

The Miami and Erie Canal Visitor's Center welcomes you, one and all!

I'd like to be the first to welcome you to the Miami and Erie Canal Visitor's Center! The new "Lockkeeper's House" is adjacent to Lock One North in New Bremen and is home to the Southwestern Auglaize County Chamber of Commerce. A dynamic partnership between the Village of New Bremen, the Miami and Erie Canal Corridor Association, the New Bremen Historic Association and the Chamber of Commerce has resulted in a handsome, historic gem along the canal. The new building was officially dedicated in a ceremony held Saturday June 19th and is currently open to visitors. The Visitor's Center Hours will be 9am-11am and 1pm-5pm Monday through Friday. Weekend hours are still being worked out.

Visitors to this historic building will discover an accurate replica of the original Lockkeeper's House, on the exact same site. While the building may appear to be an older home on the outside, the inside is anything but old. With hardwood floors and beautifully detailed features throughout, the Lockkeeper's House is truly a 21st century visitor's center. The building is fully handicapped accessible, including an elevator and ramps at the entry doors. Handicapped parking will be added behind the building at the rear entry. The building is equipped with DVD players, projectors, and screens for presentations on the second and third floors. NK Telco donated a 42" flat panel television which will be used primarily for the broadcast of local news, and special programming.

On the first floor (basement level) you'll find several old "ice tools" provided by the New Bremen Historic Association. These tools were used to harvest ice (from Rabe's pond) that was used to keep meat and other goods fresh for shipment up and down the canal. Also in the basement is the turning plate from the old "bump" bridge where Quellhorst Rd. crosses the canal. That is an amazing piece of engineering, considering that the single piece enabled the entire bridge to pivot, rotating out of the way of oncoming canal boats. Two large interpretive panels are wall mounted in the basement, illustrating the history and timeline of the Miami and Erie Canal. Public restrooms are located on the lowest level as well.

The chamber offices can be found on the second floor (canal level) of the Lockkeeper's House. Here, visitors can learn more details about the lock systems, the elevation of the canal from the Ohio River to Lake Erie, illustrated on interpretive displays on the walls. There are photos and documents depicting the history of the canal in New Bremen. Wanda Dammeyer beautifully sculpted a mule and farm-boy such as would have been seen towing the canal boats up and down the canal. The bronze piece is cleverly displayed under the east-facing window on the second floor, almost as if trudging the towpath again, as in days of old. The Chamber of Commerce has numerous informational brochures and books in the entry hallway for easy public access. Be sure to sign the guest register when you visit this level.

The third level is suited for large meetings and gatherings with a wide-open floor plan, a board table and chairs. Gilberg Furniture donated the refrigerator, giving us the ability to entertain upstairs. The ceiling is of particular interest as the entire gable is open, exposed-beam construction, stained to match the flooring

and woodwork. The windows afford beautiful views of downtown New Bremen, Lock One and the Canal as it winds its way southward. Two more large interpretive panels adorn the walls upstairs. A beautiful digital collage of canal scenes sets an historic mood, while the other panel describes the function and purpose of a canal lock. Without the locks, the canal would've been impossible to construct and use.

The Miami and Erie Canal Visitor's Center will be an evolving collection of canal-era artifacts, historic documents and photos, interspersed with educational and "hands-on" displays and materials. From my perspective here at the Chamber, we're now sitting in the perfect place to "show off" our three communities of New Bremen, New Knoxville and Minster. We'll be able to reach more people and promote our member organizations and the villages to a wider audience. It is amazing to me that 165 years after its completion, the Miami and Erie Canal continues to help Western Ohio communities grow and prosper. We now have a true "gateway" to the Golden Triangle and the entire region here at the Lockkeeper's House.