

Sunday Dispatch

This edition is for John Berlyn and all our loyal readers

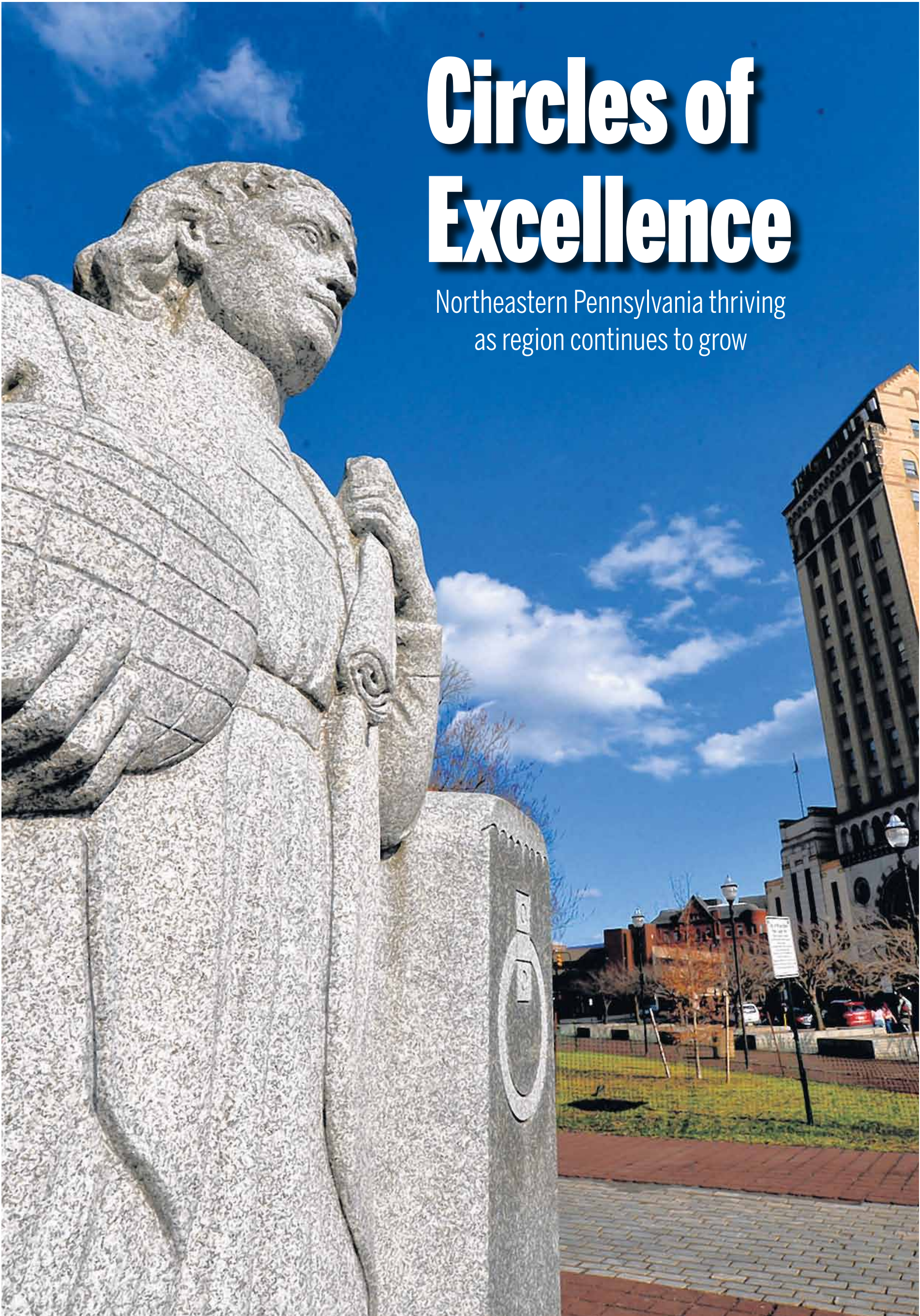
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Downtown WB on a positive trajectory



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Downtown Wilkes-Barre has come a long way since the days that its most prominent feature was a 1970s-era canopy.

Newman points to progress made in last two decades

By Bill O'Boyle | boboyle@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — To appreciate just how far downtown Wilkes-Barre's revitalization efforts have come, all you need to do is to remember what it looked like in the year 2000.

"By then, we had been hemorrhaging

"For example, you may recall that this was the era of the collapsing street-lights," Newman said. "The canopy was dirty, the sidewalks were strewn with litter, and the graffiti never seemed to go away."

Parking lots had replaced Percy Brown's and the Kiddie Shoppe on the first block of East Northampton Street, and if you turned the corner onto the first block of South Main Street, you were greeted by one vacant storefront after another. Down the street, Woolworth's had been empty since 1994.

"Even McDonald's didn't last more than five years on Public Square before closing," Newman said.

In those dreary days, Newman said three senior-citizen high-rises, built during urban renewal, comprised the majority of the housing in the downtown core. King's and Wilkes focused inward — a person standing on Public Square would never suspect that a block's walk in either direction would bring them to a college campus.

Newman said a Main Street revitalization program had been initiated in the early 1990's, but it didn't last.

