer; miniatures, paints, and memorabilia.

But Cunningham says the shop's inventory only scratches the surface of what the store is.

"In reality, what we feel we offer as a business is, a third space," he said. Home is one, work another, he explained. "And that third space is some place where people can go and feel comfortable and accepted and have a good time." For some people, he said, that third place is a sports team or a bar. For Serenity Hobbies, it's a set of tables where strangers sit down, play a game, and start talking.

Eric owns and operates the store with his wife Courtney Cunningham. Their aim has been to create a fun place people can go outside of home and work, where they can sit down, interact face-to-face, and feel comfortable joining in.

That idea is not just a marketing line in their case, because the choices they



Serenity Hobbies is open Monday from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., closed Tuesday and Wednesday, open Thursday from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., open Friday from 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., open Saturday from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., and open Sunday from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Submitted photo)

make about products, layout, staffing, and scheduling consistently point back to the same goal: get people across a table from one another to engage and be an active community hub.

There is a rabbit hole of games and storylines to engage with at the store that are measured in long hours

rather than quick purchases.

Serenity Hobbies intentionally avoids selling video games, even though the owners say they regularly get calls from people asking if they do. Eric has explained that the point is not to compete in every category of "gaming," but to focus on the kind that puts people across from each

other, talking, reacting, and learning together. The store is structured around physical play and real-time social contact, not solo entertainment.

That approach shapes who walks in and what they do once they arrive.

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City of
Norwich
welcomes
new
Principle
Hotel

SOPHIA ROOT
EVENING SUN

NORWICH - In late October, Principle Design Engineering broke ground on a new hotel in downtown Norwich.

To mark the special occasion a large group of area leaders and business owners joined by state officials took part in a special ceremony. They applauded the development and encouraged investment in Norwich and the greater communities of Chenango County.

Plans for The Principle Hotel include a \$8.3 million renovation of the former SUNY Morrisville building at 14-16 South Broad Street.

"Today, we're about to embark on one of the largest project invest-

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Area libraries strive to meet the needs of the community

JESSICA BENSON
EVENING SUN STAFF WRITER

CHENANGO COUNTY - Chenango County's libraries provide the community with a lot more than just reading material. The various libraries in the county are working hard to assess what the community needs and improve the quality of life for patrons in their area.

Earville Free Library

Jill Nelson took over as director of the Earville Free Library in 2024. Since she began, she was worked to develop a classics section, a local authors section and a section of the library promoting banned books.

In addition to curating and expanding the selection of books, the library offers an array of different activities for the community, including a

Sew Social club that meets on Saturdays from 9-3, a Crafty Companions Club that meets for a couple hours during the library's closed hours from 10-12 on Thursdays. They also have started a Cozy Chapter Society where people come to the library to silently read on their own with coffee and muffins provided from The Ugly Muffin. "We're looking into Bendy Bookworms, for tots, little kids and homeschoolers. That would provide stretch and wiggle time and then story time," Nelson said.

The library also has a movie day on Saturdays for the general public and two Dungeons and Dragons clubs, one for teens and adults and one geared toward younger children looking to learn the game.

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Earville Free Library is developing a classics section, a local authors section and a section of the library promoting banned books. (Photo by Jessica Benson)

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Eric and Courtney often field questions from parents looking for games appropriate for children as young as seven to ten. It also sees young players pulled in by Pokémon, and it serves long-time players and offers weekly events.

On busy nights, the room is lively with matches in progress, laughter, multiple overlapping conversations, and the sudden shout of a win, loss or question — often for the owners who serve as experts in officiating every kind of game.

Everybody is welcome. Courtney described how that atmosphere makes it easier for newcomers to become comfortable, then become regulars, and sometimes become friends. The set up is not only to sell games, but help people meet to play casually, through organized events and with players naturally forming groups on their own.

