

Palace to screen film about toxic creek

*Documentary attracted
full house at premiere*

By THOMAS J. PROHASKA

NEWS NIAGARA REPORTER

LOCKPORT – The documentary film “This Creek,” telling the story of the pollution of Eighteen Mile Creek and the people whose lives were altered by it, will be shown again in Lockport, this time in a bigger venue.

Filmmaker Tanya Stadelmann will show the movie to the public in the Historic Palace Theatre, 2 East Ave., at 7 p.m. May 24. The showing is free.

The film premiered 13 months ago at the Kenan Center’s Taylor Theatre, a showing that drew a packed house in a small space, with viewers sitting in the aisles. The Palace is much larger, giving more people the opportunity to see the movie.

“It’s really because people asked me for another screening and I couldn’t do it (last year), so I’m fulfilling that promise,” Stadelmann said.

The 33-minute movie is still a work in progress. Stadelmann said the version to be shown in the Palace is almost identical to the cut shown last year, but another reason for her visit to Lockport is to gather more material.

There will be a camera rolling in the Palace during a question-and-answer session after the screening, “documenting people’s responses,” Stadelmann said.

Eighteen Mile Creek is a federal Superfund site, primarily because of toxic pollution from the former Flintkote plant on Mill Street, a building materials plant that was finally demolished last year after decades of foot-dragging by local officials. Nothing major happened to clean it up until Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, during her time as a member of Congress in 2011-12, got the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to take action.

Hochul was prompted by Shirley A. Nicholas, a Mill Street resident who crusaded against the toxic site. She is featured in the movie, along with other Lockport residents, including former Flintkote workers.

Besides knocking the plant down, the EPA bought out five families who lived in homes on Water Street, across the creek from Flintkote. Their backyards were contaminated every time the creek rose. EPA spokesman Elias Rodriguez said

Filmmaker plans to take more footage

MOVIE • from NCI

the agency expects to issue a plan this year for dealing with contaminated sediments in the creek and on the Flintkote site, as well as three other locations nearby: White Transportation, Upson Park and the former United Paperboard plant. He said contamination on Water Street won’t be removed until the other sediment work begins, to keep the creek from recontaminating those lots.

Stadelmann said she’ll be down at the creek with her camera to take more footage of the partly remediated site. The Flintkote property is owned by Niagara County, which foreclosed on it in 1999 because of unpaid property taxes, but balked at the cost of cleaning up the site itself.

“It’s still problematic to wade in the water. You still can’t eat the fish,” Stadelmann said. “It still seems it’s not being acknowledged how toxic it is.”

Before the public has its chance to see the film again, it will be viewed by the 20 students in the college-level section of teacher Megan Hauser’s environmental science class at Lockport High School.

Hauser said she left her email address on a sign-in sheet at the Taylor Theatre screening of the movie, and Stadelmann contacted her.

Hauser said she’s taken her students to the creek as part of the course, but because of the fences and barriers, not to the toxic epicenter around Flintkote.

The entire creek, from Lockport to Lake Ontario at Olcott, is part of the Eighteen Mile Creek Superfund corridor, and Hauser said her students go out each fall to do a water sample exercise, and in the spring for a hands-on project.

Last fall’s samples were taken at the Lockport wastewater treatment plant and off Ide



Filmmaker Tanya Stadelmann visits Eighteen Mile Creek the subject of her documentary.



Shirley A. Nicholas prompted then-Congresswoman Kathy Hochul to spur the EPA to action on the creek’s pollution.

Road in Newfane. The spring projects in the corridor will include the planting of a river birch tree and a perennial garden at Fisherman’s Park in Burt, and another such garden, along with replacing an eastern redbud tree, at the Olcott Marina.

“We wanted to be more local, but we really can’t do anything in the city,” Hauser said. “We really are not going to be permitted anywhere between the canal and the wastewater treatment plant.”

The Palace screening will begin with a presentation by

Tammy M. Milillo, a chemistry professor from the University at Buffalo, who has been researching toxic sites in Western New York.

Stadelmann is interested in what the cleared site looks like. “I wonder if they’re going to have a memorial plaque, like at Love Canal, to remind people what happened there,” she said.

The movie was her thesis project for a master’s degree in fine arts at UB. It helped earn her a full-time position as a lecturer in film and media studies at the College of William & Mary in Virginia, along with a three-year fellowship to create a course on “communicating environmental science with documentary film.”

She showed the film to William & Mary faculty members, the Swiss-born Stadelmann screened it last October in Switzerland at a conference on long-term environmental conflicts.

email:
tprohaska@buffnews.com

May 15, 2016
Buffalo News