Reception for Erie Canal Exhibition Draws Many Attendees

Over 70 people showed up for the reception Friends hosted for the opening of “Re-Inspired, An Artistic Navigation of the Erie Canal” art and history exhibition on October 14th. The display and presentation were part of the 175th Anniversary of Civil Engineering at Rensselaer three-day celebration.

Following a welcome by Dr. Jose Holguin-Veras, Rensselaer Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, William Estes, General Counsel for the New York State Thruway Authority and Canal Corporation, related some circumstances behind the development of the canal and explained how the Canal Corporation came to exist within the Thruway Authority.

The canal, which took seven years to construct and cost an astounding $7 million (a huge amount of money in the early 1800s), was totally paid off within six years. Initially, it was disparagingly referred to as “Clinton’s Ditch” because Governor DeWitt Clinton pressed for its creation even though many New York State politicians and residents were against it. In due course, the canal proved to have an amazing and positive impact on the people and communities along its banks. After the building of the Erie Canal, what were once small villages grew to be towns and cities, and many people in those municipalities and surrounding areas prospered. Consequently, a more appropriate moniker was proudly adopted—“The Gateway to the West.”

With the decline of commercial shipping on the canal due to the emergence of railroads and then long-distance trucking, many sections of the canal were abandoned or filled in. Estes stated that the canal system became part of the Thruway Authority in 1992. The Thruway Authority paid the state $20 million for the canal system and assumed its operation and maintenance, investing more than $850 million in it. Since the 1990s, the canal system has been used primarily by recreational traffic. According to Estes, “The canals are really an underutilized resource of this state and very much under-appreciated.”

Costumed interpreter Bernard C. Schmieder, who is a professional engineer and land surveyor, held the audience’s attention with his narration of what it was like to be a surveyor and laborer toiling on the canal. Two of the artists whose paintings were on display were also present to talk to attendees after the presentations.
What Books Friends Are Currently Reading

I’m always interested in hearing what others are reading, so I asked our Friends. Here are some of the responses.

I am currently reading *Good Omens* by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett. The book is a great send up on religion, politics and end of the world theorists. It’s not quite as good as Gaiman’s *American Gods* (that book should be a must read for everyone; well, except maybe those who watch Fox News). I do recommend reading it if you like that silly way the English seem to see the world with a lot of throw-away remarks—a bit Monty Pythonish. It’s 412 pages and just a word of warning: some readers will probably have to finish it in a night.

I finished Pynchon’s *Inherent Vice* several months ago and would like to say that if you were a child of the 60s and early 70s, it is another must read. However, you will probably break down when you read the last page as it’s a very bittersweet ending. It’s Pynchon at his best with prose, but just slightly different than his other work and not as depressing as *Vineland*. — Pete Collopy ‘71, Troy, NY

I just finished reading Ed Dague’s *Six and Eleven*. Ed Dague, RPI Class of 1965, was the Capital District’s leading TV anchor before retiring a few years ago. He was known and widely respected for his forthright proclamation of the news, strong opinions on issues of the day, and his interests in science, technology, and RPI hockey. He moderated technical forums and spoke at numerous events at his Alma Mater. His book provides fascinating insights into producing and reporting the news under the constant pressures of deadlines—and, in Ed’s case, debilitating pain. — Dave Haviland ‘64, Troy, NY

I’m not currently reading it but I just finished Russell Shorto’s *The Island At The Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan, The Forgotten Colony* (Doubleday, 2004). It is a bit of forgotten history that happened here in Beaverwyck (Albany) and New Amsterdam (New York) and is still being translated from old documents written in old Dutch script. Good read. — Bob Albern ‘54, Kinderhook, NY

I just finished John Grisham’s latest book, *The Confession*. I’m a big John Grisham fan, and he didn’t fail me with this one. A real page-turner. Let me just say this, if you’re a believer in capital punishment, I don’t think you will be by the end of the book. — Bob Mayo, Grafton Lake, NY

*The Tin Ticket* by Deborah J. Swiss (Harvard-educated genders affairs expert), 2010, Berkley. Historian Deborah J. Swiss tells the heartbreaking, horrifying, and ultimately triumphant story of the women exiled from the British Isles and forced into slavery and savagery—who created the most liberated society of their time. In reading this book in anticipation of my first visit to Tasmania in June, I am experiencing the same emotion and enlightenment as when I read *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* by Oscar Handlin, 1951. — Erica Veil, Troy, NY

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Let the Great World Spin by Colum McCann. A somewhat allegorical story of the disparate but ultimately linked lives of several people in New York City in the 1970s, woven around the tightrope walk between the then-unfinished twin towers of the World Trade Center. And The Clarks of Cooperstown by Nicholas Weber. The story of the Singer sewing machine fortune, how it was made, the philanthropy that it enabled and the family rifts that it created. Much about art appreciation and of course the establishment of the Clark in Williamstown, MA. Confidently recommend both! — Dennis Fitzgerald ‘61, Loudonville, NY

I’m currently reading Matterhorn: A Novel of the Vietnam War by Karl Marlantes on my Kindle. This story of a company of Marines and their newbie lieutenant is powerful, gripping, and, at times, disturbing. I find that I have to put it down for a couple of days occasionally in order to process and come to grips with what I have read. Marlantes manages to insert the reader into the jungles, monsoons, and misery in an almost visceral fashion and exposes the complexity of the marines’ character, both the good and the bad, in a manner that draws the reader into the ranks. Reading this book has further increased my deep appreciation for the men and women who literally fight our battles, while also increasing my distrust and skepticism of how and why we fight these battles. Although set during the Vietnam War, I think it is a tale for our times.

