

ROBESONIAA

• **FRIENDS OF THE** •



Winter 2023

Volume 43 Issue 1

Friends of the Robesonia Furnace, Inc. PO Box 162 • Robesonia, PA 19551-1230

Cleaning Up the Robesonia Furnace

By Tracy Monegan Rice

Did you notice this past year that something was going on at the Robesonia Furnace? Wonder what was happening? A few years ago, the Breinger estate transferred ownership of 3.25 acres of the Robesonia Furnace historical site to the Borough of Robesonia, located at the corner of Mountain Avenue and Freeman Street. An adjacent, uphill parcel of land was transferred to the Womelsdorf-Robesonia Joint Water Authority. During the land transfer process, it was discovered that four portions of the former Furnace site were contaminated with lead and cobalt, heavy metals in the soil leftover from Furnace operations nearly a century ago. Two of the contaminated areas were located below the masonry walls and two were located above them; altogether nearly two-thirds of the property was contaminated. No contamination was detected in the groundwater.

The Borough of Robesonia received two grants from the state Department of Community and Economic Development (their Industrial Sites Reuse Program) and one from Berks County (a Community Development Block Grant) to clean up, or remediate, the contaminated soil. While the cobalt levels did not exceed safe levels, the lead contamination did and needed to be remediated. Either the contaminated soil needed to be dug up and hauled away to a safe disposal location, or the Borough could bury the contaminated soil with two feet of clean soil. Because contaminated soil was located in and around the historical walls and remains of the Robesonia Furnace that could be damaged by removing the soil, the Borough chose to bury the "dirty dirt" with "clean dirt."

Continued on Page 2

The first step of the clean-up, or remediation, project was to remove all of the trees and bushes to expose the contaminated soil so it could be covered. This work started in April 2022. While many were sad to see all the trees go, there was the added benefit of helping preserve some of the historical walls that were threatened by tree roots growing in or near them. One section of low wall near the storage building that had large trees growing through it could not be saved, however, since it was too short to extend above the surface when two feet of clean soil was placed next to it and on top of it. This low wall was the remains of building foundations along a Furnace bathroom and commissary or dining room building. Part of the wall was removed to grade the site and part of it buried. Two very large concrete blocks that were leaning against the former railroad bridge or abutments on the northern side of the property were also moved for safety but remain on the property nearby.

Many people were surprised to see the size and extent of the Furnace ruins that were exposed once the trees were removed. The contractor who removed the trees remarked that he and his work crew had never been photographed so much on a job site before!

The next step was to remove the tree stumps and grade the soil, filling in low spots to create a more level surface. A sizeable amount of contaminated soil was moved from below the walls to fill in deep depressions on top of the walls. Once the ground was mostly level, bright orange "snow fencing" was placed flat on top to mark the line between the clean soil on top and the contaminated soil below. This way anyone digging on the property in the future will encounter the layer of plastic fencing and be reminded that contaminated soil lies beneath.

Continued on Page 3



Cleaning up the contaminated soils at the Robesonia Furnace first required clearing the land of all the trees, which started in April 2022.



One low wall (in the foreground) could not be saved during the project since several large trees were growing through it and it was too short to extend above the two feet of new clean soil. The wall was the foundation remains of a Furnace bathroom and commissary or dining hall

Finally, the site was ready for clean soil to be brought in to bury the contaminated soil. This work was split into two phases, one below the walls and one on top of the walls. Jack Keener donated several hundred cubic yards of clean soil that had been dug up as part of the new subdivision on Smokering Drive and other clean soil he had stockpiled on a property at Penn Avenue and Lamm Road. Several hundred more tons of clean soil were purchased by the contractor from off-site, who spent weeks carefully covering all the contaminated soil while not harming the Furnace remains. After some final grading and additional soil touch-ups to meet the full 24" required depth of clean soil during December 2022, the remediation is nearly complete. The final step will be to plant grass seed on the new soil above the walls. Altogether the clean-up project cost nearly \$500,000, with approximately 90% paid for with state and county grants and the rest paid for by the Borough, with a small contribution from the Friends of the Robesonian Furnace.

