

# L Dimensions of living

The Smithtown News • October 4, 2018

## Exhibiting a sense of community

KP museum continues to record history thanks to dedication of founder Leo Ostebo

By MATTHEW CUDAHY

**F**or 25 years, the Leo P. Ostebo Kings Park Heritage Museum has been a hidden gem in Smithtown. Snuggled inside the RJO Intermediate School, its inconspicuous home does not do justice the breadth and depth of the stories and artifacts the museum has to offer.

In 1994, New York State announced it was closing the Kings Park Psychiatric Center due to declining patient numbers. In an effort to preserve the hospital's history, a couple of Kings Park High School students pitched the idea of a museum to the school board. The board thought it was a good idea and obliged, designating a single showcase in a hallway for the project.

Needing help and a supervisor for the undertaking, the students turned to retired English and History teacher and longtime Kings Park resident Leo Ostebo. With a passion for history and for the community he called home, he agreed to help, and they soon got to work on their showcase.

"I thought we got the short-end by getting only one showcase, I thought we were good for at least a room," Mr. Ostebo said.

It wasn't long until the museum began expanding, growing out of its modest showcase and moving into multiple showcases and even occupying classrooms. Mr. Ostebo, having lived in Kings Park since 1961, relied on his deep roots and numerous friendships to help build up the museum. And, he says he picked the right town to rely on. Donations of money and artifacts began coming in, local historians and writers helped to dig up more and more stories and they started to win some grants.

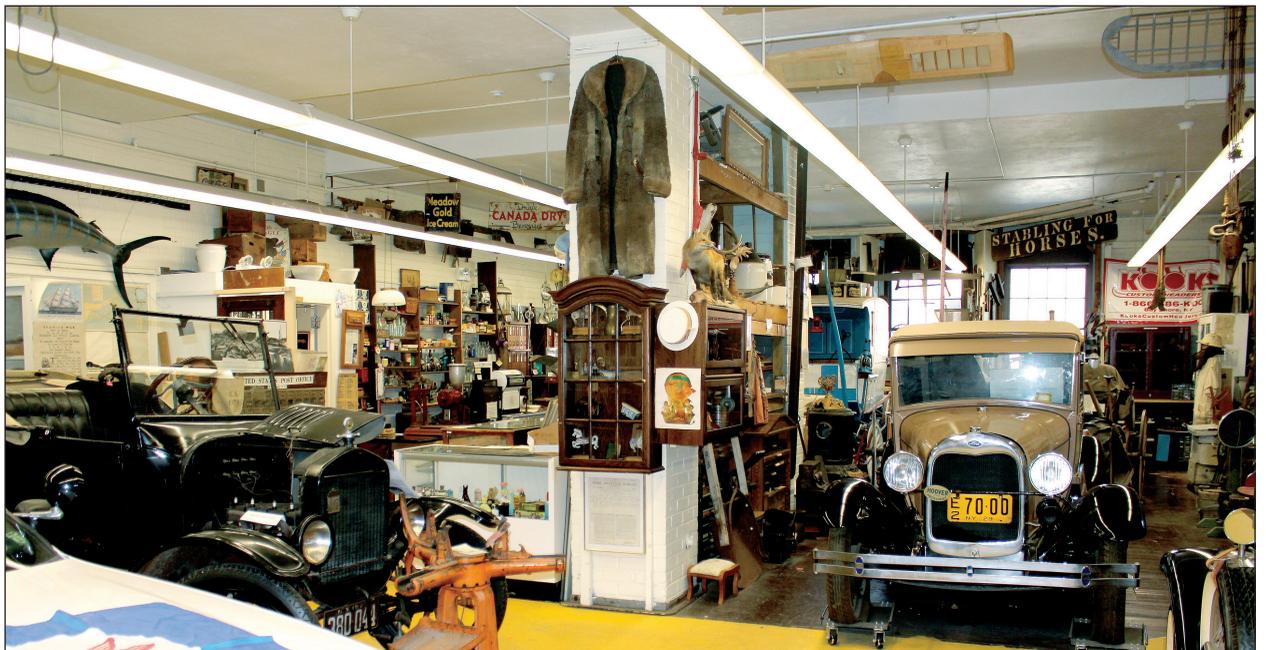
"I'll tell you, Kings Park is strange and different, but also unbelievably loyal. Unbelievably," he said. "You just send out word, 'I need some help,' and then they go, 'OK.' I'm telling you, the people are absolutely superb."

