



MILLION PENNY PARADE

SATURDAY, JULY 15

- A community celebration -

Big things expected to come from 70th Anniversary Million Penny Parade

Doud: ‘We just do not have the capability to do what we want to do and show what we have here to show’

Editor’s note: This story also ran Friday, June 30, 2023. It is reprinted here to help showcase the dedication and enthusiasm many community members exhibit whom keep the Dr. Kate Museum up and functioning.

By Trevor Greene
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

As of Monday, June 26, the Dr. Kate Museum’s curator, Marsha Doud, said 2 million pennies have been raised this year for Dr. Kate Museum and the 70th Anniversary Million Penny Parade.

“That’s doubling our (million penny) goal and we’re not stopping,” Doud said.

Over the last several months, Million Penny Parade committee members from all over the Lakeland area have been organizing and coordinating fundraising efforts in order to expand Woodruff’s Dr. Kate Museum. Funds will also help run the parade, operate the museum and fund scholarships for area students.

The parade, which is on July 15, isn’t an annual event — it only occurs at the turn of every decade, the last being for its 60th Anniversary in 2013.

There’s one word that summarizes what the Dr. Kate Museum and Dr. Kate Newcomb symbolize, according to Doud, and that is “community.”

While it’s named after a local legend who stopped at nothing to provide medical care to a community in need, the Dr. Kate Museum is really a museum showcasing the entire history of the Lakeland area with a particular focus on Woodruff and Arbor Vitae.

The expansion, Doud explained, is to push the building out to the sidewalk bordering 2nd Avenue and U.S. Highway 51.

That way, so many more exhibits and possibilities will be able to be shared with members of the public. Doud said right now there are countless artifacts and exhibits stored away.

An expansion would also allow people coming to the museum to watch the Dr. Kate “This Is Your Life” documentary in a more private space because, right now, it is shown right in the middle of the museum. “This Is Your Life” was an American documentary series broadcasted nationally in the 1950s and early 60s.

“We have no room, literally, to (even) hang up another picture,” Doud said. “We just need more room.”



Dr. Kate Museum curator Marsha Doud reflects on different artifacts showcased at the museum highlighting the local legend Dr. Kate Newcomb.



70th Anniversary Million Penny Parade committee member and museum volunteer Harriet Walker points out a picture while her and museum curator Marsha Doud speak to how the community played its role in Dr. Kate and the Million Penny Parade’s story or vice-versa.



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– *A community celebration* –

Dr. Kate Museum receives state historical marker

Editor's note: This story was originally published in The Lakeland Times on July 29, 2016.

A small, simple lot alongside Highway 51 in Woodruff has long been a place of great relevance to the Lakeland community and of great importance to the state of Wisconsin — and now it will have the credentials to prove it.

The site, where the office of Dr. Kate Pelham Newcomb once stood, was authorized in April to receive a state historical marker in honor of Dr. Kate's legacy and the Million Penny Parade.

Dr. Kate, perhaps the Northwoods' most famous resident, earned the nickname "The Angel on Snowshoes" for her dedication to serving the rural reaches of the Northwoods throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Kate traveled across the Lakeland area practicing medicine to whoever needed it, and in return, they paid her however they could — sometimes in meat or crops, sometimes with services, and often times over the course of a year or so — but they always reimbursed her for these essential services.

While the marker, which is to be unveiled Saturday, will bear the name of Dr. Kate, it isn't solely dedicated to her — the marker also stands as a testament to the Lakeland Memorial Hospital, and with that the will of local communities

that came together and fought for the common good.

A community achievement

"The communities of Woodruff and Arbor Vitae are what really started this whole thing," said Marsha Doud, curator of the Dr. Kate Museum. "Dr. Kate, yes, she's center to it, but she's only one part of the big story."

The story starts with Dr. Kate's need for a more permanent place of work. During all months of the year, Dr. Kate would travel by car, foot, snowshoe and even a custom-made ski car to treat patients from Winchester to Hazelhurst and everywhere in between.

"Of course we didn't have a hospital here at the time, so she had to deliver me in Tomahawk," said Gary Simmons, a Dr. Kate baby and museum vice president. "That's where a lot of Dr. Kate babies were born — Tomahawk, Rhinelander, Ironwood."

