SUSAN CHRISTOPHERSON
CENTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING

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Chusid Symposium on Place
Celebrates Seven Western New York Sites in Cuba

Annual gathering spotlights placemaking and placekeeping
in Allegany, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties

CUBA, N.Y. —Community leaders, planners, preservationists, funders, state agencies and organizations gathered on Friday, October 2, 2026, at the Palmer Opera House in Cuba for the annual Chusid Symposium on Place. The free, day-long event celebrated seven Western New York sites where diverse voices engage with economic development, heritage and equity to recognize and build place and community.

The Symposium, a program of the Susan Christopherson Center for Community Planning, honors Jeffrey Chusid, preservation architect and planner, retired Cornell University professor of city and regional planning, and a founding advisory board member of the Christopherson Center. The day included site case studies, an overview of the region, panels on funding, historic preservation and equitable access, and a post-event gathering at the nearby Inn at 28.

Sites were identified by a six-member nominating committee from the three counties. Site visits and evaluations were made in Summer 2026. More information about this year's sites, along with resources and further readings on placemaking, can be found on the Chusid Symposium section of the Christopherson Center's website. https://www.christophersoncenter.org/chusid-symposium

The Seven Sites

Fassett GreenSpace (Wellsville). Volunteers with the nonprofit Art for Rural America turned the Main Street lot where the Fassett House Hotel stood from 1870 until 2005 into a public garden and sculpture park. About 2,000 square feet of vegetables, flowers and herbs are free for anyone to harvest. The space includes a bronze fountain cast at Alfred University's foundry, a community-made mosaic kiosk, and outdoor musical instruments. The site was funded by $110,000 in grants between 2017 and 2022.

Robert H. Jackson Center (Jamestown). Founded in 2001 in the 1859 Kent Mansion, Jamestown's first brick residence, the Center honors Justice Robert H. Jackson, the Jamestown-area lawyer who became a U.S. Supreme Court justice and chief U.S. prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials. It offers free programs and school curricula on constitutional rights and civic responsibility, has hosted naturalization ceremonies since 2024, and welcomes about 15,000 visitors a year.

Pioneer Oil Museum (Bolivar). Established in 1964 by members of the New York State Oil Producers Association, the museum is the only one of its kind in the state. It has grown from a small Main Street storefront into a 12-building, 6.5-acre campus in a former pipe-supply complex, exhibiting oilfield machinery, photographs and archives donated largely by local families.

Palmer Opera House (Cuba). Built in 1867 by Joseph Palmer and rebuilt after a fire in 1871, the Opera House was abandoned by the 1990s, and a collapsed roof beam in 2002 left its upper floor exposed. Residents who formed the Cuba Friends of Architecture bought the building in 2005 and restored it in phases; the first floor reopened in 2008. Today its second-floor auditorium hosts performances and community gatherings, and its first floor houses local businesses and the Cuba Cheese Museum. Director Michelle Conklin calls the Opera House "the catalyst of the rebirth of this community."

City of Olean (North Union and State Streets). The City's "Walkable Olean," initially backed by a $6.5 million federal TIGER grant, replaced wide, fast streets with pedestrian-friendly design, including New York's highest concentration of roundabouts. The phased approach to streetscaping and traffic calming measures led to the revitalization of the downtown core, with preservation initiatives, new businesses and a renewed vibrancy in the city center.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church and Watson Ministry Center (Olean). The congregation of this 1890 Victorian Gothic and Romanesque church renovated the adjoining 1885 Watson building, gifted to the church in 1950, after a community needs assessment indicated a strong desire for increased mental health services. Congregation members did much of the work themselves, supported by a USDA Emergency Rural Health Care grant and an Appalachian Regional Commission contribution toward a $518,900 project. Reopened in September 2025, the Watson Ministry Center houses the Miriam Center for Hope and Healing and Cattaraugus Community Action's Victim Services program.

Tri-County Arts Council (Olean). Founded in 1997 and now serving Allegany, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties, TCAC moved in 2019 into Mayer's Block, a long-vacant Victorian rowhouse in downtown Olean. The space holds classes, a pottery studio, the Peg Bothner Gallery and an Artisan Marketplace that gives more than 200 regional artists a retail platform.

"The Chusid Symposium celebrates the unique places that help build and strengthen community. Importantly, it also gives well-deserved recognition to the people who care for their places every day. The Symposium offers them a chance to learn from one another, and for everyone to expand their connections with those committed to making our upstate NY communities strong and vibrant," said Gretchen Worth, project director of the Christopherson Center.

Sponsors and Supporters

The Chusid Symposium on Place 2026 was sponsored by Community Bank, Visit Seneca Nation, GZA GeoEnvironmental, and a gift from Morgan and Laurence Thomas. These valuable sponsorships allow the Chusid Symposium to be held free of charge for attendees and help ensure a low-waste, sustainable event.

About the Susan Christopherson Center for Community Planning

The Christopherson Center works across New York State to support communities in planning for a more equitable, resilient built environment. It honors the work of economic geographer Susan Christopherson (1946–2016), former chair of Cornell's Department of City and Regional Planning. The Christopherson Center is a fiscally sponsored project of the Center for Transformative Action, a registered 501(c)(3) organization. Learn more at christophersoncenter.org.

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