Maplewood Messenger

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Maplewood
Neighborhood Association

MAPLEWOOD HISTORY

Kelsey's Landing: Maplewood's Gateway to Freedom on the Underground Railroad

Tucked into the Genesee River gorge just below the rose gardens in Maplewood Park, Kelsey's Landing was once one of Rochester's busiest ports—and a quiet, high-stakes final stop on the Underground Railroad. Built by Alexander Kelsey in 1844 on the west bank of the river near the Lower Falls, the landing handled flour, timber, salt, and passengers bound for Great Lakes ports. Its relative seclusion, cargo traffic, and ships flying foreign flags also made it a practical and relatively safe departure point for people escaping slavery.

In the 1840s and 1850s, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, members of the Rochester Anti-Slavery Society, and others used the bustle of the landing as cover. Freedom seekers who had made it to Rochester were escorted—often at night—down to the river, where they boarded Canadian vessels. Once under a foreign flag and heading north across Lake Ontario, they were beyond the reach of U.S. slave-catchers. Historians estimate that more than 100 people a year passed through Rochester on this route during the peak years of the 1850s.

Douglass himself described one such journey in his autobiography. After driving a group to the landing in his "Democrat Carriage," he wrote: "We reached the boat at least fifteen minutes before the time of its departure, and that without remark or molestation. But those fifteen minutes seemed much longer than usual. I remained on board until the order to remove the gang-plank was given; I shook hands with my friends… and returned home with a sense of relief which I cannot stop here to describe." In 1859, Douglass himself left from the area when authorities sought his arrest after John Brown's raid.

The landing's commercial heyday was relatively brief. Railroads reduced the need for the river port; by the 1870s the property had become the Glen House resort. A fire in 1904 destroyed much of what remained. For decades the site was largely forgotten, remembered mainly for its earlier role in shipping. That began to change as local historians and groups such as the Lower Falls Foundation worked to recover the fuller story. In 2017 the National Park Service added Kelsey's Landing to its Network to Freedom, recognizing its documented connection to the Underground Railroad. A historical marker placed by the City of Rochester in 1984 still stands in Maplewood Park (near the parking area off Driving Park Avenue / Maplewood Avenue), with the simple inscription: "Freedom was assured for escaping slaves who boarded Canadian vessels here at the end of the Underground Railroad."

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This past summer, the site once again drew public attention. On July 11, 2026, the Rochester branch of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) hosted Rochester's inaugural Abolition Commemoration Day celebration in the Maplewood Park Rose Garden overlooking Kelsey's Landing. The event honored New York's 1827 abolition of slavery and the local Underground Railroad history tied to the landing. Mayor Malik Evans delivered the keynote address, and Monroe County Executive Adam Bello offered county greetings, joining historians, community members, and others for speeches and a Gorge Reflection Walk that allowed attendees to descend the historic path toward the river for a moment of silence at the water's edge.

Today the actual docks are long gone, but the location remains accessible from the park above the gorge. The marker and the view down toward the river give a tangible sense of the last stretch of a dangerous journey. Visitors can find the marker in Maplewood Park—an easy stop on a walk through the rose garden or along the river overlook—and a reminder that one of the most consequential chapters of American history ran, quite literally, through our neighborhood.



YOUR MAPLEWOOD NEIGHBORS



INTRODUCING.....Wayne Panepinto

Walk by the house at the southeast corner of Dewey Avenue and Flower City Park on any holiday and you are likely to see lights, wreaths, flowers, and decorations of all types including animated figures and piped in music. If you're lucky, the owner, Wayne, dressed according to theme, will be in his driveway offering cookies and hot cocoa on Christmas, or cooking hot dogs on the Fourth of July. It's all free, Wayne's gift to the neighborhood.

Wayne, who has lived in the house for the past 35 years, began the tradition during the Covid years, when there was not much socializing going on, and ever since he has added more holidays and more elaborate lighting anddecorations. And yes, it is costly. He tries to save money by taking advantage of after-holiday sales and BJ bargains. In all these years, he has never had any theft or vandalism. He loves to see his neighbors' appreciation, and he hopes that his goodwill will spread to other areas throughout the Maplewood Neighborhood.
When Wayne is not decorating the semi-retired professional photographer enjoys hiking, biking, and Argentine dancing.

Thank you Wayne, for being such a good neighbor!



