

Lid lifts on Plumbing Museum

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WATERTOWN — *"No more trips to the shed outside*

housed indoors with pomp and pride.

No more clatter beneath the bed

enshrined in its own little room instead."

Such are lines from a poem about Thomas Crapper, an English inventor of toilet-related products whose name has become synonymous with toilets.

The poem is on display at Watertown's new plumbing museum on Rosedale Road.

The museum, which opened to the public last Thursday, uses humor and fun tidbits to make the plumbing industry interesting to the masses. It plunges into the history of plumbing, from Crapper's time in the 1800s and early 1900s and at other moments in history.

The museum, which is housed in a 168-year-old building originally used to store ice, is broken up into sections.

The first section is perhaps the most entertaining. It's there that people can learn all about toilets. They may not know, for example, that women's urinals used to be pretty popular.

Apparently women used to pee standing up. An ad for a 1973 Koehler Hygia model on display touts one of its benefits.

"Wall-hanging to aid in housekeeping," it states.

If museum-goers aren't bothered by that idea, they may start to get uncomfortable when they see old chamber pots.

The pots would be hidden in chairs, and removed when nature called.

At the museum, chamber pots from 1850 and 1920 are steps away from an unusual modern-day toilet: The Toto Neorest performance toilet uses sensors to open or close its lid. It has a heated toilet seat, and the temperature and positioning of the toilet can be customized.

Other sections of the museum are devoted to sinks, bathtubs, water heaters and plumbing tools.

Some of the materials that were once used in the industry, such as lead, are no longer used. The term "plumber" goes back to the Latin word for lead.

Still, plumbers attending an open house for the museum acknowledged that products of yesteryear tended to be sturdier.

"The stuff you buy nowadays doesn't even work two years later," said Frank Antonelli, a plumber with the Amari Company, a commercial plumbing business in Amherst, N.H.

About 75 people attended the open house. They drank champagne, ate finger food and compared the museum with its previous Worcester location.

"It's better laid out," retired plumber Joe Croce said about the Watertown location. "It has better graphics and stuff. And the other one was just artifacts on tables."

Many of the objects are perched on tiled pedestals. Others, such as old blown-up advertisements and piping, sprinkle the museum's brick walls.

The walls are also covered in abstract images of faucets and other plumbing-related objects.

Members of Artists for Humanity, a group of high school students in Boston hired to work on local projects, conceived the ideas for many of the designs.

"We've never done anything like this before," said Steven Cronin, 16, a student at Boston Latin School.

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