Continued page 5

Rock ^{the} Furnace

Rent the Furnace Pavilion!!

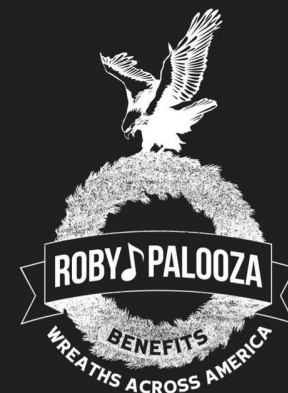
Did You Know?

The furnace pavilion is available to rent for your event or special occasion! It's a great facility with electric, ample parking and historical ambiance. \$75.00 for members or \$125.00 for non members. If you have a family event and you are not providing alcohol, (BYOB) you don't need insurance. If you have an event that is open to the public, then you'll need event insurance.

Call 484.955.7381 to inquire.

Roby Palooza!

Join the fundraiser by 39 With Honor for Wreaths Across America at the Furnace Pavilion on June 10th!



2023 PAVILION EVENTS:

March 18th- Nolde Forest Pottery -Easter Show 10am

June 10th- Roby Palooza

August 19th- Nolde Forest Pottery

Sept 23rd- 70's Class Reunion Shindig!

(check Robesonisfurnce.org for more details on these events)



Contractors graded the uneven site and covered the contaminated soil with two feet of clean soil hauled in from off-site over the summer. The amazing stone masonry walls of the Robesonia Furnace are now fully visible and owned by the Borough of Robesonia.



Phase 1 of the project placed clean fill below the walls, which was then planted with grass seed (seen at the bottom of the photo). Phase 2 of the project did the same above the walls and is wrapping up over the winter. The low wall that was buried is now the grassy hill in the middle of this photo.

Friends of the Robesonian Furnace

2023 Annual Dinner



Ozgoods Grill Bar
 Tuesday March 21st, 2023

5:30 - 6:30 Cocktail Hour

6:30 - 7:15 Dinner Buffet

7:15 Speaker –Lyle McMullen on
 Robesonian Furnace

8:00 - BUSINESS MEETING

- . PRESIDENT’S REPORT
- . TREASURER’S REPORT

OFFICERS:

PRESIDENT : ABBY WERTZ
 VICE PRESIDENT : RANDY GARTNER
 TREASURER : BARBARA ORTH
 SECRETARY : DONNA KUHN
 BOARD MEMBERS: TRACY RICE
 LYLE McMULLEN
 KIM KRAMER

HAVE AN INTEREST IN SERVING OR DONATING AN
 ARTIFACT TO THE MUSEUM? WOULD YOU LIKE TO
 SCHEDULE A TOUR FOR YOUR GROUP?
 PLEASE CALL 484.955.7381

NEWSLETTER: KEITH RENTSCHLER
 BOARD MEMBER EMERITUS: CALVIN YOH
 MUSEUM & TOURS: RANDY GARTNER

Registration Form

Name _____ Phone _____

_____ Beef Burgundy _____
 _____ Chicken Cordon Bleu _____
 _____ Baked Ziti w Meatballs _____

Please Check Off Choice

All meals include choice of House or Caesar Salad, Soup du Jour, Roasted Rosemary or Smashed Potatoes, Fresh Baked Rolls, Fountain Soda, Coffee, Tea, and Dessert [Cheesecake or Chocolate Cake]
 Cost for each entrée is \$35.00

REGISTRATION DEADLINE TUESDAY, MARCH 14TH 2023
 Please make checks payable and send along with form to:
 Friends of the Robesonian Furnace, PO Box 162, Robesonian, PA 19551

Membership Renewal Form
(Check your mailing label for your current date of membership)

Date _____ Telephone Number _____

Name _____ Spouse _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Yearly Amount Level		One Time Amount Level	
\$ 10.00	____ Individual	\$ 100.00	____ Life Member
\$ 20.00	____ Family		

*Memberships for 2023 expire Dec. 31, 2023 *All donations are tax deductible.

