

‘Quirky’ museum features interactive initiation tricks

By Jackie Sheckler Finch

Climb aboard a “bucking goat” for a thrilling ride. Or sit in an innocent-looking chair that collapses and dumps the occupant on the floor. Maybe volunteer to demonstrate strength by pulling up on two handles, which surprisingly lifts a paddle for a swift swat in the rear.

All these gadgets at the DeMoulin Museum in Greenville, Illinois, were created by three fun-loving brothers — Ed, Erastus and U.S. DeMoulin — who thought fraternal lodge initiations needed to be more exciting.

Founded in 1892, DeMoulin Bros. and Co. today makes marching band uniforms, dance team wear and show choir apparel. But it is those trick devices that often draw group tours to the museum.

“We’ve been listed among the most unusual museums in America,” said founder John Goldsmith. “We know the artifacts we have are not ones you typically find in a museum, and we gratefully embrace our ‘quirky’ reputation.”

The museum can comfortably accommodate group tours of up to 65 people. “Group tours will enjoy a special program that includes demonstrations of some of the fraternal initiation devices in our



THE BUCKING GOAT

collection. It’s an interactive experience, so be ready for the unexpected,” Goldsmith said.

DeMoulin made the initiation devices until 1930. “I always point out to visitors that the devices are over 100 years old and still working. A testament to the company’s craftsmanship,” Goldsmith said.

Goldsmith had a personal reason for opening the museum in 2010. His mother, Norma Goldsmith, had been a 50-year employee of DeMoulin and had been collecting factory artifacts over the years.

“When she passed away in 2007, I inherited the collection and felt that we had a unique story to tell that would bring visitors to our community,” Goldsmith said. “Since the museum opened, the artifacts have found us. Because the factory did an outstanding job labeling everything they made, it makes it easy for people to track them back to Greenville.”

Along with initiation devices, other popular museum artifacts include band uniforms made for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Band, a doctoral gown worn by actress Ruby Dee and a 1940s-era doll for which the factory made a World War II Army uniform.

“Because the factory has such a diverse production history, we offer something for everyone,” Goldsmith concluded. “We’re a family friendly museum. Our goal is to educate and entertain.” ■



TRICK GUILLOTINE

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DEMOULIN MUSEUM

DeMoulin Museum
618-664-4115
demoulinmuseum.org