

Ulster County is a World Class Destination

Come See Us This Summer

As the long days of summer are now upon us and the Mid-Hudson Region is finally opening up, many of the top tourism properties in the northeast, located right here in Ulster County, are rolling out the red carpet.

The Chamber will feature several of those properties at its next Virtual Breakfast Meeting, entitled "Ulster County: A World Class Vacation Destination." The program will air on Facebook Live and Livestream from 9:00-10:00 a.m., July 22 from the Seven21 Media Center.

Sawyer Savings Bank is the sponsor. Ellenbogen Creative Media is the Underwriting Sponsor.

The breakfast will feature Tom Smiley of the Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, Steve Turk from the Rocking Horse Ranch in New Paltz, Tamara Murray of the Emerson Resort & Spa in Mount Tremper, Mike Offner of the Pine Ridge Dude Ranch in Kerhonkson and James Brechbiel of Honor's Haven Retreat & Conference Center in Ellenville.

Smiley said he will voiceover a video showing some of the picturesque elements of Mohonk Mountain House, as well as the "new reality" of guests social distancing and wearing face masks.

"Many people haven't actually been on the property, or if they have, not for a while," said Smiley, Mohonk's CEO.

and mountain tubing.

Trip Advisor has for two years named Rocking Horse No. 2 in the nation among family hotels and they were ranked as No. 10 in the world in 2018.

The Emerson Resort & Spa also has risen to meet the COVID-19 challenge. The stunning destination in Mount Tremper will be reopening on July 16.

"I'm planning on highlighting how our operations are changing to keep our guests and staff safe from COVID-19 exposure," Murray said. "We're also using it as an opportunity to showcase a little bit of the Emerson for people who have never been here before."

The Emerson features the newly renovated banquet venue known as The Catamount. Billed as a "hidden treasure" in the Catskills, the Emerson also offers spacious lodging and one of the region's most popular luxury spas, along with food, shopping and the World's Largest Kaleidoscope.

Even though the upscale getaway is again welcoming guests, Murray shared Smiley's concerns about the tourism industry.

"It's been devastating," she said. "It's devastating not just for hotels, but for anyone who's in the tourism industry, so if you're talking about activities, restaurants, anything like that, it'd been very, very difficult."

Murray, the Emerson's Director of Marketing and Sales, said the community has reached out to support the Emerson and that has been "extremely heartwarming." It's true when they said, "We're all in this together."

The Pine Ridge Dude Ranch in Kerhonkson will look different when it reopens the weekend of July 4, but there will be no shortage of fun.

Known for its scenic trails, horseback riding, all-inclusive meals and down-home hospitality, the Kerhonkson ranch is sold out based on available capacity.

"We're really excited to reopen, and our guests are really excited to be back," said co-owner Mike Offner.

Like other tourist spots in Ulster County, the western-style ranch has adapted to the new safety guidelines, including reduced occupancy, temperature checks, enhanced sanitation, mandatory face coverings and careful attention to social distancing, Offner said.

"We modified all our activities and entertainment to allow for social distancing and set up some new outdoor seating by the pond and lake, so people can enjoy lounging by the water. This is a big property, so we've set up plenty of spaced-out seating," he said.

VIRTUAL BREAKFAST Meeting

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Ulster County A World Class Vacation Destination

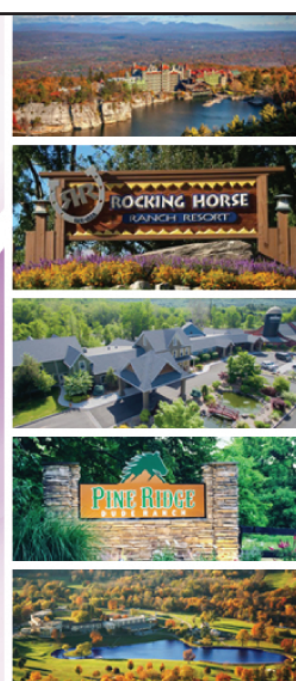
Mohonk Mountain House • Rocking Horse Ranch
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Honor's Haven Resort & Spa

Wednesday July 22, 2020

9:00 - 10:00 am

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Mohonk, a national historic landmark, was founded by Smiley's family in 1869. The Victorian castle features 40,000 acres of natural beauty and a world-class spa. The location is a huge contributor to Ulster County's roughly \$650-million annual tourism economy.

