

AusSable Forks, opening a door to the future



On the Scene

**Naj
Wikoff**

The other day my cousin Frissie was waxing poetic about going to the movies in Ausable Forks. On Dec. 29 yet another reason for visiting the Forks was unveiled at a packed open house for the Tahawus Lodge Center, the former Mason's Lodge 790, which is to become a community cultural center.

The cultural center has a ways to go before it is ready to host events. There is no heat or water, and much insulation, renovation and rewiring remains to be done. However it was quite clear that Craig Brashear and Rebecca Kelly's vision for the once forlorn edifice has a lot of promise. Massive amounts of junk, crud and mud have been hauled out, key structural work has repaired and the lower entry has been fixed so that now is apparent what a dazzling asset it would be to the town center.

Brashear and Kelly are dance artists from New York City who have a home on the Silver Lake Road and have been performing and teaching at the Lake Placid Center for the Arts and other Adirondack venues for many years. They run the Rebecca Kelly Ballet, a performing contemporary chamber ballet company, Onstage, a training and performing program for rural youth, **Kids Co-Motion**, an urban youth program, and now the Tahawus Lodge Center.

"Wait to you see the views," said Rebecca as she dragged me upstairs. "They

are fabulous. And look at the wooden floors. They were hidden under asbestos tiles. And back here we are going to create a little pied-a-terre for visiting artists. They will have a great view of the confluence of the East and West Branches of the Ausable River."

I gazed out. The views were a wow, those up and down Main Street and that of the rivers and hills beyond. The whole community was laid out beneath us and twinkled in the gathering dusk.

"Here is our studio," said Rebecca as we now moved on up to the third floor. "What do you think? Doesn't this space beg to be a studio? Look at the view up Main Street. Isn't it a classic? We had to rip out the rug that had 40 years of pigeon droppings on it. It is a wonderful space with lovely light breezes in the summer."

"I have been wanting to come over and see it for a long time," said Donna Ignatuk of Jay. "I am so excited. The space is beautiful. It is better than I expected."

"Well, you'll be the first to know when the ice jams go out," said Assemblywoman Janet Duprey looking out the window. "This view is simply amazing."

"This cultural center is the latest of a growing number of examples of small projects in the North Country that will have a huge impact on communities, projects where people are not sitting around waiting for some large government grant to make things happen," said Plattsburgh-North Country Chamber of Commerce president Garry Douglass. "Just like the

people in Tupper Lake creating a ski center, if we waited for others we would never get anything done. People are just getting down and doing it."

"We had hoped to have had this open house in September, but sometimes timelines get stretched out," said Craig Brashear.

"The important thing is you have kept at it," said Douglass. "You are not giving up."

"We are very dependent on tourism here in the North Country," said Duprey. "These are the types of things we need to do. I am just so fascinated by the view. This is such a North Country town. It will be wonderful to have this cultural center here in the hub of the village."

"The town is waking up from a Rip Van Winkle nap," said Kelly. "The strength of this community is how people come together. It has been just amazing."

"It's exciting," said Duprey. "We talk about rebirth of a small community and this is a perfect example of it that. I've never been in this building before. It is beautiful. It represents a terrific future for AuSable Forks."

"I am so pleased that Tahawus Lodge is in these people's hands," said Jessica Mulvey. "My father took his 3rd Degree here, a significant step for a Mason. Three generations of Mulvey men have been Masons here. I am so grateful that this building has been saved and will be used as a community center. I am very glad to see this rejuvenation in the village. The cultural life has been lacking in the last two generations and I hope this project

will bring it back to the level that my parents and grandparents remember. My son Anson may not be taking his 3rd Degree here but he may get a chance to perform here one day thanks to the efforts of Rebecca and Craig."

"I was moved to tears when I first saw the plans," said Jay Town Historian Sharon Hewston. "I am a sixth generation resident. I was so excited when I walked in. This used to be a post office over here. I love that they are trying to maintain and hang on to the history of this place, such as with various architectural details. There are a lot of memories here. I feel that all the spirits of this building can feel this going on."

"We renovated the front," said contractor Shawn Casey. "It's nice to see the progress. There is still a ways to go, but I think now people can see that it can be fixed up. I was surprised by the turnout. I think people are very interested and very excited."

"This is a wonderful project," said Audrey Challoner-Desjardins. "This is the greatest thing that ever happened to Ausable Forks. Of course it will take a lot of funding and that is always difficult, but look how far they have come."

"If you don't aim high you will never get there," said Dr. George Najim.

To learn more and how to get involved, visit www.rebeccakellyballet.com/Pages/Tahawus%20home.html.



Sharon Hewston, Rebecca Kelly and Donna Ignatuk



Shawn Casey mixes with the crowd



Craig Brashear, Dr. George Najim and Audrey Challoner-Desjardins