

Belmont Heritage Fair on Saturday celebrates town's 'Special Places'

BELMONT — This Saturday's "Heritage and Preservation Fair" throughout Belmont's historic Factory Village District has its roots in the classroom and library. Fourth grade Belmont Elementary School teacher and Heritage Commission member Vicki Donovan brought historian Wallace Rhodes to her classroom last fall and inspired students with pictures and stories from the "old days." Add youthful energy to ambitious community programming by new Belmont Public Library director, Eileen Gilbert – including genealogy software and classes – and the rest, as they say, is history.

Or it will be this week end, as residents, neighbors and friends are welcomed to Belmont Village on Saturday, for ceremonies marking National Preservation month, the town's newest addition to the New Hampshire State Register of Historical Places and an array of free activities, indoors and out, for all ages. Select Board Chairman Ruth Mooney will welcome all at 10:30 a.m. in front of the Library. Special guests helping to salute the day include State Senator Andrew Hosmer and State Representative Mike Sylvia.

"Everyone should take a little time to come see what's old, restored and new here in the center of our town," said Gilbert. The Library, open for regular hours from 9 a.m., will display exhibits, while nearby the Bandstand, Tioga River Pavilion and a newly sited covered bridge spanning the Tioga River, will have some of the volunteers on hand who made those projects happen. The Corner Meeting House will serve as both refreshment and learning center, featuring displays from the Belmont Historical Society, BRATT/Winni Trail, Friends of the Library, Friends of the Bandstand and Save the Gale School Committee. Five experts will speak beginning at 11:15 a.m. with tips on research and resources, as well as sagas of special Belmont places – the Mill and Gale School. Panelists include architectural historian and preservation consultant Mae Williams of Center Harbor, Richard Kipphut, preservation advocate and Plymouth State University Lamson Library staff member, Wallace Rhodes, who compiled "Reminiscences of a New Hampshire Town" for its 1969 centennial, and Diane Marden, founder of the Belmont NH Heritage website, and a leader of the effort to save the Gale School.

"The ongoing Village Revitalization project includes multiple outdoor kiosks, researched by Rhodes and featuring vintage photos. Stories of Penstock and Sargent Parks, the Library, Mill workers and more make walking around the area, both healthy and informative," said Gilbert. Belmont Parks and Recreation director Janet Breton has added walking mileage to updated maps of the historic area, which will be available as guides this week end and future activities.

Additional community partners are Belknap County Restorative Justice Program, Belmont Parks and Recreation Department, Friends of the Bandstand, Land and Community Heritage Investment Program, NH Division of Historical Resources, New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, and the Belmont Historical Society. Organizing sponsors are the Library and Heritage Commission, aided by community residents Christine Fogg, Donna Hepp, Brian Loanes, Ken Knowlton and Town staff.



Teacher Vicki Donovan and some of her Belmont Elementary students using the Town's history and buildings as a classroom, holding a photo of the 1792 Province Road Meeting House. (Courtesy photo)

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