

Ossipee Main Street program welcomes new director
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OSSIPEE — Yes, you can come home again.

The Ossipee Main Street Program's board of directors has hired a new executive director with local ties to replace Sarah Millette.

Scott Merrow, the son of select board member and former State Representative Harry Merrow, and the great grandson of former State Senator and mill owner Harry Smart, stepped into the part time, paid position the first week of December. And with him, he brings two decades of experience working with nonprofit children's camps, most recently as executive director of Camp Marist, and experience as a real estate, public relations and special events professional. One of Merrow's first assignments years ago when he worked for a public relations company was to serve as liaison to the iconic comedienne and actress, Phyllis Diller. No kidding. She even offered Merrow a job in California if he wanted it. Merrow said he worked with Diller and organized comedic events for the troops during the Gulf War.

"She was absolutely a fascinating, fantastic woman," he recalled. "I did that for four or five months, but learned an astounding amount."

In a recent interview, Merrow talked about his goals for the Main Street program and shared fond memories spending summers in Ossipee and walking through town with his grandfather and father. His vision is to further invigorate Center Ossipee by attracting special events and by collaborating with other groups such as the Greater Ossipee Chamber of Commerce and Ossipee Concerned Citizens.

"I would love to see downtown become a destination again," he said, noting that there used to be a drug store and a barbershop in the center of town. "My great grandfather father and dad too, their routine was to walk through town, walk through every business and say hi," he said.

Merrow said when he first learned of the Main Street Program vacancy through Town Administrator Martha Eldridge, "it was an epiphany." He said he loves working with volunteer groups and the revitalization piece of the Main Street Program really appealed to him.

"I think Sarah did an absolutely phenomenal job; this park is wonderful," he said, "What I bring to the table is I'm a special events guy. I want to come up with ideas to put the park to use, bring concerts to town, light this place up for Christmas. This needs to be a destination for families. The OCC is already here.

"Part of my job will be to continue to draw support ... I have a lot of friends in town. I'm hoping to get more people involved, and if we get more people involved, good things will happen," Merrow said.

What's next?

"For me, it's helping the community realize what's already happened. I've talked to a lot of people who haven't been in this building yet," said Merrow, referring to the newly refurbished Ossipee Main Street Program office right next to the new town center park. "When I walked in, I said, 'wow.' People need to know about this space," he said. The new building has a large meeting room that any group can use, a small kitchen, storage and an office.

Merrow will likely host some 'meet and greets.' "I want people to see this building as an invitation and a welcome." Putting the park to use, and expanding the Ossipee Farmer's Market is on his to-do list as well. He will try to expand upon established events such as the Beech River Run, by setting the starting and end points at the park, then organizing a big block party at the end of the race.

"It's been sleepy in town, and the real goal is to get people back into the town center," he added. The pieces are all here – the park, the restaurants, the new office and meeting space. "I see myself as the person who takes all those pieces and puts it together," he adds.

"Like the saying goes, 'if you build it, they will come,' well, we built it. Now we need to do a couple things to get people to use the space and get them to come," said Merrow.

"You will see me out in the community," Merrow said, adding that he will build on the phenomenal groundwork Sarah Millette laid in her several years of service.

"So the groundwork is there. For me, it's really getting out. I kind of bridge that world, even with my previous industry. I worked for nonprofits but also worked in private business. I think I have a unique understanding of both. I think for this position I have an understanding, everyone wants to be involved but especially in a tough economy like this, you have to know what you are getting in return. So when putting together events, there has to be something for every body whether that be press or drawing people to your store," he adds. In addition, he thinks that more state or federal funds will be available to assist with economic recovery, especially to smaller "mom and pop" businesses, and that trend could attract small business to Center Ossipee.

He sees his role as a facilitator of collaboration – a traffic cop who helps turn brainstorming ideas into a concrete plan.