

# Optical Museum makes a return

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## ARTIFACTS ON DISPLAY AT MORIN JEWELERS

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SOUTHBRIDGE — When third-generation jeweler Rob Morin learned that a great deal of valuable optical memorabilia was being kept in boxes, he decided to do something about it.

“At a Downtown Partnership meeting, we were talking about all the AO artifacts just sitting in a storage room doing nothing,” said Morin, who runs Main Street’s Morin Jewelers with his parents, Robert and Lorraine Morin. “We decided to donate a case in our store so the public could view some of them.”

The Morins hosted a fund-raiser last week to benefit the American Optical Heritage Museum, which contains one of the three largest collections of optical memorabilia in the world.

While currently closed to the public, the museum has been in existence since 1983. It was housed in a room of the former

# Morin's helps raise money for Optical Museum

## MUSEUM

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American Optical building on Mechanic Street, and closed several years ago when construction started on the Southbridge Hotel & Conference Center.

In addition, the museum was previously kept in a small room that could not accommodate all of the artifacts.

The museum, dedicated to the education and enrichment of the general public in the history, growth and contributions of Southbridge, does not have a home. Curator Richard "Dick" Whitney, a Southbridge resident and historian, has led a volunteer effort to reopen it in the downtown area.

Local businesses, including Morin's and Vienna, have joined Whitney's effort, both by housing dis-

play cases and holding fund-raisers.

"All this belongs to Southbridge," Morin said, before handing Whitney a \$1,000 check yesterday afternoon. "I'm honored to have part of Southbridge in this store."

He said the display, which accounts for roughly 5 percent of the museum's total inventory, would remain in the store until Whitney finds a permanent location.

"It will be here as long as it needs to be," he said. "We've had people come in just to look at it."

Visitors to the display will see a pair of variable density goggles that AO workers developed during World War II. The goggles, featured on the History Channel in July, were of the type used to view the atomic bomb drop in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

They will also see dozens



Danielle Williamson photo

**Robert, Lorraine, and Rob Morin present Richard "Dick" Whitney with a \$1,000 check for the Optical Heritage Museum in Southbridge.**

of early frames, most of which were so expensive that wearers would look for ways to repair glasses, rather than replace them.

Not all the artifacts on display center on optical history, however.

"The Optical Heritage Museum is an entity, but the scope is to preserve, collect and display the heritage of Southbridge, and other communities if it becomes relevant," Whitney said.

Visitors may learn

about a wide screen projection system developed at the AO. The process involved a wide screen projection of an image, which on film was intentionally distorted. When this curved image was projected down to the screen angled below the projector, the image would be wide and undistorted.

This process debuted with the showing of the movie, "Oklahoma."

"Half of the display consists of recent donations," said Whitney, an avid history buff who continues to accept donations of artifacts representing various facets of town history.

"There's a lot of interest," he said. "We're having people come forward with donations."

Whitney stressed that the museum will celebrate not only the town's past, but also its present and future.

"A lot of people don't realize that out of Southbridge have come things that are used around the world," he said. "Gentex Optics [of Dudley, the leading manufacturer of polycarbonate corrective and non-corrective eyewear] is where it is now because of the AO."

Whitney said he would open the museum once he has a sound business plan. He expects to have it in place within a few months.

For now, Whitney said, he and the other members of the museum's board will continue looking for opportunities like the one Morin's has provided them.

"We're using the name 'Optical Heritage Museum,' but it can be much more," Whitney said.

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