"The business community, colleges, and City Hall increasingly moved in separate orbits," Newman said. "There were disagreements about strategy and tactics, and a decade's worth of revitalization efforts resulted primarily in frustration and acrimony."

Wico van Genderen, president/CEO of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce, said by most

businesses for almost two decades," said Larry Newman, executive director of the Diamond City partnership. "In fact, the downtown vacancy rate doubled from 1985 to 1996."

Newman said downtown's public environment was a mess.



Butch Comegys | For Times Leader

A family walks through Public Square in Wilkes-Barre, which is currently undergoing refurbishments.

"We are growing in jobs, wages, business attraction/retention and business diversity. At the same time, our strengthening economy has exposed a critical need in workforce."



Wico van Genderen
president/CEO of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce

measures, our economic fundamentals are positive.

"We are growing in jobs, wages, business attraction/retention and business diversity," van Genderen said. "At the same time, our strengthening economy has exposed a critical need in workforce."

Van Genderen said revitalizing workforce in Wilkes-Barre and the NEPA area holds infinite potential for some economic breakthroughs and a new era of growth.

"But to get there we have

some heavy lifting to do," he said. "In business, your biggest asset is your labor force and we need to ensure we are making the investments to connect and align our people and skill sets, train up where there are gaps and attract talent from both within and the outside."

"With a region known for its strong work ethic, affordable cost of living and a large college student population to draw from, we have a great start and now need to build upon this solid base."

Today, Newman said there

are:

- 47 more occupied storefronts in Downtown Wilkes-Barre than in 2000.
- We enjoy a healthy downtown dining and entertainment scene.
- Downtown has become the region's largest concentrated employment center.
- The center city's residential sector continues to grow.
- And two-thirds of survey respondents consistently feel that the downtown is headed in the right direction.

Newman said the downtown has enjoyed 13 consecutive years of increasing occupancy rates.

More than 10 years after it opened, Movies 14, which replaced the parking lots on East Northampton Street, continues to attract more than 7,000 patrons per week.

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We've come a long way, but we have to keep going

WILKES-BARRE — In 1919 — one century ago — Wilkes-Barre was the nation's 83rd largest city.

Two years earlier, in 1917, miners had pulled 100 million tons of hard coal from Northeastern Pennsylvania's mines — a new record for anthracite production.

Downtown was the bustling hub of retail, commerce, and entertainment for 250,000 people who called the Wyoming Valley home.

From Glen Lyon to West Pittston, the Valley floor was a dense carpet of tight-knit towns and neighborhoods, woven from double-blocks and company homes, Main Streets and corner stores, parish churches and local schools, factories and railroad yards.



Larry Newman
Guest Columnist

The residents of the Wyoming Valley of 1919 — two-thirds of them born in another country — comprised Pennsylvania's third-largest population center. Most came here for the opportunity to perform hard — often brutal — work, and the promise of better lives for themselves and their families.

It's understandable that people are nostalgic about that lost age. Only a few years after 1919, our region began a long, hard downhill slide, punctuated by anthracite's collapse, population loss, and the slow unraveling of our civic and economic fabric.

It's easy to overlook the decades of heroic efforts to rebuild the local economy — which ultimately resulted in hundreds of new industries and tens of thousands of new jobs — because those efforts were pushing against powerful national trends that didn't favor "legacy" industrial cities like ours, and against devastating setbacks like Hurricane Agnes.

And, it's understandable that people who grew up here often have a palpable sense of loss. They look around, remembering the Wyoming Valley before the wrenching effects of industrial decline and socio-economic change, and they grow hopeless about the current state of our region by comparison.

Some wait for the return of the "good old days," always measuring new revitalization efforts against how things "used to be," and always finding deficiencies. New initiatives are met with cynicism — young people are counseled to get out.

But, here's the reality: there's no going back. Communities can't hide from larger economic and societal change, and they

See FORWARD | 4



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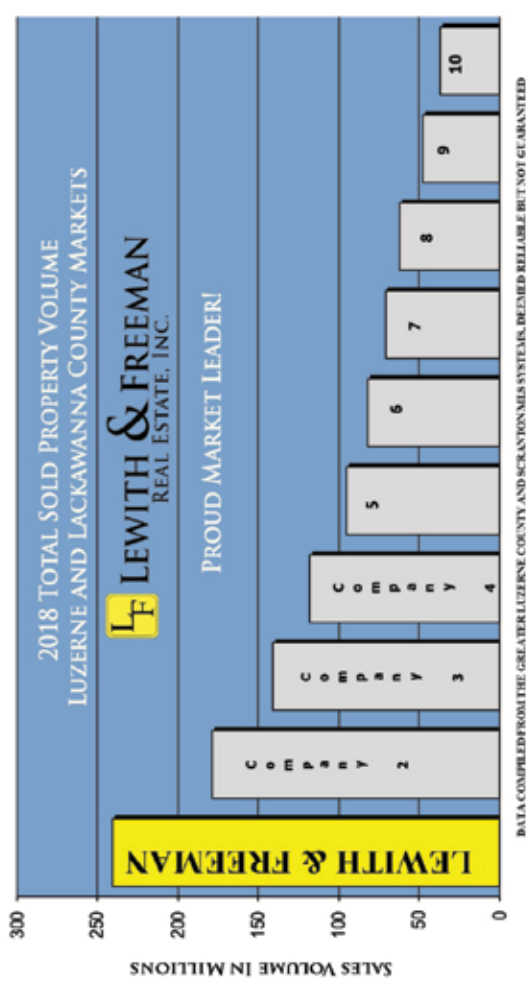


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Progress

From page 2

There are 21 loft condominiums in the once-vacant buildings next door, and Downtown Wilkes-Barre has become the region's Restaurant Row.

