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Portsmouth Historical Society Appoints Rental Manager

Former Portsmouth Library + John Paul Jones House popular sites for events

Portsmouth, New Hampshire... “It was a great library for 100 years,” says Robin Lurie-Meyerkopf, “but it was only after the books came out that we realized what a gorgeous building it truly is.”

A century before it was a library, the 1810-era brick building was Portsmouth Academy. Today, freshly carpeted, painted, and restored, the two-story museum galleries operated by Portsmouth Historical Society at Discover Portsmouth are among the most attractive interior public spaces downtown. In addition to its popular exhibitions, the Society has been using those galleries for events, as many locals and visitors know from the first Friday of the month event, Art ‘Round Town.

“My job,” says newly appointed Rental Manager Robin Lurie-Meyerkopf, “is to help to make individuals, groups, and businesses aware that they can access this fantastic downtown resource. We have one of the nicest facilities in town for programming, workshops, events and parties.”

Once the City began work on the new Library, the Society stepped up with a bold plan to keep the City-owned building open to the public for museum exhibitions and lectures, and a place for residents and visitors to learn more about our city’s history, arts and culture. The Society, to the surprise of many, raised \$1.4 million in gifts, grants and low-interest loans to rehab the aging structure.

Discover Portsmouth is actually two early 19th century buildings (the Morton-Benedict House sits on the southern, opposite side from the Academy building) joined by a 20th century addition. A costly new HVAC system, new roofing, and new lighting followed. Since then, the Society has produced a series of museum-quality exhibitions in a must-see destination for locals and tourists.

“Getting off the ground was Priority One in the beginning,” says Society Executive Director Kathleen Soldati. “Now, with an expanded staff and tens of thousands of annual visitors, we are continuing the programming and welcoming atmosphere that Mary Ellen Burke, our former Executive Director, started. It’s because of Mary Ellen that Discover Portsmouth is on the map, said Soldati. “Building awareness of our rental space will help ensure we are around for another century and beyond!”

“Creating Discover Portsmouth was a huge leap for the Society now celebrating its Centennial year,” Soldati adds. “We went from The John Paul Jones House museum to a bustling hub of activity almost year round. Robin’s new job, our growing membership, our museum shop, and our development team are critical to keeping us on track financially as we meet our mission to introduce, interpret and stimulate the study of Portsmouth history.”

Portsmouth Historical Society offers rental spaces in both Discover Portsmouth and at the gardens at the 1758 John Paul Jones House, the national historic landmark the Society owns across the street. At Discover Portsmouth, the Society rents out both the balcony and main floor of the Gallery. In addition, there is a contemporary Special Events Room - ideal for lectures, meetings and parties - in addition to the Gallery spaces. The highly successful New Hampshire Film Festival, for example, has made Discover Portsmouth its home base for the last few years. The Pastel Society, the Southeast Land Trust of NH, Council for Northeast Archeology, the popular Tablesapes, a fundraiser for Arts in Reach, and Star Island Corp’s “Starry Night” are all groups that return again and again. Many Seacoast nonprofits use the Special Events room on a regular basis. “And don’t forget weddings and rehearsal dinners,” says Lurie-Meyerkopf. Discover Portsmouth and the John Paul Jones House historic gardens across the street have become the site of wedding rehearsals, ceremonies and receptions.

“These are wonderful spaces for memorable events,” Robin points out. “Plus all rental income goes to support all of our programs including our public galleries and exhibits – which are free to the public - while also preserving our historic buildings and collections. That’s a lot of value for a good time!”

For more information on scheduling your next event with Portsmouth Historical Society at Discover Portsmouth or the John Paul Jones House Museum please contact Robin Lurie-Meyerkopf at [603-436-8433](tel:603-436-8433), rentals@portsmouthhistory.org or visit PortsmouthHistory.org.

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