Today, the Museum is comprised of eight exhibition rooms, a media center and a number of hallway showcases. Exhibits touch on subjects such as the town's farming history, fire department, psychiatric hospital, war heroes, sports stars, school system, and its rich culture and heritage.

"This museum's purpose is to tell stories. That's what it's all about, we tell stories because that's what Kings Park is all about," Mr. Ostebo said. "We're just trying to keep the stories alive, to make them come out."

The museum is incredibly successful at shedding light on unfamiliar stories through newspaper clippings, artifacts and in-depth captions. The museum also highlights a number of under-the-radar individuals and families whose stories had once been lost to the wind. Mr. Ostebo spoke about a few outstanding examples in an interview with **The Smithtown News** last week.

Approximately 467 Kings Parkers served during the second World War. The Baker family, who lived in Kings Park for a good part of the early 1900s, alone sent eight of their children into the war. The



Some of the many artifacts on display at the Leo P. Ostebo Kings Park Heritage Museum housed in the RJO Intermediate School.



Gold Star family served in various military branches, including the Army, Navy and Coast Guard. One of the Baker children, Tommy, was severely injured when his tank blew up in the Battle of Anzio. Another Baker brother was on the USS Astoria when it sank at the Battle of Savo Island, narrowly surviving the incident.

Kings Park's notable war veterans do not stop there, Lieutenant Edward Lyon, a 1949 graduate of Kings Park High School (KPHS), was the first male nurse in the United States to ever receive an officer's commission in the Army. He was commissioned as a reserve officer in 1955, breaking a longstanding law that women were only allowed to serve as nurses in the military. His entry paved the way for future men to join the U.S. Army Nurse Corps.

In addition to its military history, one of the more prolific topics in the museum is the town's strong agricultural background. Before the 1960s, much of Kings Park was farmland, featuring a wide-variety of specialties ranging from your ordinary vegetable farm to turkey-only farms. Arguably the most prominent and pivotal Kings Park farm family was the Stattels. Bought in 1906 by Daniel Stattel, the family farm specialized in vegetables and dairy, and was one of the largest farms in town. The Stattel farm was located where present-day Kings Park Plaza shopping center sits.

Kings Park is also known for producing some impressive athletes. When the topic of sports came up in Mr. Ostebo's interview, he boldly claimed

*(Continued on page 2A)*

## Dimensions of living

# Community Calendar

### Fall festival...

St. James Rehabilitation & Healthcare Center will host a Fall Festival this Saturday, October 6, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Healthcare Center, 275 Moriches Road, St. James. Open to the community, the festival will feature live entertainment, food, petting zoo, face painting, pony rides, bounce house, pumpkin patch, photo booth and more. All proceeds go directly to Walk for Beauty, which raises funds for breast cancer research at Stony Brook Medicine and the Ward Melville Heritage Organization's Unique Boutique for prosthesis and wigs.

### Bunco, baskets...

St. Thomas of Canterbury Episcopal Church hosts Bunco 'n Baskets on Friday, November 2. There will be a Basket Auction drawing for the many baskets and door prizes. Refreshments will be provided. Come for a preview of Baskets at 6:30 p.m. and Bunco starts at 7:30 p.m. St. Thomas of Canterbury is located at 29 Brookside Drive, Smithtown. Tickets are \$20 prepaid. For tickets and additional information, call 631-265-4520 or e-mail stthomasofcan@optonline.net.

