

Cultural Center aptly named *Plethora of events, activities for winter months*

By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli

Sometimes people complain that there is "nothing to do" in NEPA. Not true! Peruse the local newspaper and you'll find it impossible to take advantage of all the cultural and educational opportunities that abound every day and/or evening. And the weekends compel especially difficult choices because one person cannot be in two places at a time!

Each month, at the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Roundtable, a dozen or more painters gather to keep each other abreast of what is going on at their respective organizations or sites. It is exciting to hear that, despite tough financial times, each entity continues to operate outstanding programs and events, always offering new and innovative projects and ideas to enlighten and enrich the public.

This year, the Scranton Cultural Center at the Masonic Temple is commemorating its 80th year in operation. The SCC was the "center" of cultural life for many of us who grew up in this area. It was the place where we first heard a classical concert or first saw a live stage play. It also hosted social events for various age groups, although never with the élan or variety that it currently welcomes.

This magnificent edifice, now well known as the "Cultural Center," is one of the most glorious pieces of architecture in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Originally constructed as the Masonic Temple and Scottish Rite Cathedral, the building is a significant example of the work of Raymond M. Hood (1881-1934), a prominent architect of the 1920s and early 1930s. Within the constellation of wonderful buildings in Scranton, the Scranton Cultural Center is a unique example of Neo-Gothic architecture.

LHVA, the Lackawanna Historical Society and the Lackawanna County Convention and Visitors Bureau collaborated last year to produce a wonderful little booklet that offers an annotated Architectural Walking Tour of Scranton. It is available at the offices of LHVA, LHS or the Visitors Center on Montage Mountain. Visitors often express pleasant surprise when they discover the quality and quantity of local buildings of architectural significance.

Today the Scranton Cultural Center at the Masonic Temple operates the facility as a regional performance and cultural hub. The center serves as the residence for national tours of Broadway musicals and concerts and hosts many of the area's top regional dance companies. It also has been faithful to its earliest purposes by

continuing to serve as the center of Masonic activity in the region.

In celebration of its anniversary, the center will host a full year of related events. Themed workshops and tours, as well as other special events, will be conducted throughout the year. Mark your calendars for an open house birthday party on May 19!

In January alone, the center and its sponsoring partners will offer: Book Making Workshops starting Jan. 5 and continuing every Tuesday through Feb. 9; The View with a Scranton Attitude - Let's Hear it from the Girls - sponsored by Entercom Communications on Jan. 22; Allied Services' Up and Coming Comedy Series - Jan. 23; Dinner at the Theatre before Broadway Theatre League of NEPA's Hairspray - Jan. 25-26; Broadway Theatre League of NEPA's Hairspray - Jan. 25-26.

And February will bring: WNEP TV Thursday Talks! - Beauty- Feb. 4; *Citizens' Voice* Children's Series - Max and Ruby - Feb. 13; NEPA Philharmonic: Pops 2 - Celebrate America - Feb. 13; Love Me Tender: From Elvis with Love and Dinner at the Theatre - Feb. 20.

Tours of the Scranton Cultural Center are now available on Saturdays at 1 p.m. The tours focus on specific key elements of the Masonic Temple. Designed for children and adults of all ages, the tours explain the uses of the building today, and it also teaches about the architecture of the building and the history of the Masons. The tour guide leads the groups through many levels and rooms, including Shopland Hall, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Theatre, the grand ballroom, the Governor Robert P. Casey Library, the Masonic lodges and other unique spaces that are not generally open to the public. This is a great new opportunity when visitors come to town!

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