Newman goes on to point out that the old Woolworth's building isn't vacant any more — it houses the Wilkes/King's Barnes & Noble bookstore, Pepperjam and a dozen incubator tenants, and the Wilkes-Barre THINK Center — the hub of Wilkes-Barre's start-up sector.

And, Guard Insurance's landmark South River Street offices were just purchased by local entrepreneur Kris Jones, who will use them to house his portfolio of businesses, along with the area's first tech "accelerator."

In fact, Newman notes that downtown is home to more than two-dozen different tech start-ups, companies like Edify, Mobiniti, PlanGuru, Socialocca, and VizVibe. In fact, today, he says one-third of all the information-sector jobs in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton metro area are located in Downtown.

"The existence of these start-ups would have been unimaginable just a few years ago, but today they aren't just key contributors to the local economy, they're also helping to keep young people living here," Newman said. "And, the environment they want can only be found in a place like Downtown Wilkes-Barre."

Berkshire Hathaway GUARD

For instance, Berkshire Hathaway GUARD is in the process of moving its operations into the Tower on the Square.

Berkshire Hathaway currently has 664 full-time employees in Wilkes-Barre. In its new location at 39 Public Square, Berkshire Hathaway has occupied six floors. Full occupancy of the high-rise building is expected to be completed by the fall.

Carl J. Witkowski, Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President at Berkshire Hathaway GUARD Insurance Companies, said when the building's remodeling is completed, the company will have space to accommodate approximately 1,000 employees. "Even after all 10 floors of the Tower on the Square are fully occupied, we will continue to hold onto two other buildings in the downtown," Witkowski said. "We will still have employees at our three-story building on Market Street (the former M&T Bank building) and our five-story building on Frazer Lane."

Witkowski said the company is continuing to grow its staff and will



New benches are just one of the features on a newly refurbished Public Square.

Butch Comegys | Times Leader

Recently, Wilkes announced a \$2.5 million PennDOT/Wilkes University streetscape project, that will improve pedestrian and vehicular safety, add street and walkway lighting, and connect key street corridors of the city.

have an on-site job fair in the Tower building on Public Square. The job fair will be held in the Tower on Wednesday May 1, from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and on Sunday, May 5, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

King's and Wilkes

Then, there's King's College and Wilkes University — both schools have expanded their campuses in order to anchor both ends of Main Street.

King's College's health sciences programs adjoin Public Square, and the old Spring Brook Water Company building is being rehabbed to house the college's new civil and mechanical engineering programs.

In the meantime, Wilkes has transformed the second block of South Main Street with a new business school, a new home for the Sordoni Art Gallery, and student housing.

Recently, Wilkes announced a \$2.5 million PennDOT/Wilkes University streetscape project, that will improve pedestrian and vehicular safety, add street and walkway lighting, and connect key street corridors of the city.

Work on the project is set to begin on May 20 — the week after Wilkes' commencement — and be completed by Aug. 15. Wilkes University President Patrick Leahy said the project is "another outstanding example" of a public-private partnership.

Much of the project is funded by the Transportation Alternatives Program administered by PennDOT. Wilkes is contributing \$500,000 to address costs related to engineering and design.

What it includes:

The pedestrian improvement project is a continuation of the streetscape improvements Wilkes has made in the blocks surrounding its campus, specifically South Franklin Street. This next phase includes improvements to:

- South Main Street from Northampton Street to South Street.
- West South Street from South Franklin Street to South Main Street.
- South Franklin Street from Ross Street to West South Street (a pedestrian crosswalk with crossing signals will be installed in front of the Arnaud C. Marts Center).

BID Clean Team

Newman said downtown's public environment now gets focused attention thanks to the Downtown Wilkes-Barre Business Improvement District. He said the BID's Clean Team has removed more than 62 tons of trash and 1,400 graffiti tags from downtown sidewalks and properties since 2007 — for the past six years, they have installed and maintained 186 flower baskets through the spring and summer. There are new

pedestrian-scale streetlights, new sidewalks, and new street trees throughout downtown, with more to come later this year.

Housing

Most exciting, Newman said, is the housing market — downtown is again a live-work neighborhood.

• 216 new housing units have been constructed in downtown during the past 10 years, with another 36 units currently under construction.

• As those units have been snapped up, downtown's population has steadily become younger and better educated — the US Census tells us that Downtown's share of college-educated residents under the age of 35 is now almost twice that of Luzerne County as a whole.

"There's no question that downtown is on a positive trajectory," Newman said. "However, we also recognize that there's still a lot of work to do."

Newman says a great downtown harnesses its fundamental qualities — compactness, diversity and density of use, distinctive character, lots of activity — as its strengths.