"Typically, resorts will contribute one to two times their revenues to the local community," Smiley said. "The majority of our guests come out of the tri-state area. The lion's share of the revenue we generate is brought in from outside the county."

However, 2020 has been a different story due to the COVID-19 shutdown. Mohonk closed on March 17 and reopened June 15 with 50 percent capacity.

"It's been devastating financially," Smiley said. "It's the biggest burden we've ever seen—certainly in recent history. Smiley anticipates business improving later in the year, but he doesn't expect getting back to a normal healthy tourism cycle for 18-24 months. He believes a full recovery won't happen for at least five years."

Rocking Horse Ranch in Highland also will be featured in the Chamber's Virtual Breakfast Meeting, showcasing the award-winning, all-inclusive family destination.

Owner Steve Turk said the 62-year-old ranch reopened in June.

"We are so happy to be back and offering our guests a refreshing getaway in the great outdoors," he said. "We've all been cooped up for so long, and we think the ranch will be therapeutic for families itching to have some fun in the great outdoors."

"We are following all the CDC guidelines for the safety of our guests, which is our top priority. The ranch is beautiful and we're looking forward to the rest of the season and helping with the comeback of our local tourist industry."

The family-owned resort situated on 500 acres not only offers 113 guest rooms and top-shelf horseback riding but water sports like kayaking, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, a rock-climbing tower

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Lending A Hand

Chamber Members Give Back During COVID-19

If there's one thing we've learned during COVID-19, Ulster County is blessed with an abundance of business owners who are not only concerned about the welfare of their community but were prepared to do something about it.

Answering the call came naturally for restaurateurs like Mike Cioffi, owner of the Phoenicia Diner and Dixon Roadside in Woodstock.

As non-essential businesses began grinding to a halt in March, Cioffi already was sending meals to those in need. His role expanded when Gov. Cuomo put New York "on pause."

Cioffi heard about Project Resilience and quickly hooked up with the feeding program in both Shandaken and Kingston.

Then came opportunities to feed frontline workers at Margaretville Hospital and residents at Mountainside Residential Care Center in Delaware County.

Courtney Malsatzki, general manager of Cioffi's restaurants, said giving comes naturally to her boss.

"It's a no-brainer for Mike. He's active in all facets of the community," she said. "I've run many restaurants, and I've never met anyone who donates so much to the community. For him, it was about keeping the community spirit alive."

Even now as coronavirus cases are dropping in Ulster County and things are loosening up, Cioffi continues his mission by distributing gift cards donated on social media to those in need.

"I think anybody who is in the service industry does it because they love feeding people," Malsatzki said. "It's what makes us happy—feeding people and making sure they feel comfortable, especially in such a weird and stressful time."

Someone else who soldiered on during COVID-19 was Tom Struzzi, the owner of Diamond Mills Hotel & Tavern in Saugerties.

Brianne Ebel, the company's Director of Sales, said while Diamond Mills was closed during the shutdown, Struzzi donated food to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Ulster County; Family of Woodstock; frontline workers at HealthAlliance of the Hudson Valley; and needy seniors and families in the village of Saugerties.

"We did both lunches and dinners-to-go," Ebel said. "We did individually packaged dinners and family-style dinners for HealthAlliance. There were a lot of moving parts."

Diamond Mills donated about 2,500 to 3,000 meals a week. The busiest, by far, was when 5,550 meals went out the door. The Struzzi family worked alongside the kitchen staff at Diamond Mills.