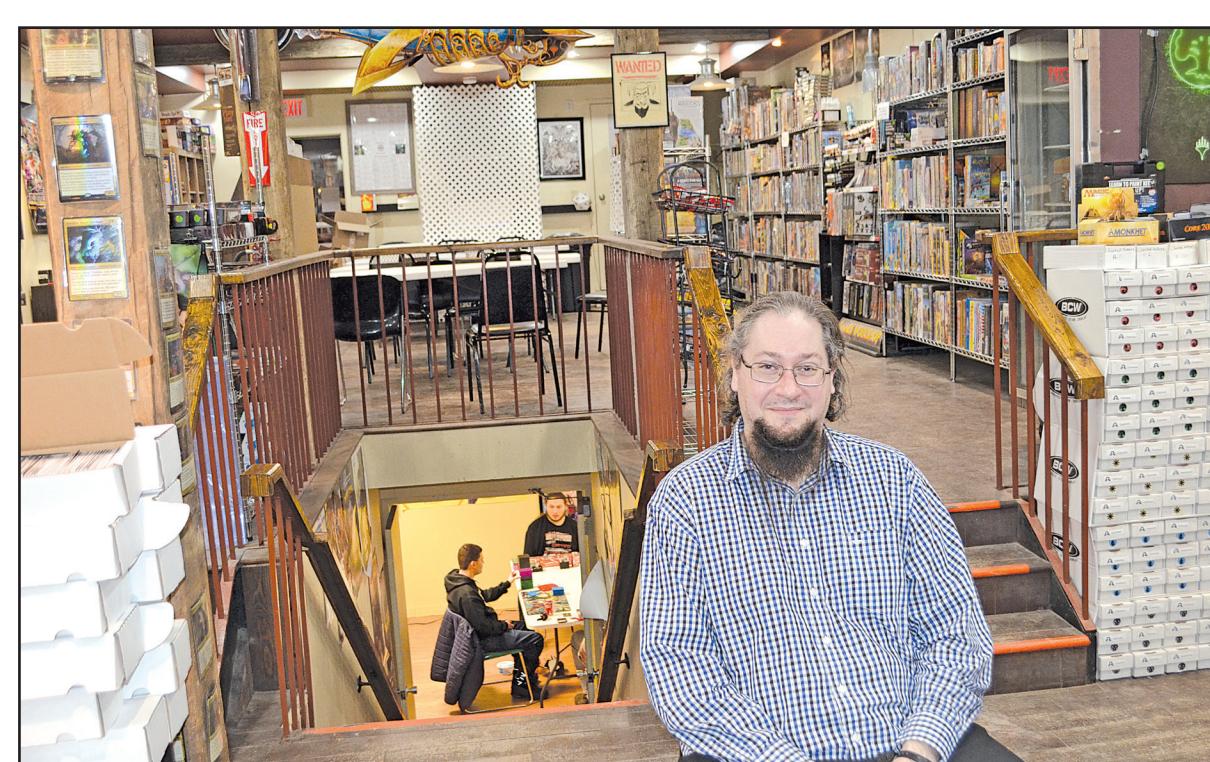
Eric said, "For me, it's offering a space for people to come and do something, to be entertained, to have some positive interaction in their day," he said. "It's a place where you can play a board game, play cards, join a tournament, or simply come in and sit down and hang out for a little while."

How the Store Took Shape

Serenity Hobbies opened



These 16 finalist in front of Serenity Hobbies in Norwich, where from a group of nearly 100 players who took part in a large 'Magic: The Gathering' event in November which was sponsored by hometown gamer Tim 'Goldsabertooth' Tarantowho wanted to give back to his community. (Submitted photo)



Eric and his wife Courtney Cunningham own Serenity Hobbies and work as fulltime educators. Their aim has been to create a fun place people can go outside of home and work, where they can sit down, interact face-to-face, and feel comfortable joining in. (Submitted photo)

in August 2018. The owners launched it while both were working full-time as educators, and they have continued balancing those roles. Eric teaches math at Norwich High School, including algebra, geometry, and trigonometry, and he has taught there for more than twenty years. Courtney teaches physical education in Sherburne. Eric also explained hiring former students at times, and he has said that the work ethic he sees in the classroom is one of the best indicators of who will do well in the store.

