



***PLEASE NOTE: The Elmhurst History Museum is reopening with limited capacity on Friday, January 22 in alignment with recent State of Illinois Tier 2 COVID mitigation guidelines. More information at elmhursthistory.org.**

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PHOTOS AVAILABLE BY E-MAIL REQUEST

PRESS RELEASE:

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Lessons Learned from the Great Depression

New exhibit, "Together We Cannot Fail," opens January 22 at the Elmhurst History Museum

ELMHURST, Ill. – It is an understatement to say that 2020 was one of the more difficult years in recent memory for most Americans. Yet if history teaches us anything, it is that we can gain perspective by looking at the past to learn from previous arduous times.

With that goal in mind, the Elmhurst History Museum looks back to one of the *most* difficult times in U.S. history through the many challenges faced and changes brought on by the Great Depression in the 1930s. "Together We Cannot Fail: Overcoming the Great Depression" is a new exhibit created in-house by Elmhurst History Museum staff that sheds light on how Americans — both nationally and in Chicago-area suburbs like Elmhurst and others — faced down the country's worst economic crisis.

The exhibit's title is inspired by words from one of newly-elected President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first radio addresses in 1933. Weaving together news reports and artifacts, "Together We Cannot Fail: Overcoming the Great Depression" presents a timely story illustrated by regional examples of how communities supported one another as the economy mended and the country regained its footing. The

exhibit, which is sponsored by Feze Roofing, will be open at the Elmhurst History Museum from January 22 through May 2, 2021.

Exhibit Themes

“Together We Cannot Fail” begins by focusing on some of the key causes of the Great Depression, which included a weakening economy, wealth inequality, financial policies such as the Gold Standard, and the 1929 Stock Market Crash. Visitors will learn how typical families responded to and survived the ravages of the Depression, and how communities pulled together to help citizens in need with food pantries, soup kitchens and more.

The exhibit considers the federal government’s response under Presidents Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. These include financial aid and FDR’s New Deal initiatives like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), two programs that impacted Chicago and its suburbs by providing jobs, training, and pay checks to many out-of-work residents. The exhibit also takes a look at many of the creative ways people made ends meet with meager budgets, and how they escaped the doldrums of Depression-era life through affordable entertainment like radio, music, and the movies. Lastly, “Together We Cannot Fail” will leave visitors with some thought-provoking questions that draw parallels from the Depression era to the crisis our country faces today.

Challenging Topic and Research

The planning for this exhibit started more than three years ago, well before 2020 and the explosion of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the events of 2020 unfolded, museum staff hit the pause button and considered changing gears to an exhibit with lighter themes.

“Our staff discussed whether the timing of this exhibit would be challenging for our audiences,” said Dave Oberg, Executive Director of the Elmhurst History Museum. “It’s not easy to think about a subject like the Depression at a time when many people are experiencing difficulties in their own lives. However, we considered the value for our patrons to learn about the experiences of the Depression generation. In the end, we decided that this is a teachable moment in history that could offer a meaningful perspective and we forged ahead with the concept.”

Elmhurst History Museum’s Curator of Exhibits, Dan Bartlett, researched and designed the exhibit and

spent months sifting through archives to learn about the local impact of the Depression. “For an event as long and important as the Great Depression, little has been written about its effects in Elmhurst and other western suburbs. Local histories occasionally mention a short period or specific incident from the Depression years. These are interesting and valuable but do not give a sense of the length or depth of the crisis.”

“To really understand what happened required us to spool through almost a decade of microfilmed copies of the *Elmhurst Press*,” Bartlett continued, “recording little details over many weeks or months. Put together, these little details, like the pieces of a puzzle, began to reveal the bigger picture.”

Another impediment to his research was the fact that 2020 COVID closures meant a number of archival collections were inaccessible. “What these records might add to our understanding of the Depression in Elmhurst and DuPage County will have to wait for healthier days,” Bartlett said. “But that’s how writing history works. We tell the story with what we have and adjust it as new evidence comes to light.”

Artifacts from the Depression Era

“Together We Cannot Fail” will feature a number of rare artifacts and images, many from the Elmhurst History Museum’s own collection, to illustrate this account of the Depression era:

- Photographs of Camp Elmhurst, a local CCC facility located near Salt Creek on the western edge Elmhurst that was open from 1934-35;
- Video footage of a 1936 centennial celebration of Elmhurst’s settlement that was designed to improve morale during the Depression with parades and events;
- A recently-donated uniform, ID card and coin changer that belonged to Elmhurst resident Carl Bucholz who worked at a ticket booth during the 1933-34 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago;
- A turn-of-the-century stock ticker, similar to those used at the time of the infamous Stock Market Crash of 1929;
- A WPA architectural rendering of the McKee House in Lombard (built in 1936), a former headquarters for the Forest Preserve of DuPage County.