### Fall festival...

St. Thomas of Canterbury Episcopal Church holds its Annual Fall Festival and Craft Fair Saturday, October 13 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Rain date is October 20) at the church, located at 90 Edgewater Avenue, Smithtown, corner of Brookside Drive and Edgewater Avenue. Get a jump on your holiday shopping with the many craft vendors that will be on hand; enjoy a variety of fun activities for the kids; and be sure to visit the Pumpkin Patch, paint a pumpkin or build a scarecrow. A variety of hot food and baked goods will be available, along with hot apple cider and cold beverages. Visit the raffle table and buy a chance to win one of a variety of unique gift baskets or gift cards. A DJ on site will provide music throughout the festival. Admission is free. Vendor

spaces are still available. To obtain a vendor application, call 631-265-4520 or go to [www.stthomasofcanterbury.net](http://www.stthomasofcanterbury.net).

### Harvest fair...

Commack United Methodist Church, located at 486 Townline Road, Commack, holds its annual Harvest Fair Saturday, October 13 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Held in the Fellowship Hall, the fair features a Country Kitchen serving homemade breakfast and lunch, craft boutique, fresh Long Island produce, bake sale with pies, breads, cakes and more, White Elephant Sale, and more. For the kids, there'll be pumpkin painting and face painting. For additional information, call 631-499-7310.

### Animal blessing...

Come celebrate the Feast of St. Francis with St. Thomas of Canterbury Episcopal Church Annual Blessing of the Animals this Sunday, October 7, from 2:30 to 4 p.m. Treats and refreshments will be served. St. Thomas of Canterbury is located at 90 Edgewater Avenue, Smithtown. For more information, visit [www.stthomasofcanterbury.net](http://www.stthomasofcanterbury.net) or call 631-265-4520.

### Garage sale...

St. James United Methodist Church, 532 Moriches Road, St. James, holds its Annual Fall Garage Sale Saturday, October 20 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. In addition to tons of great finds, refreshments will be available. Applications are now being accepted. For additional information and to reserve a selling spot, call 631-584-5340.

### Pumpkin patch...

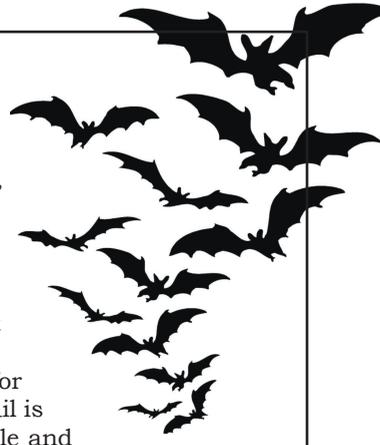
Pick your perfect pumpkin at St. Thomas of Canterbury Episcopal Church's Pumpkin Patch. The Pumpkin Patch is open Sunday, October 7 through Wednesday, October 31 at 90 Edgewater Avenue, Smithtown (corner of Brookside Drive/Edgewater Avenue). A portion of the proceeds will benefit the Smithtown

## Celebrate Halloween at Sweetbriar Spooktacular

Sweetbriar Nature Center invites all ghoulies, and ghosties, and other Halloween creepies, to its annual Sweetbriar Spooktacular Friday and Saturday, October 19 and 20, from 7 to 9:30 p.m. both days. Enjoy eerie animal presentations, ghostly garden, creepy crafts, scary stories, night walk, and snacks and refreshments.

Special outdoor trails have been created for different age groups. The Enchanted Woodland Trail is for ages four to eight and The Trail To an Eerie Tale and adjoining attractions are for ages eight and up. The Jack O' Lantern Trail will be lined with lit up Jack O' Lanterns of all kinds.

Admission is \$15 per child, \$5 per adult, with discounts available for scouts. Sweetbriar Nature Center is located at 62 Eckernkamp Drive, Smithtown. For tickets and additional information, call 631-979-6344 or visit [sweetbriarnc.org](http://sweetbriarnc.org).