The store's creation also fills a practical gap in the region. Eric has said that before Serenity Hobbies, people often had to drive roughly forty-five to fifty-five minutes to find a comparable hobby space.

The first location was on East Main Street and the original shop was about five hundred square feet. In the early stages, Eric and Courtney ran everything themselves without employees, and their immediate goal was to prove they could sustain the shop month to month.

Over time, they expanded into a space five to six times larger than where they started, and the business grew to include four part-time employees in addition to the owners.

The store moved into its current downtown location in February 2020, and the timing was difficult because

it was about one month before the COVID shutdowns began in March 2020. In the years since, the store has continued expanding how it uses the building. The building is three floors, and the business rents about ninety percent of it, with some space reserved for storage but most of it devoted to play spaces. One of the biggest internal changes in 2025 was gaining full-time access to the upstairs part of the building, which expanded play capacity and made it easier to handle overflow when events and foot traffic run high.

The store's name also connects to the owners' hobby history. Eric has described how he once traveled nearly every week to play at a shop in Oneonta called Serenity Hobbies, particularly after a local store, Black Wolf Games, closed. He has said that the owner there encouraged him and Courtney to open something local in Norwich. That Oneonta store later rebranded to Good Games, but the original connection remained part of the Norwich store's story and identity.

Staying Active: Weekly Play and Organized Events

Serenity's inventory is built around tabletop gaming. The store carries board games, trading card games, role-playing games, and wargaming supplies, along with

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accessories.

Popular trading card games include Magic: The Gathering, Pokémon, Yu-Gi-Oh!, One Piece, and Disney Lorcana.

The shop sells a wide range of single cards for Magic. The role-playing section includes games like Dungeons & Dragons and Pathfinder alongside other systems. Wargaming is supported through products like Warhammer miniatures and paints. Accessories include items like miniatures, paints, deck boxes, card sleeves, storage containers, and similar supplies that players use to protect cards, organize collections, and build play-ready kits.

The store's schedule has been anchored by regular weekly play and structured events. Monday nights were an open board gaming night where people could bring a game or play something from the store. Fridays included Friday Night Magic, described as an unopened booster pack draft tournament, where players open packs, build decks from what they pull, then play a tournament. Saturdays were commonly used for special events that could range from tournaments to birthday parties to extra board game days. Sundays are for Pokémon and included drop-in role-playing groups. The background also stated that unless specifically noted, there was generally no cost for events beyond the entry fees that were explicitly listed.

COVID was a major recent hurdle for the store, it interrupted routines and changed the pace of weekly play. Eric said that when everything reopened it was like building from scratch, some former regulars were hesitant to come back, but he also said the store maintained strong community support that helped it stay open through the pandemic.

He described how the owners and staff know many regular customers by name.

In 2025, Serenity Hobbies developed larger competitive events, especially in Magic's Competitive EDH format. He said Competitive Magic events "have started happening for us in earnest this

year. It wasn't something that we thought we'd ever really be able to pull off."

In November, Serenity hosted one that pushed the store into a new tier. "The cut-off number was 96," Cunningham said. "Ultimately, about 88 or so, actually showed up to play and we drew in people from all across the United States."

He has described the prize support as being in cards rather than cash, and he has emphasized that cards can carry significant value for players. He has also said the events can award points that apply toward larger tournaments elsewhere in the country.

Eric said the increased interest was due to the efforts of organizer and local player, Tim "Goldsabertooth," Taranto.

Eric said Tim was well known in the competitive community with connections to judge staff and competitive players. He said competitive players track tournaments online and are more likely to register when they see Tim involved because of his reputation. These aren't casual game nights. Players register to participate, judges are paid.