Being brought into this world by Dr. Kate isn't Simmons' only tie to the historic marker — his father Bethel, along with Warren Gehrke, were the originators of the initiative to build a hospital for Dr. Kate in the Lakeland area.

"They decided they needed to pull the community together for this and the community came and helped literally build the foundation," Simmons said. "It's a great story because you don't see a lot of communities binding together like this anymore, with everybody pitching in and volunteering their time."

The hospital soon became a powerful grassroots effort for area residents, headed up by the Woodruff



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOGRAPH

AV-W geometry teacher Otto Burich, who initiated the One Million Penny drive, stands on a corner selling penny buttons off his coat.

and Arbor Vitae communities. While the project was a large undertaking, residents were forced to rely on simple but effective fundraising efforts.

"The Arbor Vitae-Woodruff Lions Club actually had a song and dance show to raise money for the hospital," Doud said. "They sold brooms and had car washes and the whole bit, but they just ran out of funds. There wasn't any bank in the state

that would loan the community the money to build a hospital here because they said it would never happen."

When all other options were off the table, 16 students from AV-W High School stepped up and saved the project.

"In 1952, 16 kids in Mr. Otto Burich's geometry class were study-

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Museum

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Between the anniversary fundraisers and parades, the Dr. Kate Museum is operated with the help of its volunteers and freewill donations.

The original fundraiser, which began at Arbor Vitae Woodruff (AV-W) High School, was to help complete a much needed hospital. Before its creation, the only hospitals were in Eagle River and Rhinelander.

AV-W geometry teacher Otto Burich was the one who had the idea for the million penny fundraiser. Not only was the money going towards a good cause, but Mr. Burich thought it would be good for his students to see what a million of something actually looked like. As a sidenote, Burich's wife was the nurse to Dr. Kate.

"He had 17 students in his class studying a million and they wanted to know how much a million really was," Doud said. "So they decided after much discussion to collect a mil-

lion pennies and donate them to the hospital fund."

Each of the pennies, she noted, came from all 48 states at the time — Hawaii and Alaska not being states yet.

After Doud talked about the history between Dr. Kate and AV-W, she again pointed out how the space of the museum limits what it could be.

At a recent Night at the Museum event held in conjunction with the Minocqua Public Library, Doud said people were "jam-packed."

"We just do not have the capability to do what we want to do and show what we have here to show," she said. "We've got whole exhibits in the basement; prohibition ... World War Two and the history of television ... we have so many things in our basement that we can't bring up."

Between fundraising efforts for the expansion and the parade, and also having money to operate the building, the Dr. Kate Museum still finds a way to offer scholarships to area students too.

Since 2004, the Dr. Kate Pelham Newcomb Memorial Scholarship has been given to 22 students. Hailey Curtis was the 2023 scholarship recipient and plans to pursue a degree in nursing.

Dr. Kate "did everything," Doud said, but she is most known for the babies she delivered because not one of the roughly 3,000 babies or their mothers lost their lives during the deliveries.

"Considering there wasn't a hospital here until 1954, that's pretty amazing," she said. "And that's why we're trying to locate as many (Dr. Kate babies) to come back for the parade."

October 2022 is when the 70th Anniversary Million Penny Parade committee began planning the fundraiser and parade.

Doud said that process was "daunting."

"What's difficult about it is we don't have the same sense of community that we had in this time," she said. "We kind of lost that. We've kind of melded into our lifestyles of cell phones or whatever."

One example Doud gave of how the times have changed and why coordinating the parade is tougher regarded building floats. She said it's been hard this year and in the past people seemed to be more enthused.

"I think the frustrating part is getting people to do some old fashioned things," she said.

And while there have been challenges, Doud indicated those who have helped have done a fine job.

Committee members Barb Maines and Harriet Walker said there are a couple more things to do yet, but for the most part, everything is set to go.

"It's a mountain of work," Walker said. "People are so dedicated. We are a little tired."

Everything will work itself out, Maines said, and the only thing left to worry about now is for the weather to cooperate.

"We feel as ready as we can at this point," Walker said.

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