Food Pantry. Pumpkin Patch hours are Monday through Friday, 2:30 to 6:30 p.m., Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sundays noon to 5 p.m. For additional information, visit [www.stthomasofcanterbury.net](http://www.stthomasofcanterbury.net) or call 631-265-4520.

### Fall festival...

On Saturday, October 6, from 5 to 9 p.m. the Smithtown DECA Club will partner with the Smithtown Children's Foundation to host a "Fall Festival of Hope" at the Smithtown High School West fields. The event will include an interactive carnival from 5 to 7 p.m. for children of all ages, followed by a Halloween Movie from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is \$5 per person.

### Folk dancing...

Israeli & International Folk Dancing is held every Wednesday (when school is in session) at RJO Intermediate School, Church Street and Old Dock Road, Kings Park. All levels are welcome and no partner is needed. Dancing is from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Fee is \$10 per session. For additional information, call 631-269-6894

### Hurricane drive...

The Commack Fire Department is hosting a Collection Drive to collect goods for those in need of supplies after the devastation caused by Hurricane Florence. All donations can be dropped off at Commack Fire Department Headquarters, 6309 Jericho Turnpike (just west of Commack Road), anytime, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### Heritage ball...

The Smithtown Historical Society hosts its annual Heritage Ball Thursday, October 18 at the Watermill in Smithtown. The Historical Society will acknowledge and award members from the major hamlets of Smithtown Township for their significant and ongoing contributions to the Smithtown community. 2018 Heritage Ball Honorees are Fire Departments of seven towns: Hauppauge, Kings Park, St. James, Commack, Nesconset, Smithtown and Nissequogue. Chairperson is Deanna Varricchio. The Heritage Ball will start with cocktails and raffles at 6:30 p.m., followed by dinner at 7:30 p.m. To purchase tickets or to be included in the commemorative journal marking the celebration, call the Society at 631-265-6768.

# Heritage museum recording community's history

(Continued from page 1A)

most Kings Parkers don't even know who the town's greatest athlete really is.

"When I ask people who they think is the best athlete to ever come out of Kings Park school district, they all come up with [Craig] Biggio," he said. "But I say, no, it wasn't Biggio. The best athlete was Bootsy Lyons. And 99 percent of Kings Parkers don't know her because we don't even have a picture of her in the school."

Bootsy Lyons was a KPHS student in the 1940s. She played four sports. She played at the varsity level in all four sports. More impressively, she played varsity in all four sports in all four years of her high school career. And it doesn't end there. She received All-County honors in all four sports in all four years. Yes, you read that right. She was a 16-time All-County athlete.

"It's a shame that everyone doesn't know her name. But that's the job of the museum, to bring attention to people like her," Mr. Ostebo said.

In October 2017, the school board announced that the Kings Park Heritage Museum would be named after Mr. Ostebo for his years of dedication and service to the community. The announcement came as no surprise to people in town, and was even met with gratification, knowing all the work Mr. Ostebo had and continues to put in. But, Mr. Ostebo on the other hand, wasn't a fan.

"It is embarrassing. I didn't want it," he said. "I don't like too much attention. I really, really, really don't like attention. I just like working on projects and seeing them succeed. Credit has nothing to do with anything."

At the age of 87, Mr. Ostebo is still very active with the museum. As a curator and the volunteer director for a quarter-century, he remains focused on his

mission to brainstorm ideas for new exhibits and to uncover the lost stories still out there.

The hope is that the museum will continue to expand, both in the space it takes up and, more importantly, in its influence.

"Twenty-five years from now, I hope it takes up the entire first floor of this building and it's a little more organized," he said. "The bottom-line, and the whole goal here is that the town uses the museum as a type of classroom, a type of library, I want kids to learn but I also want the adults of the town to teach them."

The Leo P. Ostebo Museum is open Monday through Friday from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The museum is hosting a number of upcoming events, including Italian Night on October 19. Future events and times, locations and dates can be found at [kpheritagemuseum.net](http://kpheritagemuseum.net).