"It builds on those qualities, along with a comfortable public environment, in order to create a place where people want to work, live, shop, and spend time," Newman said. "We've made a lot of progress, but we're not yet fully where we want to be."

Follow trajectory

Successful downtown revitalizations generally follow the same trajectory — Newman said one that moves from addressing the basics of clean, safe,

and attractive, to a place that can support the arts and entertainment, and then restaurants, and then downtown housing, and finally new retail and office tenants.

"We're still working our way along that path," he said.

Through it all, Newman said downtown has become remarkably vibrant during the evenings, but that isn't always the case at other times of day. He said there are still too many vacant buildings and too many gaps.

"We don't yet have a consistent critical mass of activity — particularly retail activity," Newman said. "And, throughout downtown, the quality of the public environment simply isn't where it needs to be."

So, Newman says, we need to continue to foster new investment of all kinds.

"We need to do a better job with historic preservation," he said. "And, we need to provide a more consistently hospitable public realm. In particular, we need to continue our work to remake Public Square."

Then, there's the discussion about safety. Newman says it's clear that, when it comes to this issue, facts don't really matter — the statistics may say one thing, but public perceptions say another.

One effective weapon in combating those perceptions is simple — get more people downtown.

"We need to continue to bring more people downtown to experience the improvements for themselves instead of believing whatever they happen to read online," Newman said. "Survey

results make it clear — as people spend more time in downtown, their perceptions of downtown steadily improve."

It's also undeniable that downtown is a very busy place, and it attracts all sorts of people, Newman noted. When individuals come downtown and engage in uncivil behavior, that has a negative impact on everyone else — and it can't be tolerated.

"So, we continue to work with the city and the police department to ensure that downtown provides a comfortable public environment," Newman said.

However, Newman said we must also remember that, for better or worse, downtown is a reflection of our entire community — and that means that all our community's problems, from poverty to addiction to mental illness, are going to show up there in a very visible fashion.

"The challenges that we sometimes see playing out on downtown's sidewalks and public spaces aren't only downtown issues," Newman said. "And they aren't going to be solved by downtown stakeholders alone. They are the region's issues, and if they aren't addressed forthrightly, they'll continue to drag the entire community down."

Nevertheless, Newman remains very positive about Downtown Wilkes-Barre's future — and, based on the array of private investments that are being made throughout downtown — from the first block of North River Street to the second block of South Main Street — it's clear that many others feel the same way.

Forward

From page 2

can't freeze themselves in time.

You can either be an actor in shaping your own story, or you will be acted upon.

There is no third option.

And, here's another reality: the Wyoming Valley isn't alone.

Brain drain, factory and store closings, the opioid crisis, neighborhood decline, and struggling Main Streets are issues confronting cities and towns across the nation.

In the recent book *Our Towns*, authors James and Deborah Fallows describe four years traversing the United States by single-engine plane. They visited dozens of communities from Maine to Arizona — including two Pennsylvania cities, Allentown and Erie — in order to understand how small-town America has been navigating change at the local level.

And, they recorded how some of those communities are turning themselves around — not by waiting for good fortune to fall from the sky — but by the slow, incremental work of rebuilding

civic muscle and regenerating themselves as places where people want to live.

When I finally had a chance to read *Our Towns* in full, a chapter toward the end, titled "10½ Signs of Civic Success," caught my attention. In it, the Fallows describe the common factors they saw in those small cities and towns — Rust Belt and Sun Belt, red state and blue state — that are successfully charting a path forward.

So, let's consider the Fallows' checklist of those things distinguishing the



Times Leader file photo

See FORWARD | 5 Larry Newman, executive director of Diamond City Partnership.

WYOMING VALLEY ART LEAGUE



The Wyoming Valley Art League calls the Circle Centre for the Arts in Wilkes-Barre home.

Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Bringing art, culture to the community

By Geri Gibbons | For Times Leader

WILKES-BARRE – The Wyoming Valley Art League has served as an asset to the community for more than 60 years, providing benefits that go far beyond simply the appreciation of fine arts hanging on its wall, but also in community outreach, performance art and the written word.

The building that the organization now owns, was previously owned by the Luzerne County Medical Society, with a circular room reflecting the structure's name, Circle Centre for the Arts.

The center recently opened its spring juried art show, which will run until June 13. With more than 80 entries in each of five categories, the show brings beauty and color to both floors of the building.

The show will run at the same time as the Fine Arts Fiesta, providing a chance for art lovers to take a few minute walk to enjoy the art league's offerings.

The Art League will also have a tent set up at the Fiesta to show off their members' artwork and to reach out to the community.

Robert Husty, the organization's coordinator, said the art league partners with other community organization, including the Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce, Wilkes University and the Sordoni Art Gallery to bring the arts to Wilkes-Barre and surrounding area.

The organization's round striking building, with a South Franklin Street address, can be seen and accessed from South Main Street, putting it close to the city's "restaurant row," and within easy walking distance from downtown, making it part of what is known as the city's "Art Block."

This spot has made the Art League a natural for the city's "Third Friday Art Walk," which begins in April and runs through early fall.