I have also recently read, and highly recommend, both Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen by Christopher McDougall and Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption by Laura Hillenbrand. Born to Run is an entertaining and interesting account of why humans can run long distances set into the backdrop of the Tarahumara Indian tribe in Mexico’s Copper Canyon and colored by an intriguing cast of characters, and I do mean characters. Unbroken is the fascinating biography of Louis Zamperini, a 1930’s track star who became a POW in World War II, narrated masterfully by Hillenbrand, the best-selling author of Seabiscuit. Although very different, both of these titles are some of the best non-fiction I have enjoyed in recent years. — Jeff Miner ‘78, Troy, NY

I have recently read My Name is Mary Sutter: A Novel by Robin Oliveira. It is an interesting story about a young midwife who desperately wants to become a surgeon. The time period for the book is during the Civil War, a time when women were not admitted into medical schools. Mary is headstrong and determined and faces difficult challenges of her medical career desires and the prejudices against her and family needs. Mary Sutter is from Albany, NY which added to my interest because of the familiar references to this area. — Ruth Gallagher, Loudonville, NY

Friends of the Folsom Library covered half the cost of the first 100 softcover editions of prize-winning fiction writer Susan Choi’s books sold in the campus bookstore this spring. Choi was on campus Thursday, April 14, for a reading and to award prizes at the 70th McKinney Writing Contest, which was held in the auditorium in the Biotechnology Interdisciplinary Studies Building.

Choi is the winner of the Asian-American Literary Award for the novel the Foreign Student (1999), Pulitzer prize finalist for American Woman (2003), and author of the novel A Person of Interest (2008).
We have a beautiful new chess table, pieces, chess clock and two Institute captain chairs in the Class of ‘96 Reading Room. The table was made and shipped from Poland, and the pieces were made in Spain.

According to Director Bob Mayo, “This is another small experiment to enhance Folsom ‘Library as Place.’ I believe we have achieved success in this regard with the opening of study rooms to general use (more will be added next semester), and the addition of historical prints throughout the library.” Bob welcomes other ideas on ways to promote “Library as Place” at relatively low cost.

A “magnetic poetry board” was installed in the Folsom Library this winter to encourage users to “FREE YOUR INNER POET.” Located in the Class of ‘96 Reading Room, it affords students an opportunity to take a break from studying for some creative play. The magnetized words can be rearranged to craft some amusing, one-of-a-kind poems. Below are some of the imaginative verses library users have come up with recently.

Emily Lambert ‘14, Biomedical Engineering, tries her hand at composing a poem.

Magnetic Poetry Board Entices Would-Be Poets

Aaron Valentine ‘14, Mechanical Engineering, and Erin Gilbert ‘14, Bioinformatics, enjoy a challenging game of chess.
Under the leadership of Friends’ Board member and Assistant Dean of Students Cynthia Smith, the Community Advocates sponsored a project to create and hang “The Peace Crane” on the bottom floor of Folsom Library during Human Rights Week. Members of the Rensselaer community worked together throughout Human Rights Week to make 1,000 origami paper cranes, which were woven together to make one large crane. Designed by Steven Egwele ‘10 Architecture and installed by fellow Architecture students Jeffrey Bedard ‘11 and Ashlee Giacalone ‘11, the sculpture measures 8 feet wide by 3 feet deep by 5 feet tall.

This was inspired by the story “Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes,” the account of a young girl who died ten years after the bombing at Hiroshima as a result of developing leukemia from the radiation fallout. She inspired her classmates in her attempt to fold 1,000 origami paper cranes, symbolizing her hope for peace. After her death, her classmates started a national campaign in her memory, and the tradition of making paper cranes for peace continues around the world.

According to Smith, “There are so many things that we love about this project, including the fact that it is very participatory.” Members of the Community taught anyone who was interested how to make an origami paper crane, and their work became part of the project.

This is the Community Advocate’s fifth installation of “The Peace Crane” in the Troy area. The other four have been displayed at the Ark Community Charter School, The Children’s Museum of Science and Technology, the Griswold Heights Community Center, and Rensselaer’s Chapel and Cultural Center.

