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Manhattan's Biggest Take-out Order

LIBERTY – Talk about your large orders to go. The Munson Diner, a fixture from the corner of West 49th Street, is moving from Manhattan to the South Main Street district of Liberty next month.

The historic diner will soon be hauled over the George Washington Bridge to make its grand entrance up Main Street to Lake Street, where it will find a permanent home.

So far, the Munson Diner is scheduled to arrive in Liberty in May.

Then, with an intensive schedule of construction, landscaping, restoration and selection of an operator, the diner will celebrate a grand opening early in the summer. If all goes well, it will open just in time for Liberty's July 4 Festival on Main Street.

“The Munson Diner will be Downtown Liberty's new national tourist attraction,” said Allan Berube, who, as Coordinator of Community Development at the Liberty Economic Action Project (LEAP), got the ball rolling when he saw an article in the *New York Times* last fall announcing that the diner was for sale on the website of the American Diner Museum.

Manufactured in New Jersey by the Kullman Company, the Munson Diner was moved in the 1940s to West 49th Street and 11th Avenue as one of the first in a new era of streamlined, stainless steel diners. It quickly earned a reputation as a crossroad where working people, tough waitresses, reporters, artists, city police and theater-goers all mingled. It was a magnet, wrote *The New York Times* over half a century ago, where “all classes of New Yorkers gathered on equal terms, especially as the nightclubs met the night shift.”

In more recent years, the Munson Diner was a location for a Seinfeld episode, radio interviews and TV commercials.

“We believe the move, restoration, community involvement and grand opening,” Berube added, “will turn a new page in the ongoing revival of our Main Street district. This creative, community-initiated project will draw new visitors to Liberty's home-style restaurants and shops, museums, galleries and theatres.”

The Munson Diner project is linked to a larger campaign to promote downtown Liberty as a visitor destination. Dozens of people and organizations have participated in the project so far.

The Munson Diner Corp., with 15 Liberty investors, was formed to raise \$250,000 in funds to buy the diner and vacant lot, pay for the move, restore the diner, prepare the site and build an addition.

The cost of purchasing the diner is approximately \$35,000. The Liberty Fire District voted to sell the vacant lot to the Diner Corp. for the future site, which is on the south side of

Lake Street, just above the corner lot where the Miss Liberty was once located. The project is being financed in part by the Community Bank of Sullivan County.

“It’s rare as a developer to have the chance to work on such an interesting and exciting project,” said Jeremy Gorelick, President of the Munson Diner Corp., who has recently moved to Liberty. “Through the work of many dedicated members of the community, we have been able to save an important historic landmark that will contribute to the redevelopment of downtown Liberty.”

The Munson Diner Corp., as part of a larger Sullivan Renaissance Project to beautify the Lake Street gateway to the Downtown Liberty Historic District, plans to donate an easement over a portion of the property to Sullivan County BOCES, which will landscape a new public picnic park with a view over Main Street.

“I’m excited about this creative project that’s good for everybody in Liberty,” said Mayor William “Rube” Smith.

The Munson Diner is being nominated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, which would make it one of the few diners in New York State to be listed. An architect will make sure the wheelchair-accessible addition enhances the streamlined character of the diner.

“We were determined to save the Munson Diner from an ill fate and felt its relocation to Liberty was a preservation dream come true,” said Daniel Zilka, diner historian and director of the American Diner Museum in Providence, Rhode Island, who rescued the diner from demolition when it closed last summer.

The American Diner Museum has been instrumental in saving more than 20 diners around the county from demolition. It is dedicated to helping preserve diners and promote the culture of diners.

The Munson Diner will draw new attention to the long history of Sullivan County as a “Northeast capital of diners.” Liberty alone was home to the Miss Liberty Diner and Lucky’s Diner (both at the same intersection where the Munson Diner will be located), White Bridge Diner, Triangle Diner, Sullivan Diner, Liberty Diner, and the West 17 Diner, among others.

“Moving the Munson Diner to Liberty will bring back a lot of nostalgia for those of us who remember having a classic diner in the village,” said resident Robyn Gerry. “There’s something cozy about sitting at the counter with a cup of coffee, surrounded by all that polished metal and the sounds and smells of the nearby griddle.”

Qualified potential operators have already expressed interest in becoming the permanent operator of the diner. The Munson Diner Corp. is also seeking to contact people who have memories of the Munson Diner or Liberty’s many classic diners.

Meanwhile, Liberty Town Supervisor Frank DeMayo said he's already got his diner plan. "I'm looking forward to starting my day at the town hall with a short stroll down Main Street to the Munson Diner for a hot cup of coffee," he said.