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Museum in Leominster a victim

Plastics Center & Museum closes; economic conditions are cited

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LEOMINSTER— The Pioneer Plastic City is no longer home to the National Plastics Center & Museum.

Various pieces of the collection at the museum are being shipped from the city to other parts of the country and the building that once housed the center and museum — a building that took \$3.5 million to renovate and years to complete — is being shuttered.

Richard P. Flannagan, a member of the center's board of directors, said funding to continue the museum had dried up. The center, a destination for school trips, has been supported in part by the local plastics industry. "We saw a slowdown in the industry about a year and a half," Mr. Flannagan said. "Companies that have supported the center and museum could no longer do so due to economic conditions."

The National Plastics Center & Museum is governed by a national board of directors. The organization will remain intact and operational, but it will no longer be calling Leominster its home, Mr. Flannagan noted.

"The National Plastics Center and Museum has been a proud citizen of Leominster, the city which is recognized as the 'Birthplace of the Plastics Industry' in the northeast United States," said G. Watts Humphrey Jr., chairman of the NPCM board of directors. "Unfortunately, the board has come to realize over the past several years that the Leominster facility can no longer be supported financially."

Mr. Humphrey extended the thanks of the board to the city of Leominster for its role in helping the organization grow its vision of teaching about plastics in society and its place in society.

Leominster Mayor Dean J. Mazzarella said although he was saddened by the loss of the center and museum, he understood that economic conditions made this necessary.

Mr. Mazzarella noted the effort to build the museum started locally and by doing so, a great deal of the history of the industry that would have been lost was preserved. "They did a remarkable job with the rehabbing of the building and collecting all of this information for what is a very important industry," he said. "The city gave birth to the plastics industry and it also gave birth to the center and museum that will preserve all of this for generations to come."

The center and museum, at 210 Lancaster St., have been housed in a former elementary school that underwent \$3.5 million in renovations. The building opened in 1991 after years of study and planning by a core group of industry



executives who wanted to preserve important information about the history of the industry. The National Plastics Center and Museum was incorporated as a not-for-profit 501(c) 3 public charity in the state in 1982.

The four-story building sits on two acres and has approximately 10,000 square feet of space. The permanent collection included objects made of natural plastics such as horn and tortoiseshell; semi-synthetic plastics, including celluloid and fully synthetic objects such as the first synthetic plastic, Bakelite. Objects include personal items such as combs, and accessories, housewares and household items such as Tupperware, and decorative items to name just a few.

Other displays showed how plastics is used every day to enhance the quality of life, including an exhibit about plastics in the health care industry; still others were used to emphasize the need for plastics recycling. The first floor of the museum also housed a Discovery Corner, a place for lectures and educational programs about the plastics industry were held.

The National Plastic's Center Doyle Library and Archives — housed at the building — holds thousands of volumes, documents, photographs and ephemera. Advertisements, company files, periodicals and books were contained in the collection.

The center's historical artifacts will be moved to Syracuse University in New York. The Syracuse University Library has agreed to be the new home for the museum's collections under the official name of The National Plastics Center at Syracuse University.

The Plastics Hall of Fame, an exhibit developed in collaboration with The Plastics Academy to pay tribute to the hall's inductees, is being redesigned into a multilocation virtual exhibit that will allow for greater reach and access. The Hall of Fame was on the second floor of the museum and center and was displayed as a series of informational kiosks.

The Plastics Hall of Fame is administered by The Plastics Academy Inc. in Washington, D.C.

The Hall of Fame was founded in 1972 by Modern Plastics Magazine in cooperation with the Society for Plastics Engineers, The Plastics Pioneers and the National Plastics Center and Museum. Membership is bestowed on people who are or were responsible for raising the field of plastics to one of the major industries in the United States.

The third floor of the building holds a 250-seat meeting room. The room was open for a variety of functions and could be used by the public and by various organizations for a fee.

One of the educational programs developed at the center and museum, the PlastiVan, will continue. The vans bring programs on plastics science and technology to various schools throughout the United States and Canada.

The decision to close the building was made a while ago, Mr. Flannagan said.

Mr. Flannagan, who has worked for many years in the local plastics industry, said he has been working over the past month to contact individuals in the community who have contributed to the collections at the museum.

"We wanted to make sure that we made these people aware of what was going to happen and if there was something that had put on loan to us that they wanted back, that they did get it back," Mr. Flannagan said.

Mr. Mazzarella said the museum was working with the city to find a future use for the building.

"It's a beautiful building that really would be a turnkey operation for someone," Mr. Mazzarella said. "They've brought the entire structure up to code, modernized it entirely."

As part of the city agreeing to allow the museum to have the space, restrictions as to what the building can be used for if the museum were to move out were set in place.

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