Cunningham credits Tim with leading that effort and connecting judge staff and high-level players.

Those larger events also affect the downtown economy beyond the store itself. Eric has described how out-of-town players often need meals, drinks, and sometimes overnight stays, which turns tournament weekends into broader spending in Norwich.

He also said Pokémon events that draw players from places like Syracuse, Binghamton, and surrounding areas, and he has described Disney Lorcana events that bring in additional travelers as well. He has said that after the biggest Magic events, the next-largest event he cited was a Pokémon tournament around twenty-plus players, which he described as a couple dozen.

The event calendar is also tied to the release cycle of card games. Eric has said that many card games release sets every two to three months and that the store schedules events around those releases.



Eric and Courtney often field questions from parents looking for games appropriate for children as young as seven to ten. It also sees young players pulled in by Pokémon, and it serves long-time players and offers weekly events. (Submitted photo)

He said supporting five different card games with regular events and has estimated roughly four to five events per year for each, which can create stretches where the store hosts play on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in consecutive days, followed by quieter periods depending on what the community wants to focus on next.

Even outside major tournaments, Eric said typical busy days where there can be around twenty people seated and playing at tables at a time, while customers stand at the counter browsing singles, packs, and board games.

Downtown Ties, Pressure, and Owners' Hopes

As Serenity has grown, the

owners have also described pressures that visitors do not always notice. Inventory forecasting remains one of the most difficult parts of operating a gaming store, especially after COVID.

Eric said stores often have to order in advance and pay distributors upfront, while also dealing with limited print runs that can restrict supply and uncertain customer interest. He has described the ongoing risk of ordering too much and getting stuck with unsold product, or ordering too little and disappointing customers when a product becomes a hot item. Anything they fail to get correct can result in extra costs for the store.

He has said they try to

reduce that risk by being a part of the games they sell and listen to the people who play them. He said between staff members there is at least one person who can teach any of the trading card games the store supports.

He also said worker challenges that can surprise people who only see the fun side of the hobby. He has said the store receives frequent job inquiries, but many applicants do not realize how much of the day-to-day workload involves being a sort of a gaming librarian—sorting, alphabetizing, and filing single cards, which he has described as one of the biggest ongoing tasks in the entire store.

The business also func-

tions within a network of downtown relationships. Eric described helping Deja Brew next door during a roof leak by bringing over trash cans and reaching out to a roofer he knew who would come on a Sunday, even though Serenity had no financial stake in the situation. He described frequent food ordering downtown, including regularly going to local eateries and he has described an intentional relationship with Wally's World O' Comixs next door.

He said Colorscape Chenango was a strong weekend with overlap between the arts-and-crafts crowd and the type of customers who enjoy the store. He said the Norwich Renaissance Festival weekend is another major draw with significant crossover and large crowds.

Looking ahead, the store's plans are to seek expanded events and offer more tabletop options. Eric said he wants to increase the number of medium and large tournaments, especially Competitive EDH, and he has described a target of at least bi-monthly events, potentially running as often as every six weeks.

He has also said the store wants to start running decent-sized Warhammer events, though he has noted that major renovations are limited because the owners do not own the building. He has described a push to keep board game nights fresh by learning and teaching new board games on certain Mondays each month, which is intended to expose regulars to newer releases and broaden what people feel comfortable trying.

"You will find people from all kinds of different backgrounds that are here," he said. "And it's amazing because you can have people that if they saw each other out on the street, you would think that they would never interact with each other," said Eric.

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Area libraries strive to meet the needs of the community -

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The library also has a 3D printer and Cricut machines that patrons can use after a short training. Nelson said there are a variety of things the library provides that people are unaware of. "We offer a variety of museum and park passes that allow patrons to visit at no cost. We have a puzzle exchange and DIY classes each month."