MNA TOWN HALL HIGHLIGHTS

June 2026 -August 2026

The MNA Town Hall meetings are held at the Aquinas Institute on the first Wednesday of every month at 7:00 PM. They are open to the public and provide an opportunity to learn about neighborhood updates and share your input. The atmosphere is casual, and participation is encouraged.

June 2026

Government: William Burgess, Monroe County legislator, reported that they are planning additional safety measures at locations such as Charlotte Beach and the Lilac Festival.

Bridget Monroe, City Council, reported on this year's City budget: It has increased by $22 million. This is an increase in fees, not taxes, and the effect will be approximately $10/year per household. All department budgets have been reduced by 10%. $160,000 has been designated for the design of the gazebos in the Maplewood Rose Garden, which are in a state of disrepair. She also reported that there are police cameras now monitoring Maplewood Park, thanks to our MNA member, April Foreman, who was the squeaky wheel.

Anna Keller, Northwest Neighborhood Service Center, reported that tenant and neighbor complaints are up. She reported that nuisance points have been issued to 2 residential rental locations.

Guest Speakers:

Laura Kroenig, director of the Maplewood YMCA, spoke about some of the many programs that are offered to members and non-members. There is a free meal program at 4pm, a wellness clinic for adults on Wednesday evenings, free swim lessons, free teen access to facilities from 2-6pm, a youth tennis program, a free golf program, an electronic game lounge, a full day summer camp, and much more. It's a great facility for youth, adults, and seniors.

Nicolas Coulter, Person Centered Housing Options, spoke about the work they have been doing across the County since 2015. They provide direct assistance to the homeless (there are over 1200 people on the streets or in shelters). They assist with food, healthcare, case management, and then permanent housing. With those they work with, they are 80% successful in 3-4 months. The average cost to get someone housed is $4700, and they are funded through city, county and federal funds. If you know of someone who needs assistance, they can be reached at PCHO.org.

Other: The latest MNA newsletter was available at the meeting. Upcoming events were announced: Mini Clean Sweep at the Rose Garden (which has a new Rosarian), Walk Audit of Lake/Driving Park traffic safety, Walking Tours by the Landmark Society on Seneca Parkway and Lakeview Park, and Lower Gorge Tours.

July 2026

Government: Bridget Monroe, City Council, reported that 1000 plants have been ordered for the Miyawaki Forest at Dewey and Driving Park, and soil improvements will take place in August.

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Michael Maxwell, Northwest Neighborhood Service Center, reported on plans for a Community Uplift in the Aquinas parking lot.

Johanna, from the Maplewood Library, reported that things are in full swing at the renovated library. They are providing lunch and snacks for 35 kids, have kids' literacy activities, and have started a story time at the new Maplewood Nature Center.

Guest Speaker: Casmic Reid, Deputy Commissioner of the City's Bureau of Buildings and Compliance, spoke about the new requirements for CofO's, brought about by changes to the NYS Public Health Law. The focus is on lead paint remediation, but all aspects will be inspected every 3 years. Owner-occupied houses are now required to get a CofO. There are still a number of issues around the new law that need to be clarified.

Other: Ted Mancini, Principal of Aquinas, spoke about their permit application to construct a fence across the front of the property (this was later denied). They are having issues on school property with theft, vandalism, loitering and fights. They are also considering other measures, such as 24-hour on-site security.

New events were announced: the RPO at the Rose Garden, and Olmsted History / Discover Trees of Maplewood Park by the Maplewood Nature Center.

August 2026

- Summer vacation – no Town Hall! See you September 2!
- We can report on other MNA work that has been ongoing this summer. Dewey Avenue now has 36 large planters lining the business corridor. Tree wells have all been weeded and mulched. The 3 community gardens continue to be beautifully maintained. Additional Neighborhood News Centers have been purchased and assembled and are ready to be placed. Additional signal box paintings are in process. Litter pickups, Pac-Tac walks, and reporting of code violations are ongoing.
- The MNA Website is down due to provider issues. We are working to get it back up asap. MNA info can be found on Facebook and Instagram.
- For volunteer opportunities with the MNA, please email info@maplewood.org, or just speak with one of our board members at a Town Hall meeting!

VISIT US ON FACEBOOK & INSTAGRAM!

JOIN TODAY!