The Art League also offers a monthly Sunday at the Circle, with differ-

The organization was started in 1954 by a group of women committed to bringing culture to the Wyoming Valley. Although appreciation for art and commitment to the community has been a constant within the organization, much has also changed, with the league finding a permanent home on South Franklin Street in 2011.



Wyoming Valley Art League coordinator Robert Husty and President Don Armstrong stand with juried art entries in the gallery of the Circle Centre for the Arts.



Don Armstrong, president of the Wyoming Valley Art League, looks at sculptures for the members' juried art show recently.

ent types of art, including performing art, for those attending.

The league's Don Armstrong said during an age where schools are dropping art, drama and music programs, the organization is increasingly important in providing cultural opportunities to residents.

Armstrong said the

league has hosted elementary and high school students at the center to help them gain appreciation of art in an interactive environment.

Students were able to look at art and then take time to write about. An activity that went over exceedingly well.

"We were able to bring art into word," said

Patricia Lacy, a member who assisted with the program.

The Art League also seeks to go out into the community, loaning art to local businesses to be enjoyed a perhaps purchased.

Recently the organization worked with the Linde Corporation, hanging art on the business'

walls. The Art League is also reaching out to other businesses and is hoping to also partner with them, bringing art to the workplace.

The organization also many performances and classes for both members and the community, offering an art class at Ruth's Place about twice monthly.

Armstrong said the Wyoming Valley provides a wonderful opportunity for its residents to purchase beautiful art at a reasonable cost with many artists featured by the league well-known in the art world nationally.

Springtime, Armstrong said, has always been a time for a mini-renaissance of art, with the Art Walk and Fine Arts Fiesta bringing residents, artists and non-artists alike, to the center city to appreciate and learn about art.

For more information about the Wyoming Art League access their website at <http://wyomingvalleyartleague.org/>.

Forward

From page 4

places where things seem to work:

1. People work together on practical local possibilities, rather than allowing bitter disagreements about national politics to keep them apart.

2. You can pick out the local "patriots" (those who are the answer to the question, "Who makes this town go?").

3. The phrase "public-private partnership" refers to something real (In successful towns, people can point to something specific and say, "This is what a partnership means.")

4. People know their civic story (Successful cities seem to have a guiding story – one explaining why the place works).

5. They have healthy downtowns (This seems obvious, but it is probably the quickest single marker of the condition of a town).

6. They are near a research university.

7. They have, and care about, a community college.

8. They have distinctive, innovative schools (Across our country, we saw cities experimenting with schools that could succeed — and we noticed where that was not so).

9. They make themselves open.

10. They have big plans.

10.5. And, finally: a city on the way back will have at least one craft brewery, maybe more.

There's nothing magical or comprehensive about this list — after all, it's based on one set of observations — but it's unquestionably thought provoking.

So, think about it for yourself: when it comes to these characteristics, how is our community — the Greater Wilkes-Barre area — faring? Where do we hit the mark? Where do we need to do better?

And, the next time you start longing for the "good old days," consider this: in 1919, Wilkes-Barre was the largest city in the United States without any college or university to educate its young people.

Today, Greater Wilkes-Barre boasts five different colleges and universities enrolling more than 16,000 students.

That didn't happen by accident, but through hard collective effort.

And, if you look around the Valley, you'll see many other areas — from downtown revitalization to entrepreneurial development;

economic recovery to environmental reclamation; public libraries to parks and trails — where we've made similarly remarkable progress.

In other words, while change is difficult, it's certainly possible.

So, we need to move forward with purpose. We must "tend our garden" — if we don't care about our own communities, who else will?

Let's focus on the issues that continue to hold us back — limited economic opportunities; distressed core neighborhoods; struggling public schools; a lack of governmental capacity; the near-complete absence of planning — and redouble our efforts to work together and correct them.

We need to learn from our mistakes, and from the mistakes of other communities, lest we repeat them.

We still have some distance to travel — but we've already come a long way.

Let's keep going.

Larry Newman is executive director of Diamond City Partnership.

To move forward, we all must work 'together'

WILKES-BARRE — For decades coal was king, making Northeastern Pennsylvania the center of the economic universe.

Our region supplied urban centers such as Philadelphia and New York City with anthracite and was a critical component to helping fuel the American Industrial Revolution.

However, as time passed, and the dependence on anthracite dwindled, our region was saddled with mine-scarred land, a struggling economy, and an unskilled workforce.

The collapse of coal was not all negative, as the industry highlighted the work ethic, determination and resiliency of the residents of Northeastern PA. Those characteristics of our community allowed the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business & Industry, along with our fellow Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) in Scranton and Hazleton, to develop and execute a regional strategy to convert that mine-scarred land and develop business and industrial parks. Leveraging the strengths of our people (workforce), we were successful in attracting new industries to the region, and in the process, diversified our local economy.

Fast forward to 2019,



Miner's Mill Craft Distillery founder Nick Rosati, right, describes his business to Wilkes University Allan P. Kirby Center for Free Enterprise & Entrepreneurship Executive Director Rodney Ridley and Wilkes University Executive-in-Residence Jerry Ephault at the Wilkes-Barre THINK Center during a Wilkes-Barre Connect Pitch event last year. The pitch event is just one of the numerous programs Wilkes-Barre Connect holds throughout the year.

and the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber is still focused on diversifying our local economy. But today, it's not done through real estate development, but through unique, custom-based solutions and programs delivered through Wilkes-Barre Connect.