"It is important that the library is a safe-space. Anybody can come in and use our resources. People can come together to share similar hobbies, interests, crafts and activities."

Nelson said the Earlyville Free Library also has a huge collection of DVDs, with more than 300 added to the collection this year.

"We are here to serve the people of the community. If we don't have a book in the library, we'll get it through the inter-library loan system or we may purchase it." In addition to the physical books at the facility, the library utilizes Libby and Hoopla to allow access to ebooks, audio books, comics and movies. "All of those services are free to patrons."

Earlyville Free Library offers an after-school program and a summer reading program to help families and students to stay on track throughout the school year and during school breaks. They also participate in many community activities such as the holiday basket raffle and an array of spring activities that take



The Sherburne Public Library is housed in a historic building that was built in 1911. Even though the library is small in size, they have an extensive collection of books and resources available to the public. The Sherburne Library prides itself on having something for everyone who visits. They have books, DVDs, magazines, e-books, audiobooks, and lots more. We also offer storytime, crafts, coffee Tuesdays, adult coloring club, and our popular Summer Reading Program. (Photo by Jessica Benson)

place at the library and in the adjacent park. "All of the events are meant to bring people in and offer a service to the community," Nelson said.

Otselic Valley Public Library

Otselic Valley is a small community and while few resources are readily available, those in the community have found ways to offer services to those in the community. In 2023, the Otselic Valley Central School District library officially opened as a public library in order to meet the needs of the public.

"When we started, the library was open to the community on Tuesday nights," said library director Catalina Charles. "Our previous superintendent worked with the Four County Library System to get our charter approved." The process took well over a year to complete and the library is still waiting for their official registration to be processed.

"The Otselic Valley Library is a unique library that grew out of a school library and intentionally expanded to serve the broader community. While many libraries operate as either school

or public institutions, OV Library functions as both — supporting students during the school day and welcoming the entire community beyond school hours," Charles said. She explained that the unique model of the OV library allows them to maximize resources in order to meet the needs of the student learners during the day and the public community during the afterschool hours.

"What truly sets us apart in Chenango County is our role as a shared community hub, where lifelong learning begins in early childhood and continues well into

adulthood."

Over the last year, the OV library has worked to strengthen its role as a community partner by expanding the programming for older age groups. In addition to their regular programming, they hold Zumba classes, weekly chair yoga, classes in fiber arts. They host Girl Scout meetings, programs for the community's Fishing Heritage Program, book clubs, food workshops, and programs in topics of interest such as beekeeping and mushroom log workshops.

"Our numbers continue to increase," said Charles. "One cool thing is that we now have a space where kids can be afterschool. In South Otselic there is nowhere for them to really go afterschool." Charles explained that many students hang out in the library afterschool while waiting for games or afterschool activities to begin. The library hosts game clubs, makerspace, robotics, 3D printing workshops and Activities for adults take place later in the evening.

In 2026, the library is focused on expanding their programming. "Challenges include limited funding and staffing in a rural environment, but these are matched by opportunities to innovate, collaborate, and tailor services to the specific needs of our community. Our board is currently discussing the possibility of a food pantry housed inside the library to further extend our resources for our patrons and hopefully

draw new ones," Charles said.

Charles said if there is one things people should know about the OV Library it is just to come check it out. "Come see us. We would love to see more people check out what we have to offer," Charles said. The Otselic Valley Library is open Monday through Friday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. For more information, visit <https://www.otselicvalleypubliclibrary.com/>.

Sherburne Public Library

The Sherburne Public Library is housed in a historic building that was built in 1911. Even though the library is small in size, they have an extensive collection of books and resources available to the public.

The Sherburne Library prides itself on having something for everyone who visits. "We have books, DVDs, magazines, e-books, audiobooks, and lots more. We also offer storytime, crafts, coffee Tuesdays, adult coloring club, and our popular Summer Reading Program. The best part is that it's all free! We are proud to offer free education and entertainment to all of our patrons," said library director Megan McDowell. The Sherburne Library also has an extensive collection of historic paintings created by local artists hanging throughout the building.