To join the MNA, download the membership form from www.maplewood.org. You can bring the completed form and annual dues payment to any monthly MNA Town Hall Meeting, or mail it to our office. You can also get a form at the townhall meetings.

If you have any questions regarding membership, please contact (585)647-3186 or info@maplewood.org.

Rochester Buzz: What's Happening October-December 2026

There's plenty happening around Rochester this fall and into the holiday season. Here's a look at what's coming up at the Kodak Center plus other notable events around town.

KODAK CENTER

(200 West Ridge Road)

October

• Wednesday, October 21 – Scott Bradlee's Postmodern Jukebox: The Future Is Vintage World Tour, 7:30 p.m.
• Friday, October 23 – Stayin' Alive: One Night of the Bee Gees, 7:30 p.m.
• Saturday, October 24 – Hocus Pocus: The Taste-A-Long Experience, 7:00 p.m.

November

• Thursday, November 5 – Jeff Dunham, 7:30 p.m.
• Sunday, November 8 – The Rush Tribute Project, 7:30 p.m.
• Wednesday, November 11 – BEAT (performing the music of King Crimson), 8:00 p.m.
• Thursday, November 12 – A Drag Queen Christmas, 7:30 p.m.
• Friday, November 13 – Rick Braun Plays Chuck Mangione, 7:30 p.m.
• Saturday, November 14 – Bill Engvall, 7:30 p.m.
• Thursday, November 19 – Gary Owen, 8:00 p.m.
• Friday, November 20 – Jim Breuer, 8:00 p.m.

December

• Thursday, December 3 – Professor Brian Cox: Emergence, 7:30 p.m.
• Friday, December 4 – Cirque Musica Holiday Wonderland, 7:30 p.m.
• Wednesday, December 9 – The Rock Orchestra By Candlelight, 7:30 p.m.
• Thursday, December 10 – Be Like Blippi Tour!, 6:00 p.m.
• Friday, December 11 – Winter Enchanted, 7:00 p.m.
• Saturday, December 12 – Lou Gramm: The Released Tour, 8:00 p.m.

Other Rochester Highlights

Theater & Performances

• October 31 – Lil Baby: Upstate Fest (with Fetty Wap, Key Glock, Boosie & more) at Blue Cross Arena, 8:00 p.m.

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• October 31 – Lil Baby: Upstate Fest (with Fetty Wap, Key Glock, Boosie & more) at Blue Cross Arena, 8:00 p.m.
• November 3 – Alicia Keys' Hell's Kitchen at West Herr Auditorium Theatre, 7:30 p.m.
• November 25 – December 27 – A Christmas Carol at Geva Theatre (Rochester's favorite holiday tradition)
• December 1–6 – The Sound of Music at West Herr Auditorium Theatre
• December 10 – NUTCRACKER! Magical Christmas Ballet at West Herr Auditorium Theatre
• December 11–13 – Let It Snow: A Holiday Cabaret at Geva Theatre

Holiday Festivities

• November 27 – December 20 – Roc Holiday Village (downtown). Ice skating, visits with Santa, shopping, live music, food, crafts, and more (Wednesdays–Sundays).
• Holidays at the Market (Rochester Public Market): November 29 and December 6 (8 a.m.–2 p.m.), plus December 10 (6–9 p.m.). Trees, wreaths, decorations, gifts, and seasonal foods.

Tickets and full schedules are available through Ticketmaster, venue websites (kodakcenter.com, gevatheatre.org, etc.), or directly at the box offices. Times and availability can change, so confirm details before you go.

Hope to see you out and about this season!

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World Oddities Expo

November 14–15, 2026

Joseph A. Floreano Rochester Riverside Convention Center

A peculiar paradise where weird thrives! The World Oddities Expo began in 2018 as a traveling oddities festival founded by Adam Hutter. It has grown into an all-inclusive, artisan and small-business-focused convention that now visits cities across the country. This marks Rochester's first year hosting the event.

Shop the massive Lost Curio Marketplace packed with taxidermy, insects, macabre art, jewelry, and home décor. Beyond shopping, you can get tattooed on-site at the Oddity Ink Parlour, explore real animal anomalies at The De·Formed Exhibit, or catch live music, burlesque, and guest speakers.

Want a hands-on experience? Sign up for a WOE Labs workshop to learn unique crafts like butterfly pinning, taxidermy, or Victorian hair bouquet making.

Details and tickets: worldodditiesexpo.com