Representing the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business & Industry, Wilkes-Barre Connect is the Entrepreneurial and Economic Development provider in Northeastern PA. Connect is powered by its partners — Penn State University, Wilkes University, Ben Franklin

Technology Partners, and the Diamond City Partnership — along with our entrepreneurial partners in Hazleton (Jocelyn Sterenchock-CAN BE) and Scranton (Aaron Whitney-Scranton Chamber). Together, utilizing a well-structured local, national and global net-

work, we "connect" entrepreneurs, start-ups, and existing businesses to the resources, providers, and facilities they need to grow in Northeastern PA. Together, we have developed a true entrepreneurial ecosystem. Our goal at Connect is not just focused on

programming, data and metrics — it's about changing the culture of Northeast PA. We are done being referred to as coal country. We are transforming Northeast PA into a hub of innovation and creativity.

See BOYLAN | 11

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Residents upbeat about downtown



Eileen Kenyon looks over Main Street from the shared deck at the Elevations Lofts on Main.

Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

By Jerry Lynott | jlynott@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Eileen Kenyon walks the walk and talks the talk about the downtown.

It's home to the 73-year-old retiree and has almost everything she needs.

"I always swore I would come back," Kenyon said.

She returned to her birthplace 10 years ago after working in New Jersey and moved into one of the lofts at 14 E. Northampton St. next to the RC The-

atres Wilkes-Barre Movies 14.

Loft living suited her fine.

"I wanted to own something" that wasn't a house with a lawn to mow in the summer and snow to shovel from the sidewalks in the winter, she said.

She can come and go as she pleases, and does to the F.M. Kirby Center, the Osterhout Free Library, the River Commons and elsewhere downtown.

"I can walk to just about anything. I like the community. I met a lot of people down here. I have a lot of friends," Kenyon summed up the benefits of her choice to be an urban dweller.

She's got company as the downtown has become a preferred location with the conversion of some of the city's tallest and oldest office buildings into luxury living spaces. Kenyon's neighbors are a mixed bunch of young people, professionals and seniors.

The millions of dollars of private development, combined with the investments by King's College and Wilkes University and the city have paid off and breathed new life into the heart of Wilkes-Barre teeming with new shops, businesses, residences and restaurants.

"You have a vibrant center of the city. If you have something vibrant, they will come. The more they come, the more vibrant it will become," Kenyon said. "It's a ripple effect."

There's room for more and Kenyon presented her wish list of boutique shops and restaurants that open for lunch.

Still she likes the transformation.

"Wilkes-Barre got a bad



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

CIRCLES ON THE SQUARE

A Public Square staple since 1985



Debi Rudy, Brenda Sokolowski, Flo Bellucci, Kristeen Kania and Qiana Brown of Circles on the Square.

Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

WILKES-BARRE — Circles on the Square has mainly stayed the same with its crazy and delicious offerings while outside, Public Square has seen many changes since the delicatessen and emporium opened nearly 35 years ago.

Nestled behind a table in the back kitchen doing paper work next to a chest freezer, a wall shelf full of supplies and hot ovens, Debi Rudy continues the legacy her late husband, Phil Rudy, and his business partner, Steve Gibbs, started in January 1985.

“Phil was the type who wanted to work hard and have fun and he did that with Circles,” Debi Rudy said. “Nothing really hasn’t changed, we continue to offer quality and great food to our loyal customers.”

As workers slip, slid and hustle in the back kitchen preparing for another busy day of offering sandwiches and salads, Debi Rudy recalled when she met Phil.

Around the time when Circles opened, Debi Rudy began working for Attorney Carl Frank as a legal secretary, a position she continues today while also operating Circles.

Standing in line one day inside Circles for lunch, she said Phil “flirted” with her by asking her a question. Phil told her if she answered the question correctly, she didn’t have to pay for her lunch.

“Ever since then, we were



Debi Rudy sits in her office area at Circles on the Square. On the chair she sits in Phil Rudy, the late founder of the sandwich shop and Rudy’s husband, left a ‘Boss Lady’ photo.

seven feet off the ground, that’s how passionate we were about each other,” Debi Rudy said.

Phil Rudy would work 16 hours

a day, seven days a week. After the two began dating, Debi Rudy

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Downtown

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rap and many years ago it deserved it,” Kenyon said.

But it’s changed with time, money and through the efforts of people and organizations.

“You’d hardly recognize the place from 10 years ago,” Kenyon said.

The growth doesn’t go unchecked, however. Kenyon, a co-coordinator of the Downtown Residents’ Association, keeps an eye on the happenings.

“Our mission is to improve the quality of life not just for the downtown

residents, but for all of the people of Wilkes-Barre,” Kenyon said.

Pat Parks joins Kenyon in that endeavor as the other co-coordinator.

“One of the reasons we’re doing it is we’re trying to get rid of the bad impression people have of downtown,” Parks said.

She and her husband Wes bought a home on South Franklin Street that was built in 1873 and restored with three others vacant properties by the now defunct non-profit development corporation CityVest.