Over the last year, the Sherburne Library has seen some major changes. Long-

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- We are launching a package receiving program so community members don't have to have their deliveries left on their porch unattended for hours while they're away. We'll post more details on our website and social media when ready.
- We're researching our options for expanding our print capabilities, including larger format printing (posters and blueprints) and more finish options for things like glossy photos or business cards.
- We'll be looking into how we can adjust or expand business hours to accommodate people who do not have the flexibility to get here during their "9-5."



Area libraries strive to meet the needs of the community -

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time library manager Colleen Law-Tefft retired. McDowell took over in September of 2025. Another big change took place in the children's library. Children's Librarian, Michael Moren focused on making the Children's Library more welcoming for everyone, specifically children with sensory needs. "We now have sensory kits available for use in the library, and we offer a monthly sensory-friendly storytime for all ages," McDowell said.

In 2026, the library has more changes on the horizon. In the spring, construction will begin to install a new elevator. "Our old elevator broke down almost 2 years ago, and we have not been accessible to all of our patrons since that happened. The planning and construction process has taken a long time, but we are nearing the end. We are eager to have this project completed and to welcome everyone again," McDowell said.

Over the years, the library has changed and adapted to meet the needs of the community. "We are seeing an increase in the use of digital services," McDowell said. Ebooks, audiobooks and digital magazines and digital videos continue to increase in popularity. "We also recognize the need for free entertainment in our community, and we have tried to offer more free classes and activities for all ages."

While the primary focus

of the library is on books, McDowell explained that it is so much more than that. This year, Sherburne Public Library was contacted by the Madison County Rural Health Network and asked to put in a community cabinet at the library entrance. Stocked with nonperishable food items, cleaning products, and toiletries, the community cabinet is accessible to anyone in need, no questions asked. "We were pleasantly surprised to see that this cabinet has been used

regularly, and that various community members are helping to refill it as needed. It has been a great success and we are grateful to everyone who has contributed," McDowell said. She added that as food and housing insecurities increase in the area, more people seek out resources via the local library. "The library is for everyone! We exist to serve the public, and that is exactly what we do. If you have not been to our library, or it has been several years, we invite you to visit us," McDowell said. The Sherburne Public Library opens at 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Wednesday they are open until 7 p.m. and Saturday they are open from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Guernsey Memorial Library

Guernsey Memorial Library in Norwich is the largest library in Chenango County in terms of collection size, circulation, mem-

bership, and programs offered. Guernsey Library Director Connie Dalrymple said "public libraries are about education, enriching lives, and equality. No matter who you are, regardless of your age, your race, your economic status, you can access the library and learn about anything you choose." Dalrymple said the library also aims to enrich life through quality entertainment, be that in the form of books, movies, music or programming.

The biggest improvement for Guernsey Memorial Library in the last year was the expansion and repaving of the library parking lot, which allowed for more available parking spots for library patrons. 2026 will bring a lot more construction projects and improvements. "Now that our building is more than 50 years old, we have been progressing through a series of much-needed construction projects. This year we hope to begin planning a project to replace the windows in the curtain wall at the front of the library," Dalrymple said.

Construction improvements are not the only change that the library will be undergoing. "We also are trying to increasingly engage young adults in using the library by thinking of creative new programs that will be of interest to that age group."

While Guernsey Memorial Library has been a part of the Norwich landscape for many years, Dalrymple said the library has experience

tremendous growth and change over that time. While traditional books, newspapers and magazines still make up the library's collection, digital counterparts are now available for all of those. To access those materials, patrons do not even have to visit the library in person, but can peruse the site at <http://guernseylibrary.org/>.