Although the installation was initially planned as a temporary one for the library – it would be nice if it hung around for awhile. Smith said the group is “hoping it doesn’t migrate, and stays in the library forever! Of all the installations, this by far is my absolute favorite. I think this is because it’s on campus—and that it has such a magnificent nesting place.”
Board Chair Ruth Gallagher passed the gavel to Chair Elect Ray Lutzky ‘02 at the April 20th meeting. Gallagher, who served as Chair for two years, is pleased that during her term, she “worked with and learned from an enthusiastic and imaginative Board. We sponsored three well-attended programs documenting interesting historical aspects of Rensselaer. Those programs helped me, and I hope others, appreciate one of the library's many fine resources—the Archives. I look forward to continuing my support of the Friends as the Past Chair board member.”

As the new Chair, Lutzky’s goals for the next two years are to “continue to partner closely with complementary organizations on campus (for example, the Rensselaer Alumni Association, the McKinney Contest, etc.) and hopefully solicit more graduate student involvement/feedback in the investments made by the Friends, as they are some of our ‘power users’ of the library.”

Lutzky just completed a term as president of the Hudson Mohawk Chapter of the Rensselaer Alumni Association and is currently a Ph.D. student in Communication and Rhetoric. He anticipates completing his doctorate in 2013. He graduated from Rensselaer in 2002 with a degree in electronic media, arts and communication and received an M.S. in 2003 from the Newhouse School at Syracuse University.

Directors who completed their terms in April are Peter Collopy ‘71, Marion Roach Smith, and Grand Marshall Ben Hunt, who is graduating in May with an M.S. in Economics and a B.S. in Science and Technology Studies. He’ll be heading back to Berkeley, California, while looking for work. A big thank you to all three retiring Board members for their contributions!

The following three new Directors have been appointed to serve on the Board. We are fortunate to have these folks join the Board.

Carlos Godoy, Ph.D., Esq. (Chair Elect)

Professor Godoy joined the Department of Language, Literature and Communication in 2007, completing his doctoral work at the University of Southern California. His research focuses on health communications and behavior-changing media, particularly with respect to disease prevention through interactive simulations. His work has been featured by the National Institute of Health and the prestigious Institute of Medicine. Prior to his academic career, Professor Godoy practiced law in California. He holds a law degree from UC Berkeley.

Barbara Lewis, Ph.D. (Director)

Dr. Lewis is Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Language, Literature, and Communication and is also Director of the Center for Communication Practices, housed in the Folsom Library, and Co-Coordinator of Rensselaer's Communication Intensive Requirement. Professor Lewis’ teaching interests center on composition studies, communication practices in engineering and other technical disciplines, and writing center theory and practice. She is involved in a number of on-campus activities, including the McKinney Contest and the Graduate School's Dissertation Bootcamp. She received a Ph.D. in 1999 from Rensselaer, an M.A. from Syracuse University in English Literature, and did her undergraduate work at The College of Saint Rose.

Chaz Goodwine (Student Director)

Chaz Goodwine hails from Livingston, Montana, and is a third-year co-terminal student earning a bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering and a Master's Degree in Systems Engineering and Technology Management. He has studied abroad through RPI's REACH program at the Technical University of Denmark and is planning on participating in RPI's International Scholars Program, allowing him to study in both Italy and China. Chaz is a brother of Sigma Chi Fraternity and also a member of the Order of Omega. He is on the executive committee of the Rensselaer Pride Alliance and works as a Student Ambassador under RPI Admissions. He sites reading as his favorite pastime and is greatly looking forward to working with the Friends of the Folsom Library.
Book Exchange

Folsom Library invites Friends to participate in the Take a Book—Leave a Book program. Outside the computer lab on the bottom floor of the library, you’ll find a “collection” of used books. Stop by and drop off a title or two and perhaps you’ll find a new favorite! Here are the guidelines.

Take a Book

Take a book from the shelf you are interested in reading. Keep it if you would like, or put it back on the shelf to share with others.

Leave a Book

Place a book that you have read on the shelf to share with others. You may even include a note with a short review of why you enjoyed the book. Please donate books that are either popular fiction or non-fiction. They can be either hardback or paperback, but they must be in good, clean condition. Since space is limited, we can’t accept large donations; those would be more appropriate for a library planning on holding a used book sale.

“ ‘I must say I find television very educational. The minute somebody turns it on, I go to the library and read a good book. ‘”

Groucho Marx

Friends of Folsom Library - 2011 Membership Year

The Friends of the Folsom Library is an active service organization comprised of Rensselaer faculty, staff, alumni, retirees, and interested community members dedicated to enriching the collections, services, and events provided at the Folsom Library.

Enjoy the summer!
Library Director Bob Mayo is pleased to report that Folsom Library attendance is up 12% this academic year to date compared to last year. "I attribute this to our "Library as Place" initiative (Open Study Rooms, historical prints, chess table, poetry board...), top-notch exhibits and good customer service." Kudos to the staff!

And that's not all that's up. Past Chair Ruth Gallagher is delighted to inform Friends that membership dollars have increased 15% over last year. Thank you, Friends!!!