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SCHOOLS / CLOSE UP / Kings Park Takes a Look At Its Roots: [SMITHTOWN Edition]

BILL KAUFMAN. STAFF WRITER. Newsday, Combined editions; Long Island, N.Y. [Long Island, N.Y.]09 May 1999: G24.

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Created and maintained by the Kings Park school district in its administration building, the Kings Park Heritage Museum consists of five rooms filled with historic materials, photographs, personal memorabilia and other treasures that graphically trace the history of the North Shore community.

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five rooms filled with historic materials, photographs, personal memorabilia and other treasures that graphically trace the history of the North Shore community.

"This museum is dedicated to educating the young and old," explained Leo Ostebo, its volunteer director. Ostebo, a retired English teacher who has taught in the school district and has known the students of more than 40 graduating classes, was the prime mover in the founding of the museum in 1994. Its eclectic artifacts were collected and put into historical perspective for visitors by the retired educator.

Among many others pivotal in helping create the museum was a Kings Park colleague of Ostebo's, dentist George Tiernan. Tiernan's large collection of vintage photographs relating to the community, some of them dating back almost a century, are among the highlights of the exhibition.

Yet another aspect of the museum that may bring a pang of nostalgia to anyone who has lived in the community for more than a few years are the artifacts relating to the state-run, and now-closed, Kings Park Psychiatric Center. It provided jobs for countless area residents since before the turn of the century.

"We incorporate what the Kings Park Heritage Museum has to offer into our educational curriculum," said Mary DeRose, superintendent of schools. All children in the district, usually between the fourth and seventh grades, are given an extensive tour of the museum as part of their history courses. Teachers use a curriculum handbook prepared for the education unit and subsequent field trip.

"We find that senior citizens are among our most enthusiastic visitors," said DeRose. "They dwell on old photographs of graduating classes and other things that remind them of what this community once was like." Many well-known residents have been honored by the names of the museum's various spaces - among them The Smith Room, named for Marion Smith Lederman, a direct descendent of Obadiah Smith, whose house still stands on St. Johnland Road, and The Cusick History Room. It's named for John and Alice Cusick, who donated many items depicting Kings Park's contribution and involvement in national conflicts.

A visiting group of seventh-graders from the district's William T. Rogers Middle School found its visit memorable. "It's a great link to our past. There's something for every age group. Every town should have one," said Kevin Wilton.

"I love the place," said Stacy Black. "It's amazing how much was assembled in so short of a period. Working on projects for the museum is my favorite activity." And for Christina Hulser, it was food for thought: "It's easy to imagine life as it once was here."

The free museum at the RSO Building, 101 Church St., is usually open daily

8:30-4:30 p.m. Special arrangements can be made for large groups. For information, call 269-3205 or 269-3228.

Illustration

Newsday Photo / Daniel Goodrich - Leo Ostebo offers a ride into the past to visitor Kristen Wilton, left, and Kings Park Schools Superintendent Mary DeRose.

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