

For Morristown Nat'l Park's artist in residence, 'ready for battle' is more than a name

By P.C. ROBINSON Editor 22 hrs ago  0



XIOMARO
XIOMARO

Photo by Janet Pelligrini

HARDING TWP. - Going through life "ready for battle" isn't easy, but it is worth it, as Xiomaro, the Long Island, N.Y. artist whose photography is now on display in the Jockey Hollow Visitor's Center in Morristown National Historical Park (MNHP) will attest.

Observer~Tribune

The park will celebrate its 90th anniversary next year, but it's kicking off that celebration now to whet visitor appetites. The 62-year-old Xiomaro, pronounced See-oh-ma-ro, is the park's artist-in-residence. The works showcase the park's key features: the Ford Mansion, Jockey Hollow, and the Cross Estate Mansion/New Jersey Brigade area.

The initial kickoff was held on Saturday, June 4 and Sunday, June 5. Other events with the artist are set for 2 to 4 p.m. this Saturday, June 11, when Xiomaro hosts a photo walk along Jockey Hollow's Wick Farm and Grand Parade Trail, both of which run along Jockey Hollow Road in the park, and from 2 to 3 p.m. on Saturday, June 18, when he presents a live café-style, family friendly concert at the Washington's Headquarters Museum, 30 Washington Place, Morristown.

There, he will be accompanied by Saint, a singer-songwriter he is producing. The concert will incorporate an illustrated talk about his National Park photography and its connections with his music.

Additionally, now through Sunday, July 31, the centerpiece exhibit of "Rediscovering Morristown National Historical Park" will be on view at the Jockey Hollow Visitor Center and the Washington's Headquarters Museum and Ford Mansion.

In a Friday, May 27 phone interview, "Xio" a New York native, of Cuban/Puerto Rican descent, said he chooses to use his pseudonym for a host of reasons, including that of empowerment.

"It's the masculine form of 'Xiomara,' an old, women's name that supposedly means 'ready for battle,'" he said.



Morristown National Historical Park (MNHP) will celebrate its 90th anniversary in 2023 with photographs like this one of a piper peeking around the corner in the Cross Estate Mansion in Bernardsville.

Photo by Xiomáaro

'Almost The Best Thing'

Xiomaro is a Renaissance man by anyone's standards. After getting a philosophy degree from Manhattanville College, he got his law degree from New York University. From there, he worked in corporate law firms, but also represented

Observer~Tribune

various musical groups in the '80s and '90s, including the iconic Village People.

Along the way, he wrote and produced his own music and even had his own band. At one point, according to his website, a song he wrote and performed at various coffeehouses lasted a week in the Top 40 of "American Idol Underground."

About 20 years ago, he also incurred cancer - stage three prostate cancer, which he overcame.

Or, as he said, "It was almost the best thing that happened to me," as it made him "pause and think" about what he wanted out of life.

He found it too, through photographing national parks. The point-and-shoot he had used on family trips to shoot those parks - and to document those coffeehouse performances - was replaced by a Nikon D400.

Things began to change when a brochure from AAA lured him to Connecticut's first National Historic Site, Weir Farm. While there, a park ranger mentioned an artist in residency was available. Xiomaro decided to apply and see what happened.

To his surprise, he was accepted. "I didn't think I qualified," he said.

He spent a month on the farm, photographing historic structures although, he said, he could have done anything he wanted to. When the month was over he went home. About a month later, he said, Weir Farm called.

Observer~Tribune

He said he thought something was wrong. As it turned out, they wanted him to shoot more photos. Today, he continues to be the park's official Artist-in-Residence.

He got another gig, too - photographing Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, the summer home of Theodore Roosevelt in Oyster Bay, Long Island, N.Y.

Tom Ross was the park superintendent who had hired Xiomaro for the assignments, and when he was transferred to Morristown, Xiomaro in effect went with him, setting up exhibits at the various park sites in the Morristown National Historical Park system.

In all, his works have highlighted numerous national parks, from the Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, Ochopee, Fla. , and Fire Island National Seashore, Patchogue, N.Y., to the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area.

Xiomaro's photos have a texture and ambiance that are certainly unique. The angles and colors produce a mood that does what art should - draw one into the moment and suspend them there.

When asked if he knew just how good he was, there was silence enfolded with what came across the phone as the twinge of embarrassment.

"I know that I'm not terrible," he finally said. "I like to stay humble and I don't want to know I'm that good."

Observer~Tribune

"I'm very humbled," he said.

Xiomaro, however, is also girded for a more serious battle, one he hopes others will join him in.

Xiomaro and his wife, Rita, of 41 years, had two children. His son now lives in Allendale with his wife and 16-month-old daughter, and Xiomarao said he and Rita are looking to moving nearer to them.

But they also had an adult daughter, and she suffered from borderline personality disorder, or BPD, in 2016 dying from a drug overdose.

To help promote awareness of BPD, a portion of royalty proceeds from the sale of Xiomaro's book, "Weir Farm National Historic Site," with a foreword by former Senator and U.S. Vice Presidential Candidate Joseph Lieberman, go to Emotions Matter, Inc., a nonprofit mental health care advocacy group. For more information, visit <http://xiomaro.com/books.html>

For more information and a free souvenir print of Xiomaro's exhibits at Morristown National Historical Park, visit www.xiomaro.com, or contact Morristown National Historical Park at (862) 400-5972, or visit <https://www.nps.gov/morr/index.htm>.