Dalrymple explained that the library continues to grow and change as the wants and needs of the community dictate. After hearing a request from a patron, the library started a Mahjong program. Despite Dalrymple's doubt about the program, within a short time, 15-20 people joined the Wednesday night sessions and found a fun way to interact with one another. "I love the way the library has been able to support people learning from their peers and building community through this program," she said.

Dalrymple explained that she believes Norwich is a great community with a lot to offer. "It is large enough to have a little bit of everything that families need and yet small enough to feel like a small-town community," she added.

Guernsey Memorial Library is open Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Some other local libraries for you to explore:

Afton Free Library

105A Main Street
Afton, NY 13730

Hours - Monday 12:00 - 5:00 p.m.; Tuesday 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.; Wednesday closed; Thursday 12:00 - 6:00 p.m.; Friday 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.; Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Sunday closed

Bainbridge Free Library

13 North Main Street
Bainbridge, NY 13733-1210
607-967-5305

Hours - Sunday closed; Monday closed; Tuesday 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.; 2 - 6 p.m.; Wednesday 10 a.m.-1 p.m.; 2 - 7 p.m.; Thursday 10 a.m.-1 p.m.; 2 - 6 p.m.; Friday closed; Saturday 9 a.m.12 p.m.

Moore Memorial Library

59 Genesee Street
Greene, NY 13778
(607) 656-9349

Hours - Monday to Thursday 9:30 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.; Friday 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.; Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

New Berlin Public Library

New Berlin, NY
(607) 847-8564

Hours: Monday and Wednesday 10 a.m.- 8 p.m.; Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 10 a.m.- 5 p.m.; and Saturdays 10 a.m.- noon

Oxford Memorial Library

8 Fort Hill Park
P. O. Box 552
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City of Norwich welcomes new Principle Hotel -

Continued from page 1 ►

ments in the city of Norwich in decades. We're about to take this three story building built in 1992 and create a 61-room boutique hotel right in the heart of our city," said Michael O'Reilly, one of the founders of Principle Design and Engineering, a firm based in Norwich.

New York Secretary of State Walter T. Mosley attended the announcement representing state support for the project.

"I'm very excited for a multitude of reasons, because when you get to this point, when you start to actually break ground, you know that change is happening," Mosley told the crowd.

He added, "Change is tangible. Change is visual. Change is going to impact your economy. Change is going to impact visitors. Change is going to impact people who vacation here. Change is going to impact the business corridor, change is going to impact the walking customers that are going to be walking up and down Broad Street."

A fourth floor will be added to the building, as well as a rooftop lounge, restaurant, dining area, lounge, conference room, fitness center, outdoor patio and open courtyard with a fountain.

The project is comprised of five prime contracts, four of which are all local contractors who reside within 25



Commerce Chenango Board Chairman Luke Hess-Murphy; Michael O'Reilly, George Liaskos and Dan O'Reilly of Principle Design and Engineering; Commerce Chenango CEO & President Sal Testani; New York Secretary of State Walter T. Mosley. Plans on display for The Principle Hotel, which includes a \$8.3 million renovation of the former SUNY Morrisville building at 14-16 South Broad Street. (Photo by Sophia Root)



Rendering of the exterior of the Principle Hotel. (Submitted photo)

minutes of this project site.

Norwich was selected as a recipient of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative by New York State in 2021.

Since then, plans have been laid to spend this grant on: construction of The Principle Hotel, rehabilitation of the Heritage and Unguentine Buildings, improvement of East and West Parks, upgrades to the Martin Kappel Theater at the Chenango Arts Council, and enhancements to the American Avenue Streetscape.

Sal Testani, Commerce Chenango President and CEO said "The Principle isn't just a hotel, it's a catalyst. It will bring new visitors, new energy and new opportunity to our downtown, helping strengthen all the businesses around it. So today, we're not just starting a construction project, we're continuing the transformation, one that ensures we remain a community where people want to visit, work and live."

