

History: Lillesand House meets 'essential criteria' for center

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In September, VAHS members began "seriously investigating and planning" what it would take to renovate a small historic downtown Verona home on 103 E. Park Lane into a history center/house museum, president Jesse Charles wrote in an email to the Press.

The group has enlisted the help of an architect and other local experts for advice, and want to present what they've found and get feedback on fundraising ideas and "what functions a Verona history center should serve."

"Several of our officers have toured the building and believe this could be the location and house that would finally be our physical, permanent location for a display space," he said.

The proposal is already backed by some funding, Charles said, with an anonymous donor offering \$150,000 for the purchase of the building and naming rights, "once we raise everything else it will take to renovate and open it up." He said the group hopes to have blueprints and cost estimates in the next few months.

The home is the former residence of "Doc" Joel E. and Viola Lillesand, best known for running a longtime veterinary service out of this house from 1920 to around 1968. VAHS members are working with the owner, Lillesand's granddaughter, of whom is "very interested, along with Doc and Viola's other remaining descendants, in this becoming a home for our historical society and a local history museum," Charles added.

VAHS members have previously evaluated other sites as a possible history center based "essential criteria," of which Charles said the

If You Go

What: Verona Area Historical Society discussion on planning a history center

When: 10 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 9

Where: Verona Senior Center

Info: Email SaveVerona-History@gmail.com or visit veronahistory.com

Lillesand property satisfies all: centrally located downtown and walkable; zoned to allow a museum; provides links to Verona history; and smaller, maintainable size.

VAHS officials have toured the house with contractors and local renovation experts, met with the city inspector, consulted fundraisers, and have started working with an architect to scope out possibilities.

Charles said if the site passes the "investigation phase," the next step is a "massive effort" to raise funds to purchase and renovate the building. He said as the project moves along, it would need "lots of help" with everything from contacting potential donors to helping fix up the property.

Charles said the group would also investigate how much annual expenses would cost for the facility, as well as possible "recurring funding sources." He said due to the group's nonprofit status, it would not have to pay annual property taxes on the property.

September meeting — Dane County Asylum cemetery project

Sandy Evenson, who used to work in the building that

About the Lillesand House

The Lillesand House started off housing non-human tenants.

The home, located at 103 E. Park Lane, started off as a livery stable and was later retrofitted to be a home and veterinarian's office for Doc and Viola Lillesand, according to the Verona Area Historical Society.

Doc was a veterinarian for Verona and surrounding communities for more than 50 years, and additionally was one of the first volunteer fire department chiefs and the first Commander at a local Legion post. Viola was a teacher at McPherson School, a small rural Verona school close to Mount Vernon.

once housed the old Verona poor house and asylum, talked at the September VAHS meeting about saving and organizing a large collection of patient records left there.

Erected in 1854 with a capacity of 80 people, Verona's original "poor house" was located on the southwest corner of East Verona Avenue and Hwy. PB, where the Park and Ride is currently located. In 1882, the asylum was built across the street to the north.

The asylum initially had 101 beds and separated the mentally ill from the poor house population. Over time several additions were built and by 1964, its population grew to a peak of 430. The 1970s saw the phasing out of many units, though, and sections of the buildings were chipped away over the next several decades.

In 2000, Evenson started at the hospital as a part-time seamstress working at nights, repairing residents' clothing and sewing curtains.

She later worked as a medical records secretary, and through an interest in genealogy, came across a court document on her great-great-grandmother, who was institutionalized in the asylum because her husband declared her insane, which at the time it was legal to do without

proof.

"The juxtaposition of Sandy's job at Badger Prairie Healthcare Center here in Verona and the finding of this ancestor's fate made her realize the importance of the detailed ledgers and listings of a century of residents and patients," Charles wrote in the VAHS October newsletter.

Soon, Evenson became intrigued by the old asylum part of the building; by then unused and blocked off, and set to be soon demolished. Walking around the area with a long-tenured colleague one day, she was shown a damp basement room containing long-forgotten patient records and personal possessions dating back to 1882.

She got permission to remove the documents, and started to organize the material, and would soon use the information to help answer questions from people seeking information on relatives that might have been patients there. All of the documents were turned over to the Wisconsin Historical Society.