“We like an urban setting,” Pat Parks said. “It’s very nice living down-

town because you can walk everywhere.”

She and Wes had been living in San Diego before their separate moves east. Wes, 76, came first to take a job as an engineering professor at the Penn State Wilkes-Barre campus in Lehman Township in 1997. Pat, who said she’s close in age to her husband, joined him eight years later.

The couple bought half of the South Franklin Street double-block after Wes said in 2004 he went into the office of Larry Newman, who was a vice president for the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry of

the Diamond City Partnership at the time, and asked, “Where does one find old houses?”

Newman, now executive director of the Diamond City Partnership, the downtown economic development organization, showed Wes Parks the CityVest designs and sold him on the project. “It was an opportunity to live in an old house,” Wes Parks said

From his front door Wes Parks takes regular walks with his fox terrier and meets up with others walking their dogs. He said it’s one of the positive aspects of living downtown.

Safety isn’t an issue. “For me, I’m not concerned,” he said.

He encouraged others to live downtown in one of the many houses on the market. “There are a

lot of them there,” Wes Parks said.

The recent development has focused on the office buildings near Public Square, but Pat Parks wished the attention turned more toward the neighborhood.

“It would be nice if they could improve the houses farther down,” she said.

Reach Jerry Lynott at 570-991-6120 or on Twitter @TLJerryLynott.



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

The city is reflected in the Elevations Lofts on Main front door.

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Circles

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said she told him to work six days, having one day to themselves.

After Phil's passing in March 2017 at the age of 68, Debi Rudy began running Circles leaving the food preparations and menu selections to Brenda Sokolowski and a dedicated staff.

One item Circles is famous for is their day's menu specials. You never know if a sandwich will be named after you.

Who makes up those crazy sandwich names?

"Phil started naming sandwiches when Circles opened using a twist of some sort, whether it was a current event, seasonal changes or after someone he knew or if someone was in the news," Debi Rudy said.

Today, Sokolowski makes up the names for the day's menu specials.



Circles on the Square on Wilkes-Barre's Public Square.

Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

"I stole his ideas," Sokolowski said. "Phil was a riot and a great man. We all miss him."

Sandwiches offered by Circles are made with Boarshead deli meats and cheeses. To say

the sandwiches are overstuffed would be an understatement. And they offer pickles in a little cup.

Phil Rudy and Gibbs met as students at Wilkes University

prior to the Agnes Flood of 1972. Both moved away but returned to the Wyoming Valley to give Wilkes-Barreans "A gold mine of good food" on the Square, says their 1985 news-

paper advertisement.

Circles also offers homemade soups, a salad bar, T-shirts, gifts and catering for parties.

While the only change to Circles is their menu that has grown with offerings, Public Square has been transformed with the elimination of the canopy and public transportation buses being moved to the Intermodal Transportation Center.

"I thought it was a good idea to remove the canopy, it really opened up Public Square making us and other stores easily visible," Debi Rudy noted.

As customers line up to order their sandwiches, a smiling Phil Rudy is pictured above them, fastened high on the wall next to the large menu board. Of course, Phil stands behind a sandwich in the forefront.

"Everyday I come in, I look up and talk to him. I think he's looking down and no doubt, he's telling us what to do," Debi Rudy says.

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From page 6

Leveraging our academic capital, tremendous business and community leadership, and our local, state and federal government partners, we have successfully channeled our hard working, coal industry mentality, into a passionate community ready to grow from within. A true ecosystem where our residents have the power to launch new businesses, products and solutions right in their own backyard.

With that fire now lit, the role of Wilkes-Barre Connect has become even more clear. We must lead this innovation revolution — but it cannot be done alone. We need our partners to answer the bell — and

they have.

Whether it's our academic partners (King's, Wilkes, Misericordia, LCCC, and Penn State) or our Connect Avengers (Kris Jones, Ryan Hertel, Holly Pilcavage, Gerard Durling, Helen Lavelle, and Chris Nash) — our partners have been relentless. They have helped launch new programs, engage the community, and help us change the perception of our region.

And together we have set the stage for our complete transformation to a region known as a hub of innovation and creativity. Just this past month, Connect launched its first PODCAST out of the THINK Center; announced a partnership with Kris Jones to open the region's first Accelerator Building in downtown Wilkes-Barre; and

worked with the United States Postal Service and Maga Design Group to launch a national Academic-Industry Partnership right here in Northeast PA. These are just a few highlights of the amazing work being done right here in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

With the players and programs now in place, Connect will continue on telling our story — not just of the unique programs and solutions we offer at Connect, but of the amazing people, places and businesses in Northeast PA.

It's all been leading up to the launch of our first ever Wilkes-Barre Connect Conference. This three-day event will be held at the Woodlands Inn & Resort on November 17-19, to showcase the innovative and creative side of Northeast-



Bill Tarutis | For Times Leader
Misericordia University associate director of alumni & annual giving Lauren Gorney, left, and Greater Nanticoke Area High School student Jasmyne Morgans greet fellow women entrepreneurs during the Wilkes-Barre Connect Spotlight Series at the Wilkes-Barre THINK Center last year.

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known it could be.