**Please make checks payable and send along with Membership Form to:
Friends of the Robesonia Furnace, P.O. Box 162 Robesonia PA 19551-0162**

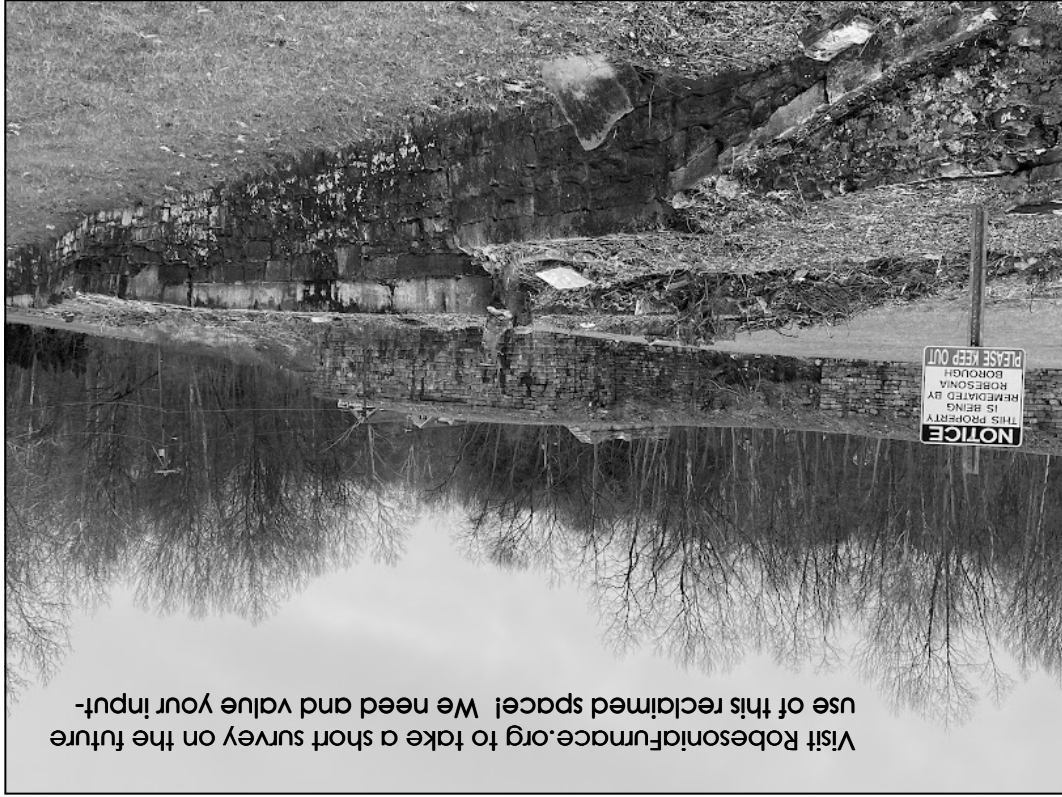
Did You Know?



That you can schedule a walking tour of the Furnace grounds for your private group? It's true! Call our very own Randy Gartner to schedule. Take advantage of his wealth of knowledge on the Furnace site and operations- 484.955.7381

Sign Up A Friend! How about sharing with a friend or sending them a gift membership?

The recent cleanup of the Robesonia Furnace site was enabled by collaboration of grants from the State and Berks County. These were supported by contributions from the Robesonia Borough and The Friends of the Robesonia Furnace and top soil provided by a local developer.



Friends of the Robesonia Furnace
P.O. Box 162
Robesonia, PA 19551-0162