"Sandy is to be commended for her lone role in saving such an invaluable piece of history," Charles said.

Email *Unified Newspaper* Group reporter Scott DeLaruelle at scott.delaruelle@wcinet.com.

Verona Area School District

'Helping Hands' runs through Nov. 22

Annual district program teams up to help area families

NEAL PATTEN
Unified Newspaper Group

The Verona Area School District is once again co-organizing the annual Helping Hands holiday gift drive program.

As in past years, the program will help local families in need with holiday gifts. Social Workers from the VASD team up with the local FFA, Dane County Joining Forces for Families and the Badger Prairie Needs Network to offer the annual program.

Now through Friday, Nov. 22, district residents with children up to age 18 who attend or will attend VASD schools in need of assistance may register to be recipients. There is an online Google form they can complete, or they may contact a school social worker or a translator to register.

Program organizer Stacie Wagner encourages the use of the form.

"We've been using the Google Form for the past five years or so and it has worked really well," she said. "Our school social workers have high student ratios, so the form has allowed us to retain this program while not exacerbating our workload."

As families register to be recipients, the VAHS FFA Club creates paper mittens with specific requests based on their needs. The school social workers then post the mittens, creating displays in their schools.

These 'helping hand' mittens will be posted at each school in the entry area or office, starting Monday, Nov. 11. Donors may pick up a mitten from any VASD school and purchase an age appropriate gift.

Anyone in the area is welcome to donate gifts, gift cards, or cash to the

program, though Wagner said clothing or used items should not be donated. No single gift should exceed \$30 and all donations should be left unwrapped.

She said the program often receives lots of items for children ages up to 10 years, but is typically low on items for 'twens' and teens.

People and organizations can donate gifts at any time between Friday, Nov. 11 and Monday, Dec. 9, and the items will go to children in the Verona Area School District who are in need this holiday season.

The VAHS FFA Club collects the gifts, sorts them by ages and assigns them to families who requested assistance (each is assigned a number to maintain confidentiality), and organizes the bags of gifts for pick up. Joining Forces for Families and the Badger Prairie Needs Network connect VASD families to this resource and assist families as needed with registration.

Wagner said she's proud of continued success of Helping Hand.

"We spend so much of our time helping families through very stressful situations to overcome barriers, that it is nice to take a moment for something lighter that brightens the spirits of so many children during the winters," she said.

If you are in need of holiday gift assistance, complete the online Google form and submit by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 22. If a family is unable to complete the electronic form, they may contact any of the school district's social workers or interpreters.

If you are interested in donating toys and gifts, bring them to any school in the Verona district prior to the end of the school day on Monday, Dec. 9.

Neal Patten can be contacted at neal.patten@wcinet.com.

VACT to perform 'We are Monsters' Nov. 14-16

'Frozen, Jr.' show sold out

You can still buy tickets for one of the two Verona Area Community Theater's fall youth productions.

The show for students in second through fourth grade will be performing the show "We are Monsters" from Nov. 14-16. The shows on Nov. 14 and Nov. 15 will take place at 6 p.m., and two shows will be held at noon and 3:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 16.

General admission to each show costs \$4.50.

There are two casts for the shows, each of which will perform twice throughout the show's run.

The musical follows a group of human kids

who find themselves in a monster cabaret and end up meeting an interesting cast of characters. Through their adventures, the children meet vegetarian vampires and rock 'n roll werewolves, learning that there's more to the monsters than one might believe.

The other youth show, "Frozen, Jr." is sold out because the production company's license agreements only allow a certain number of attendees.

For more information, or to see which cast is performing in each show, visit vact.org.

Email reporter Kimberly Wethal at kimberly_wethal@wcinet.com and follow her on Twitter at [kimberly_wethal](https://twitter.com/kimberly_wethal).

If You Go

What: "We are Monsters" play

When: 6 p.m. Nov. 14-15; noon and 3:30 p.m. Nov. 16

Where: Verona Area High School Performing Arts Center, 300 Richard St.

Cost: \$4.50 general admission

Info: vact.org

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- ★ Bakery & Oplatek
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- ★ Szopka
- ★ Polish Craft Demonstrations
- ★ Polish History & Genealogy



Merry Christmas
Wesołych Świąt

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