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Nassau to exhibit Sagamore Hill photos

BY NOAH MANSKAR

Like most people who grew up in New York, Xiomaro said he knew of Theodore Roosevelt as a larger-than-life historical "rock star" when he was younger.

But the Roslyn-based photographer got to know the 26th U.S. president and longtime Long Islander a lot more personally in putting together his newest photography exhibit, which opens at the Nassau County Executive Building in Mineola on Oct. 13.

When Sagamore Hill, Roosevelt's summer mansion in Oyster Bay, was being cleared out for an extensive renovation project in 2012, its caretakers saw an opportunity to document the house in a way it had never been seen before.

They reached out to Xiomaro to photograph every room of the house, and he jumped at the opportunity.

"I thought it was fitting to do a National Park site that's in my backyard so to speak," he said.

Xiomaro worked with the National Park Service on a similar project documenting the Connecticut home of Impressionist painter Julian Alden Weir.

For this project, he had "unfettered access" to Sagamore Hill. He spent five days there in February 2012 photographing every room of the house, capturing perspectives and minute details that cannot be seen on public tours.

For example, in one room, Roosevelt's son Archie had carved an "E" into a door jamb in an attempt to get his sister Edith in trouble.

"It gives you a sense of what life was like in the house," he said. "... This is about as intimate as you can get and as personal as you can get with where a president was."

He first exhibited the photos at the Oyster Bay Historical Society in 2013.

They then went on display at Harvard University for a year.

When Xiomaro went to Sagamore Hill in July to celebrate the house's reopening, he met county Comptroller George Maragos, who was enthusiastic about showing them at the County Executive Building, named for Theodore Roosevelt.

They arranged the show fairly quickly — Xiomaro had about a month to put it together. It will be open for less than two weeks, from Oct. 13-23.

"I am proud to have another opportunity to showcase our local artists," Maragos said in a statement. "Xio is a gifted artist who has created a remarkable photographic exhibit. I encourage everyone to make time to see these historic images while they can."

Xiomaro said he is excited to have the photos on display at the Executive Building not only because many people travel through it, he said, but also because of its connection to Roosevelt.

He laid the cornerstone for the building in 1900, when he was New York's governor. Today, murals of him decorate the walls in the rotunda.

Xiomaro said he has found the majority of the public officials he has met are able to somehow identify with Roosevelt regardless of their political affiliation.

He hopes anyone passing through the exhibit at the Executive Building will be able to get to know Roosevelt better, he said, just as he did through taking the photos.

"I had a general knowledge and interest and admiration of him, but in actually doing a little more reading about him and seeing the house in person, you get a deeper connection with it," Xiomaro said. "What I'm hoping is when people see the photos they have a similar experience and even more importantly go to the house and see the renovation."



PHOTO BY XIOMARO
The North Room at Sagamore Hill, where Theodore Roosevelt met with dignitaries.