

Adirondack Folk School

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LAKE LUZERNE — Jim Mandle is taking a new approach to local economic development by promoting old-fashioned skills and trades.

The Adirondack Folk School is scheduled to open June 5 at Lake Luzerne's old town hall on Main Street, and will feature a wide variety of traditional arts, from woolmaking and quilting to blacksmithing and boat building. The facility, backed by SUNY Adirondack (Adirondack Community College), will start off with 30 regional instructors teaching about 40 different programs.

"It's a school to learn for the joy of learning," said Mandle, a New Jersey transplant, whose family has been coming to the Luzerne area for many years. The concept has been highly successful at similar institutions, such as the John C. Campbell Folk School in southwest North Carolina and the North House Folk School in Minnesota, which specialize in Appalachian and Scandinavian skills, respectively. With so many trades unique to the Adirondack region, Mandle — who has a marketing background — thought, "Why not try the same thing here?"

Jim Schreiner, of Great Sacandaga Designs, in Day, specializes in custom-made Adirondack furniture. He's already signed on as an instructor and will be leading classes in how to make rustic furniture and birch-bark picture frames. "It'll be fun," he said. "I'm going to be able to teach a lot of people. This will be my first time in an official school setting. Plus, it's good advertising any time I can get my name out there. Hopefully it turns into some orders down the line."

Chrissey Eberhardt, from Joy of the Journey Farms in Greenfield Center, will teach students how to make goat milk soap, and Linda Van Alstyne of Middle Grove will have two different felting classes — one on making pocketbooks and the other on "Wearable Creations." "We've lost a lot of traditions," said Eberhardt, who started her Locust Grove farm, with Nubian goats, in 2006. "I think people are looking for something 'real.'" Goats are primarily used for dairy production and she hopes to start making cheese this summer. However, goat-milk soap has health benefits, too, she said.

Next Sunday, from 3 to 5 p.m., Adirondack Folk School will host a "50 Artists Within 50 Miles" event. "It's a way to introduce the artists and craftspeople of the region to the school, our mission and what we're trying to do," Mandle said. Hopefully, they'll promote the concept and get people to sign up for classes. Mandle said the school will be a year-round operation and eventually he's expecting students from throughout the country, helping boost local businesses such as restaurants, bed-and-breakfasts and hotels.

"The North House school in Minnesota is pumping millions of dollars per year into a community that's smaller than Luzerne," said Sandy Sherman of Luzerne. She's one of the Adirondack school's four board members along with Mandle, Sue Wilder of Hadley and SUNY Adirondack President Ron Heacock. They're modeling the Adirondack school after the Minnesota school, which has lent considerable guidance and advice.

"That school is 5-1/2 hours from the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul)," Sherman said. "They were pretty excited when we told them how close we are to Montreal, Albany, New York and Boston." Mandle said he's expecting about 300 students this summer. Classes will range from a half-day to several days in length, and are strictly non-credit. "We've already got people coming from Ohio and Vermont, and we've had hits on our Web site from Denmark and Indonesia," he said.

Instructors, amateur and professional alike, will show people how to make all kinds of items from pack baskets and rugs to paddles and Adirondack chairs, while imparting skills ranging from fly-tying to weaving. During fall and winter, the focus might shift to things such as skis, wreaths and balsam pillows. SUNY Adirondack (ACC) isn't providing financial support, but will handle the major task of handling student registrations, scheduled to begin soon. Classes could have up to 10 or 12 students and will cost from \$25 to about \$150 depending on their duration and materials involved. "It's a great thing for the area," said Patti Carte, director of SUNY Adirondack's Center for Personal and Professional Development. "I think it's going to be a really well-run operation."