Preserving the Past

Spotlight touches image archive, Iron Mountain

By Eric Freeling
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BOYERTOWN — A short film documentary brings to life a photograph archive stored 226 feet below ground in Butler County.

The Bettmann Archive is stored in the Corbis Film Preservation Facility at Iron Mountain, 1127 Bracken Road.

Corbis is owned by Microsoft founder Bill Gates. The company scanned the archive, which is said to contain 38 million historically important images.

The documentary

"The Invisible Photograph," shown last month at the Film Kitchen screening series in Pittsburgh, focused on the image archive. The series features regional, independently made short films and videos.

Film producer and cameraman David D'Aquisto, commissioned by the Carnegie Museum of Art, said, "I heard rumors that there was a cave in the But ler area where they hid publicists during 9/11. I also knew about the Corbis-Bettmann Archive but didn't know it was in Pennsylvania."

The archive

Accessing the Corbis facility was an unusual experience for the filmmakers.

Iron Mountain is housed in a former limestone mine. It offers record management and document storage services, and security is tight because government agencies store records there.

"I was most surprised at how quickly you forget you are over 300 feet underground, with only one exit, controlled by armed guards," D'Aquisto said. "I think as a filmmaker you can't help but feel the feeling of a science-fiction film, but the amount of visual history in the Bettmann Archive is far more impressive than the shock factor of the mine," said D'Aquisto.

"Once past the armed guards, and safe in the hands of collections manager Ann Hartman, the archive is an incredibly hospitable and accessible environment. It's pretty normal, as far as office environments go, aside from the rock walls. The coffee is still hot and the carpet is still brown," said D'Aquisto.

"The science fiction feeling really came after walking through the airlock into a giant refrigeration containing our visual history as earthlings, neatly alphabetized into hundreds of beige file cabinets," he said.

The archive began as the contents of two trunks Otto Bettmann took with him when he left Nazi Germany for the United States in 1933. Bettmann worked as a librarian in Berlin, where he developed the idea of creating a photo archive. Images of U.S. history included in it date to the Civil War.

The collection grew over the years with the eventual merger with the news photo library of United Press International.

The collection contains iconic images as Albert Einstein sticking out his tongue and Rosa Parks seated in the front of a bus.

Today, archive images are available for licensing online at www.corbisimages.com.

Filmmaker D'Aquisto said, "Anyone can go online and type in a keyword and be overloaded with tons of images. But there is something very different about the printed physical image that somehow makes it more, I don't know, deeper."
Potpourri

Tanglewood hosts books sale

LYNDONIA — Tanglewood's Hyde Hall, 100 Main St., will have a book sale for the benefit of the library from 3 to 5 p.m. on Oct. 17 and 18. Day sale on Friday is from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and on Saturday is from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The sale also includes a live auction. The proceeds will benefit the library and any remaining books will be given away to local schools and groups. For more information, call 724-387-0021 or visit www.tanglot.com.

Auxiliary craft, garage sale set

Tanglewood Auxiliary Ladies will host their annual craft and garage sale from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 18, at the Town Hall, 98 Old Plain Road. Proceeds will benefit the Auxiliary and the vendor information, call 724-585-1717.

Fall festival scheduled

SAXONBURG — Saxton Memorial Presbyterian Church, 300 W. Main St., will hold its annual fall festival from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 11. The event includes a pancake breakfast, a craft auction, quilted items, homemade apple butter, hand-crafted wooden and homemade baked goods. For more information, call 724-533-3800.

Fashions will rain money

BARKERSVILLE — Barkersville Book Dog Walk and Fashion Show will be held Saturday, Oct. 18 at Adams Park. The proceeds will benefit the Mars Public Library.

Candid photos will be awarded

MARS — The Public Library of Mars, 100 Grand Ave., will host Make-a-Craft Mondays from 3 to 7 p.m. beginning Oct. 3. All ages are welcome.

For more information, call the library at 724-276-4950.

Domestic violence theme of art

VOICES will collaborate with the Art Center for the Visual Arts in Butler County, 344 Main St., for an art show to recognize Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October. The show will open Saturday, Oct. 11, and will continue through Nov. 1. For more information, call Gallery at VOICES at 724-289-6500.

Oktoberfest date moved to Oct. 11

CONNELLSVILLE — The Connelssville Lutheran Parish will celebrate its annual Oktoberfest this year on Saturday, Oct. 11, at 8 p.m. at Haver's Road, in Connellsville.

For children, there will be a costume contest, games, crafts, hayrides, bonfires and more.

For adults, Connelssville food service staff will prepare a traditional German menu. There also will be a quiet beer tent and a traditional beer tent.

The shuttle service will be available. Guests are encouraged to arrive early to ensure seating at the 7:45 p.m. Randall Fireworks display.

The event is free. For more information, call Connelssville Public Library at 724-628-3511, Ext. 3599.