"Tom felt it was the right thing to do and his opportunity to do something during a time of need," Ebel said. "He's made that statement quite a few times. It kept his family busy, and it was something that we're able to do."

Bob Siracusano believes that face coverings will be a hot commodity for the foreseeable future. That's why the owner of Sawyer Motors donated more than 13,000 masks to the public, as well as banks, fire departments, restaurants, charities, nursing homes and agencies that serve the disabled.

In late April alone, he and a band of volunteers gave away about 4,000 disposable masks, along with toilet paper, at a drive-through at Cantine Veterans Memorial Complex, where the line of cars stretched around the venue over a two-hour period.

The whole mask project cost \$12,500 and was financed through Siracusano's Sawyer Motors Automotive Foundation and individual

donations. The masks became even more important when Gov. Cuomo signed an executive order in late May allowing businesses to refuse service to anyone not wearing a mask.

Like many Chamber members, Siracusano identified needs during the pandemic and found creative ways to meet them.

It started out with small gestures like purchasing restaurant gift cards for families he knew had suffered job losses. He then moved to buying 80 gallons of ice cream from Stewart's Shops to treat area nursing home residents, who could no longer have visitors.

As the virus continued spreading in Ulster County, Siracusano latched on to the medical reports recommending face coverings to prevent the spread. That's when the mask idea hit him.

"Taking care of people is important to me," he said. "It's what I've learned to do, especially in times of need. Those of us in a position to help others have an obligation to step up and answer the call."

Kevin Diers, owner of Foxhall Deli in Kingston, also found ways to keep busy. He did his part nourishing first responders and frontline workers, including personnel at the COVID-19 testing site on Grand Street in Midtown.

"We also made sure to take care of the 'last responders,' the funeral directors and their staff in Kingston who also were stressed," Diers said.

In addition to participating in Project Resilience at the height of the coronavirus crisis, Diers distributed more than 350 lunchboxes filled with Boar's Head meat products, salads and pickles, so that frontline workers could make their own sandwiches.

Opportunities later opened up for him to provide food through Meal Train Plus for HealthAlliance frontline personnel.

"They were so stressed-out, and we wanted to make sure they were well-fed," he said. "What they were doing was so important. The last thing they needed to worry about was food."

Diers, who had worries of his own, said giving was a way to turn it around and focus on others.

"Very early on, business was down 60 to 70 percent," he said. "Sometimes, I felt like George Bailey in 'It's a Wonderful Life,' where he found a dollar bill at the end of the day and everybody celebrated. I said, 'We have money left. We can open the doors tomorrow.'"

Despite the uncertainty, Diers said he will always remember this time as an opportunity for service.

"It's always been in my heart to help the community. You do it because you want to do it, and when you lay your head on the pillow at night, you feel good about yourself and the people around you."

Diers reminded his fellow business owners to carry on the spirit of generosity once life returns to normal.

"Please remember the same people you helped during COVID-19. Do it once a month. Send a meal to the nurses in the emergency room or the people at the fire department just to say thank you."

The owners of Herzog's Home and Paint Center in Kingston also worked behind the scenes to brighten lives.

As a way to thank their essential workers and support local restaurants, they treated their staff to lunch many times during the pandemic.



Mike Cioffi



Tom Struzzi



Bob Siracusano



Kevin Diers

said Julie Jordan, the marketing and advertising manager.

The owners also found other ways to help such as donating personal protective equipment to fellow Kingston Plaza tenants like HealthQuest and Kingston Physical Therapy and delivering lunch to essential workers at the plaza, including Hannaford.

"Herzog's recognized the early demand for masks and purchased several hundred from local seamstresses," Jordan said. "One-hundred percent of the profits from the sale of the masks was presented to People's Place as a donation to support the overwhelming needs in our community."

Ulster County Regional Chamber of Commerce

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