

The Towne Crier May 11 – 17, 2005

## **Downtown Revival Deluxe**

**By Barbara Gref**

Even though the Munson Diner was four hours late in arriving, the crowd just seemed to grow – and wait. When the diner-bearing trailer came into view, children began shouting, “It’s coming, it’s coming.”

It turned the corner and people applauded.

Nearly 20 hours after it left Manhattan, the 43-seat Munson Diner with a *Daily News* sticker still on its glass door and a souvlaki poster on its side window pulled into Liberty last Thursday to a thrilled audience.

It didn’t matter to them that it was late, that it had hit a railroad bridge in Orange County, that it had been pulled over by the cops and that the bad side (the one ripped away from a Manhattan high-rise) was showing toward Liberty’s Main Street.

No, all that mattered was it was there, some kind of symbol that people cared about diners, cared about Liberty, and cared about the plans to make its Main Street district shine.

It was just as Jeremy Gorelick had said at 1 p.m. “We’re very pleased that this is being so widely and so well received,” said the president of the new Munson Diner Corp.

The lore of the diner says it’s been featured on *Seinfeld*, that Andy Warhol used to eat there, and that there’s still a bullet hole where gangsters once shot at a wisecrack kid working behind the counter.

Village trustee Allan Berube months ago noticed a column in the *New York Times* that said the diner was being uprooted and needed a permanent home. Berube, a history fan, knew the diner’s historic value and thought it would be good for Liberty.

Liberty resident Robyn Gerry was charmed enough by the idea that she put up the money to make the purchase. Then a group of 15 Liberty residents who raised \$250,000 and formed the Munson Diner Corp. took it over. They paid about \$35,000 to buy the diner, even more to move it, and the rest will go into the cost of siting, refurbishing and reopening the Munson at its new location, Lake Street, overlooking Main.

It’s all part of a bigger plan to make Liberty a destination and to have its downtown thrive once again.

Its new openers, who hope to have it open in time for the July 4 Liberty Street Festival, are now interviewing diner operators.

The food, said Gorelick, will not be “greasy spoon,” but “it will be diner-inspired.”