Online Reservations and Visitation Procedures

In alignment with the most recent State of Illinois COVID-19 mitigation efforts, the Elmhurst History

Museum has the following visitation procedures in place until further notice:

- **Online reservations are required and can be made at elmhursthhistory.org.**
- Visit duration is limited to one hour.
- Limit of 15 guests per hour and five people per group.
- Face masks and at least six feet of social distance required at all times in the galleries.

Food Pantry Donations

Please note that during the run of the “Together We Cannot Fail” exhibit, the Elmhurst History Museum will be collecting canned goods to support the Elmhurst-Yorkfield Food Pantry, a local non-profit organization that is facing an unprecedented demand for food during this time. A collection bin will be available in the museum gallery.

Upcoming Exhibit-Related Programs

The Elmhurst History Museum will continue to offer online programming only in the coming months with many engaging options to connect with themes found in the “Together We Cannot Fail” exhibit.

Online Adult Lecture

The Great Depression’s Impact on Chicagoland

Starts Sun., Jan. 24-May 2, FREE

Access: elmhursthhistory.org/320/Programs

Dominic A. Pacyga, Emeritus Professor of History at Columbia College Chicago, presents an illustrated online lecture exploring many ways the Depression impacted Chicagoans. Pre-recorded program will be available online January 24-May 2. No registration required.

Online #TBT Lecture

The Civilian Conservation Corps in Elmhurst

Starts Thurs., Feb. 11-May 2, FREE

Access: elmhursthhistory.org/320/Programs

Elmhurst History Museum’s Curator of Collections, Dan Lund, will discuss the history of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the New Deal-era federal program created to provide work for young men in the 1930s and its local facility in Elmhurst. No registration required. Pre-recorded program will be available online Feb. 11-May 2.

Facebook Live Gallery Talk

Together We Cannot Fail

Sun., Feb. 28, 12-12:30 p.m., FREE

Access: <https://www.facebook.com/elmhursthistorymuseum/>

Join Elmhurst History Museum's Curator of Exhibits, *Dan Bartlett*, as he takes viewers on a virtual walk through the exhibit "Together We Cannot Fail: Overcoming the Great Depression." Bartlett will share insights learned while researching and designing the exhibit.

More Info: elmhursthistory.org or call 630-833-1457

Online Concert

Songs of the Great Depression

Starts Sun., March 7-May 2, FREE

Access: elmhursthistory.org/320/Programs

Folk musician Dean Milano presents an online concert with an engaging musical performance of Depression-era favorites including "Pennies from Heaven" and "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" Pre-recorded program will be available online March 7-May 2.

Online Streamed Radio Play

War of the Worlds: The 1938 Radio Script

Six Performances: March 19, 20, 21 & March 26, 27, 28

Time: 7 p.m.

Cost: \$2.95 payable to Broadway on Demand at time of streaming

Access: elmhursthistory.org/320/Programs for link to Broadway On Demand website

On the evening of October 30, 1938, panic ensued when Orson Welles's infamous radio dramatization of War of the Worlds aired. Gather around the "radio" (your streaming device of choice) and listen as GreenMan Theatre Troupe actors present this classic radio play of Martians and mayhem.

Online Performance

Leslie Goddard Presents: Eleanor Roosevelt

Starts Sun., April 18-May 2, FREE

Access: elmhursthistory.org/320/Programs

Eleanor Roosevelt was our country's longest-serving First Lady and beloved by many Americans. Utilizing Roosevelt's autobiography, diaries and letters, award-winning actress and historian Leslie Goddard will portray this iconic stateswoman in a special first-person performance. Pre-recorded program will be available online April 18-May 2.

Online Program: Tasting History of the 1930s

Starts Sun., May 1, 2 p.m., FREE

Registration Required: elmhursthistory.org/320/Programs

Join food historian Ellie Carlson on ZOOM as she prepares a menu of Depression-era staples, including creamed chipped beef, candy-coated carrots and mock apple pie among others.

For the latest program information, go to Elmhurst History Museum's web site at elmhursthistory.org in the Programs section or call 630-833-1457.

Learn more about the lessons learned while overcoming the Great Depression by exploring the new exhibit, "Together We Cannot Fail," which runs from January 22 through May 2, 2021 at the Elmhurst History Museum. The museum is located at 120 E. Park Ave. in downtown Elmhurst. Exhibition hours are Sunday and Tuesday through Friday from 1 to 5 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. General admission is free, and limited free parking is available. For reservations and the latest exhibit and program information, please visit elmhursthistory.org or call (630) 833-1457.

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The Elmhurst History Museum is a department of the City of Elmhurst supported by the Elmhurst Heritage Foundation, a 501c3 non-profit organization. The Museum is located at 120 E. Park Ave. in downtown Elmhurst. General admission is free. For more information, call 630-833-1457 or visit our web site at elmhursthistory.org.

CAPTION: The lobby of the Elmhurst Post Office at 154 W. Park Avenue c. 1937, with the mural "There Was Vision" by George M. Smith. Pictured are J. Tubergen, assistant postmaster; James F. Grogan, postmaster; and muralist George M. Smith.