

# A batch of new exhibits awaits visitors at Region of Three Oaks Museum

BY FRANCESCA SAGALA

While the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 is the one that receives the most notoriety, it wasn't the deadliest fire that took place that year.

That claim to fame, Nick Bogert, a board member of The Region of Three Oaks Museum (TROTOM), said, goes to the Peshtigo Fire in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Known as the "deadliest wildfire in United States history," the fire killed 1500 to 2500 people and devastated the cities of Holland, Port Huron, and Manistee.

"Chicago is still in the headlines — everyone remembers the Chicago fire," Bogert said.

Information on the Peshtigo fire, as well as area blazes of the past and the teams and equipment that fought them, can be found at "FIRE!," one of the newest exhibits at TROTOM.

Museum volunteers and board members got an up-close look at the exhibits during a reception Friday, April 30.

The museum officially opened for the season Saturday, May 1.

Other fires burned in the area in 1871, from New Buffalo to Avery and from Sawyer to New Troy. The exhibit features an acrylic painting by River Valley High School senior Brianna Martin depicting the 1871 fire that swept across the fields between Sawyer and New Troy.

In 1875, the Tempest Brigade, Three Oaks' first fire company, was formed. "Fred Warren (a brother of Warren Featherbone Company founder E.K. Warren) said, "These fires have shown us we don't know how to put out fires,

we need something more professional than people with buckets and water," Bogert said.

Before the company, townspeople ran to the well to fill up their two initialed buckets with water when the fire alarm sounded. Townspeople formed a "bucket brigade," where the buckets (one is featured in the exhibit) would be passed

article, the current building was built in 1935 by Dr. T.H. McKenzie.

Bogert said that the display contains 1935 dental equipment, which is indicated by a blueprint of the building built in 1935 (located near the exhibit).

"The company that sold them all the equipment also had an architect that would help you design your office to fit

Several exhibits have been enhanced and updated with additional narratives through QR code scans.

Museum volunteer Linda Martin-Mangold helped profile the Martins, a family that has been holding reunions in Michiana since the 1860s, in "Crossroads — The Martins and Minnichs," a part of a series on how local roads got their names.

"I was raised in the Martin farm, which is a sesquicentennial farm and lived there until I got married," she said.

Board member Julie Sittig thanked all the volunteers and docents.

"This museum would never be possible and has not been possible because of all of you and the volunteer hours that you give to us every year," she said.

Members of TROTOM's board of directors are Chuck Sittig, chair; Harold Russell; Janet Hayes; Julie Sittig; Nick Bogert; Randy Miller; Daniel McDonough; and Kathy Alton.

Last spring, the museum purchased Three Oaks' oldest building: The Three Oaks Township Hall, which was built in 1866. Now known as The Heritage Hall, the museum wants to make the space available for community-building events at reasonable rental prices. For information on renting the hall, contact [trotommuseum@gmail.com](mailto:trotommuseum@gmail.com).

The museum, located next to Acorn Theater, plans to be open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday through October from noon to 5 p.m. For more information on other exhibits, visit [www.regionofthreeoaksmuseum.com/](http://www.regionofthreeoaksmuseum.com/), email [trotommuseum@gmail.com](mailto:trotommuseum@gmail.com) or leave a message at 269-336-9688.



Julie Sittig thanks museum volunteers during the TROTOM reception



Buckets that were passed along in a bucket brigade to put out fires is in the FIRE! exhibit



Nick Bogert displays one of the fire helmets from Chikaming Township that's on display at the FIRE! exhibit

down to the fire crew's pumper truck.

The exhibit contains artifacts that Michigan State University let the museum bring back from the Chamberlain Warren collection, Bogert said. Artifacts from the Tempest Brigade include a cloth helmet for the firefighters.

Also included are articles detailing the massive all-night fire which occurred May 7, 1962, in New Buffalo and the two 1971 Galien fires.

Another corner of the museum is the dental office from 103 S. Elm that has been recreated circa 1935, with its patient chair, drill, spit stand and tool cabinet.

The dental exhibit had been sitting in the basement of the dentist office where Dr. Debra Mannia and son Paul Mannia currently practice for 35 to 40 years, Bogert said.

Dentists have practiced at what is now 103 S. Elm Street since the 1890s; however, per a Galien River Gazette

it all in, so we know the exact date this was purchased," he said.

S till on loan from Michigan State University is the Warren Calculating Engine, possibly the first functional mechanical calculator made in the country, that was invented by local jeweler Fred Warren.

Randy Miller, a TROTOM board member, said the engine is the "gem of the whole museum."

"He (Fred) was on his deathbed when he finished it, he was dying of tuberculosis, so he was directing the people how to finish putting it together while he was on the couch...He died shortly after," he said.

Miller created the series of photo montages in the "Three Oaks — Then and Now" exhibit, with each one juxtaposing the modern village with the Three Oaks of the past (such as the Union Meat Market or Drier's Butcher Shop).