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Project puts Mystic history at fingertips of smartphone users

By Joe Wojtas

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Sean D. Elliot /The Day

Cathy Marco of the Mystic Historical Society demonstrates one of the Geohistory tags Friday in the window of Mystical Toys in Mystic. There are 12 such tags in the downtown Mystic area.

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Mystic - People who walk up to Mystical Toys in the downtown may now spot a small sign that shows a cartoon lobsterman in a yellow slicker holding a QR code.

If they have a smartphone with a QR code-reader app, they can scan the code and connect to a short YouTube video in which they will learn about the history of the fire-plagued property.

The sign is one of a dozen on the windows of downtown businesses, which people can now scan to learn about the history of the properties.

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GeoHistorian locations

Groton side:

- 1-17 W. Main St. (Gilbert Block)
- 2-6 W. Main St. (Mystic Drawbridge Ice Cream)
- 24 W. Main St. (Clad In)
- 28 W. Main St. (Tidal River Clothing)
- 36 to 44 W. Main St. (Tift Building)
- 46 W. Main St. (Bartleby's)

Stonington side:

- 4 E. Main St. (Mystical Toys)
- 2-4 Holmes St. (Puffins)
- 20 E. Main St. (Whalers Inn and George Mallory House)
- 21 E. Main St. (Asa Fish house)
- 22 E. Main St. (HJ Smith Plumbing)

To see all the films and learn more about the project, go to www.mystichistory.org.

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The Mystical Toys site once was home to a large meeting space called Washington Hall that burned down in 1885. It was rebuilt as an opera house, but that, too, burned down in 1900. In the 1920s, the Strand Theater and another storefront building were constructed there, with portions overhanging the adjacent Mystic River. In the 1950s, Noyes Dry Goods opened on the site, but in 1960, a fire destroyed the whole block. The dry goods shop later reopened and stayed in business until 1989. Ten years later, Mystical Toys opened.

The GeoHistorian project, a collaboration among Mystic River Historical Society, Mystic Middle and Stonington High schools and the Home Scholars of Mystic and Stonington, will be unveiled officially today at an 11 a.m. ceremony in Mystic River Park. A large banner announcing the project is now draped along the fence in front of the former Central Hall block.

"This project would never have been done without these kids," Cathy Marco of the historical society said as she demonstrated Friday how the QR code works.

The students researched the sites, found historical photos, wrote and narrated the script, integrated sound effects, and filmed and edited the clips using iMovie.

In celebration of its upcoming 40th anniversary, Marco enlisted the students to undertake the project.

Marco said she discovered the GeoHistorian Project after being asked to look into traditional plaques for historic buildings in the downtown. Created by two Kent State professors, Marco saw the project as a way not only to use technology to teach history to students, but also get them excited about the subject.

Marco said the groups came up with the idea for the cartoon lobsterman as they were looking for a way to draw people to the project.

She said the students chose the character from four designs created by her daughter Stefanie Marco of Kindspin Design of West Hartford. The other candidates were a lobsterman in a red slicker, a sailor and a Magellan-like explorer.

Marco said she has now been contacted by other groups looking to do similar projects in their communities.

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- 5%

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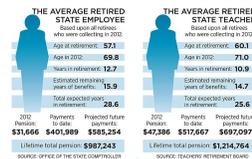
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