Commerce Chenango Board Chairman Luke Hess-Murphy added, "This project is a great example of many entities, private and public, individuals at all levels of local, regional and state government working together to bring us here today."

Demonstrating the impact The Principle will have, O'Reilly said, "The project supports our expansive business markets and growing tourism. If you use our ini-

tial occupancy numbers of 63% that will put roughly 43,000 people into the heart of our city annually, every year. According to the American Hotel and Lodging Association, that equates to \$2.65 million spent in our community: restaurants, bars, mercantile, gas, events and the movie theater."

O'Reilly thanked his brother Dan, his family, his business partner George Liaskos, interior designer Laura, past summer Interns, Jim and Marty from SFCU, Omar Sanders, Dave and Jen from NBT Bank, Luke Hess-Murphy, Erik Scrivener, Sal Testani, Tyler Oliver, former mayor Carnrike, the McNeils, their contractors, and New York State for the funding.

"Our hope with this project is it will stand as a lasting testament to what perseverance, collaboration and a bold vision can achieve," O'Reilly said.

"We're not just constructing a hotel, we're laying the foundation and the cornerstone of a legacy that will uplift our city and welcome travelers from every corner of the world as if they were coming home. With every decision we made, every obstacle overcome, our unwavering commitment has been to shape a place that radiates excellence, warmth and genuine hospitality for generations to come."

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- Mission:** A safe haven for pregnant and parenting mothers to gain opportunities, resources and knowledge toward becoming self-sufficient.
- Vision:** Aunt Mary's House provides emergency and transitional shelter to homeless pregnant and parenting mothers, ages 18 and up.

Aunt Mary's House is a not for profit organization serving Chenango County residents who are pregnant and parenting mothers who are at least 18 years of age and their babies from pre-born to 18 months of age.

We are a private, donor funded organization and are truly grateful for those who give of their time, goods, services and finances! We have an amazing group of volunteers who support our guests each and every day. We appreciate you!

We have a current guest opening and are developing a wait list. Please go to our website for the application or contact our Executive Director at executivedirector@auntmaryhouse.net or by calling 607-238-3392.

For more information, you can visit our website at: www.auntmaryhouse.net

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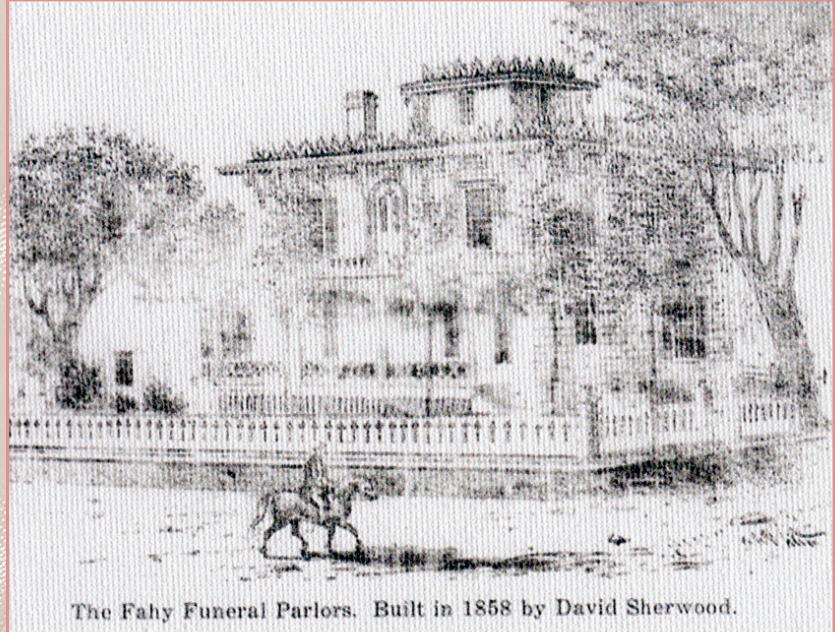
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