

## **The Dickens Crier EXTRA!**

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### **DICKENS VICTORIAN VILLAGE CREATED WITH COMMUNITY VISION AND VOLUNTEERS**

By Toni Kellar

Special to *The Dickens Crier*

CAMBRIDGE, OH – The Dickens Victorian Village, an innovative public art exhibition in historic downtown Cambridge, Ohio, began with one man's vision. In the span of one year, it has developed and grown into a full community-wide success story.

The project is the brainchild of local businessman and artist Bob Ley, who envisioned the concept, created sketches of each scene, and organized the beginnings of the Dickens Victorian Village committee.

"The idea for Dickens Victorian Village was inspired by my wife, Sue, during a discussion about what we could do to bring visitors to our downtown," said Ley. "She noted our Victorian architecture, street lamps, benches and our English heritage."

From, there, Ley designed a mannequin that could be posed, and after leafing through his wife's extensive collection of Dickens books, he drew pictures of potential scenes.

"Of course, the idea would take money and mannequins," noted Ley. "I presented the idea to the Cambridge Main Street group, and they adopted it with an enthusiasm I have never seen in a business meeting!"

Cambridge Mayor Sam Salupo offered use of the city armory in which to start building mannequins, and provided a \$2,000 Urban Development Action Grant as seed money.

Community volunteers with a variety of necessary talents and excitement began to appear, and the Dickens Victorian Village committee was formed.

"Community projects take the commitment of many volunteers," noted Jonett Haberfield, Dickens Victorian Village committee co-chair.

"Bob handpicked a strong group of sub-committee chairs with specific talents, leadership abilities and the experience to get things done! He had the vision and found the people within our community that could make his dream a reality," she said.

"Early on, this group sat down and committed to a long range plan, a vision and a mission for what we wanted this project to become and we have gradually checked off the accomplishments with the final rewards of our work yet to be seen," said Haberfield.

"We are blessed to have outstanding, spirited, and aggressive leaders such as Bob Ley and Jonett Haberfield of the Victorian Village project," said Cambridge Mayor Sam Salupo. "This terrific program and all of its volunteers make me proud to live and work in Cambridge, Ohio."

As the project's plan became more widely known through the local media, sponsorships from individuals, businesses, and organizations provided continued financial support for national marketing, materials and supplies.

Early support from the Ohio Arts Council, Cambridge/Guernsey County Visitors & Convention Bureau, Guernsey County Historical Society, Mid-East Career & Technology Center, Cambridge Kiwanis Club, and businessman Grant Hafley gave the committee the necessary resources to achieve success in developing the project to what it is now.

Of particular note is the contribution from members of the Eastern Ohio Art Guild. Each of the 106 mannequin heads and faces have been uniquely and artfully sculpted and painted by members of the guild, giving each a unique character.

"We had a great time working on this project with so many different people and groups in the community," said Martha

Jamail of the Eastern Ohio Art Guild. "It has been an awesome experience seeing this project come together."

"The expressions are priceless!" noted Ley.

Countless individuals donated period clothing and accessories for the mannequins, the frameworks of which were built by students at the Mid-East Career & Technology Center's Buffalo Campus.

Local volunteers spent every Tuesday evening for 11 months building and clothing the mannequins.

"We feel the project will be an attraction for all ages," said Ley. "It will provide an interesting and educational look into another era, and it will be easy to visit."

"The excitement of a new attraction has also caught on with potential visitors to our area," said Debbie Robinson, director of the Cambridge/Guernsey County Visitors & Convention Bureau. "For example, we have many motor coach tours from several states coming to enjoy the Dickens display as well as related attractions and events in our area during the holiday season."

The display consists of 40 vignettes made of the 106 lifelike mannequins capturing classic scenes from Victorian society. They are set at each historic lamppost and bench between 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets on Wheeling Avenue, which is also the National Road / Route 40 and features an outstanding streetscape of original buildings from the 1800s.

"Downtown Cambridge is an Historic District and we are proud of its history and unique architecture," said Linda Adkins, president of the Guernsey County Historical Society.

"It makes a great backdrop for the Dickens scenes and we hope visitors will enjoy the atmosphere and sense of returning to a bygone era. The Dickens Victorian Village brings an exciting new aspect of heritage to our Christmas celebration," she added.

Visitors are invited to stroll amid the scenes set against the striking architecture and eclectic shops and eateries that make Cambridge a unique and well-preserved destination.

A self-guided walking tour brochure is available at downtown shops and area hotels.

The displays include engaging depictions of classic Dickens-era scenes and figures such as Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim, the town crier, groups of carolers that actually "sing" classic carols, a bucket brigade, lamplighters, school children, street peddlers, and Father Christmas, all posed in active scenes that appear frozen in time.

The Dickens Victorian Village will be on display daily from Nov. 25, 2006, through Jan. 15, 2007. Visitors are welcome to visit the exhibition any time of the day.

Other components of the seasonal experience include entertainment, special events at local attractions, peddler weekends, make-and-take projects at downtown shops, and specially created souvenir merchandise available at select locations.

A full schedule of events can be found at [www.dickensvictorianvillage.com](http://www.dickensvictorianvillage.com), or by contacting the Cambridge/Guernsey County Visitors & Convention Bureau at 740-432-2022.

The mission of the Dickens Victorian Village is to create a destination with an old world atmosphere that preserves history, creates memories, and develops family traditions.

According to Ley, future plans include the lighting of many of Wheeling Avenue's second story windows to show scenes of home life from 1850s London, such as families decorating the tree, opening gifts, Christmas dinner, and visits from Father Christmas.

"And maybe a few ghosts from Christmas Past!" said Ley.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

For more information about the Dickens Victorian Village display, including a listing of related Schedule of Events, please see [www.dickensvictorianvillage.com](http://www.dickensvictorianvillage.com).

For more information about the project and group tours, please contact committee co-chair Jonett Haberfield at 740-432-8789 or [info@dickensvictorianvillage.com](mailto:info@dickensvictorianvillage.com).

For general information about Cambridge and Guernsey County, Ohio, and details about the Schedule of Events, contact the Cambridge/Guernsey County Visitors & Convention Bureau at 627 Wheeling Ave., Suite 200, Cambridge, OH 43725, 740-432-2022, or [www.visitguernseycounty.com](http://www.visitguernseycounty.com).