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Joe Boylan is executive director is Wilkes-Barre Connect.

INNOVATIONS IN THE ABINGTONS



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HKQ Law established **HKQ Kids**, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting child safety and public awareness of child hazards as one of many ways the HKQ Law Team gives back to the community that has given us so much.

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Fate of region, educational institutions 'joined at the hip'

Positive growth in business fundamentals, key indicators



King's College Engineering Department Chair Paul Lamore stands in a future classroom of the future Mulligan Center for Engineering in the former Spring Brook Water Building on Franklin Street in Wilkes-Barre.

Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

By Bill O'Boyle | boboyle@timesleader.com

A significant key to the economic growth and stability of any region rests with the quality of education at all levels. Northeastern Pennsylvania — and

specifically Luzerne County — is fortunate to have five colleges and universities that provide numerous programs that produce thousands of graduates each year.

Larry Newman, executive director of the Diamond City Partnership, steward of Wilkes-Barre's downtown, had this to say.

"Consider this: in 1919, Wilkes-Barre was the largest city in the United States without any college or university to educate its young people," Newman said. "Today, Greater Wilkes-Barre boasts five different colleges and universities enrolling more than 16,000 students. That didn't happen by accident, but through hard collective effort."

Thomas P. Leary, President, Luzerne County Community College, has hundreds, if not thousands of success stories about his students.

Like the the time a young woman walked across the stage to receive her diploma as a graduate of the LCCC nursing program.

"As she approached me, I heard a little girl yell out 'mommy.' It was the graduate's daughter in the audience," Leary said. "I found out that this young lady was raising her child, working full-time, and caring for an aging parent."

After the ceremony, Leary had a conversation with the



Butch Comegys|For Times Leader

The Penn State Lion outside of the new Science Building at Penn State Wilkes-Barre.

graduate. She shared with him that it had always been a dream of hers to become a registered nurse but her life's obligations had gotten in the way of her accomplishing that sooner.

"She said she had to tell her little girl at times to go play or be quiet because she had to study," Leary said.

"It reminded me of how her accomplishment will inspire her little girl and it really transforms not only individuals, but generations. This

is a story that literally can be told hundreds of times over. This is how LCCC impacts individual lives in our communities."

Leary said Northeastern Pennsylvania has made substantial economic progress in the past several years with the many companies which have located in our region.

"These new businesses are providing thousands of new jobs for the area including significant oppor-

tunities for our graduating students, as well as current students who are employed as they work to complete their degree," Leary said. "Luzerne County Community College is formulating partnerships with these new employers as we continue to join with the community to provide training and education for the workforce."

Leary said college officials and company leaders are developing working

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By most economic measures, we have seen positive growth in our business fundamentals and key indicators.

We are growing in jobs, wages, attraction/retention and business diversity.

The Wyoming Valley is attracting hundreds of millions of dollars in private capital investment and creating millions of square feet of business inventory.

The investment in infrastructure has not only grown our existing legacy businesses, exemplified by the freshly minted expansions of Colours, Geisinger Health Plan and Berkshire Hathaway Guard, but with the attraction of new businesses like Chewy, Adidas, Patagonia, American Paper Bag, True Value, Ubiquity and Spreetail.

The result is an exponential growth in jobs over a wide range of skill sets advancing wages for our overall labor force. In the past 5 years we have seen our unemployment rate drop more than 6 percentage points from a high of 11 percent in 2013 to less than 4.5 percent in 2018.

Our job growth has been fueled by a broad range of businesses over a spectrum of industry segments that are drawn to the confluence of great business value propositions, an enviable "work ethic"/labor pool and a strong family lifestyle culture. The result is that we have developed a vibrant and stable economy through a measure of diversification.

At the same time, our strengthening economy has exposed a critical need in workforce. In our recent 2018 member government affairs survey, workforce was identified as our primary challenge with close to 70% of respondents indicating that they have hired or added new positions during the past twelve months but with a growing concern on the availability and quality of the workforce.

In business, your biggest asset is your labor force. Access to a talented labor force is one of the driving influences when businesses consider expanding existing operations or establishing new ones. Areas with the right skills, talent and expertise are the ones that will win the battle for job growth and business sustainability.

The availability of skilled talent and the gap between the existing workforce and the skills businesses need are key economic challenges; further exacerbated against the backdrop of historically low unemployment rates, a baby boomer generation of skilled labor poised for retirement and an increase in new jobs entering our region.

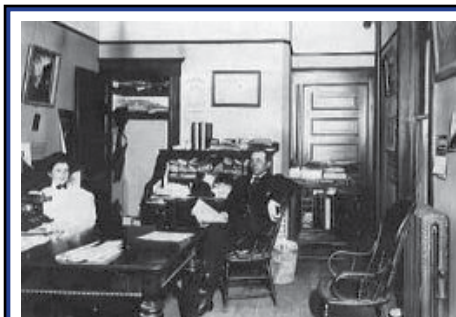
We need to ensure we are making the investments to connect and align our people and skill sets, train up where there are gaps and attract talent from both within and the outside.

Our focus as a Chamber must be to orchestrate and incubate workforce innovation through a multi-faceted coalition of our ABCs (academia, business community) leaders and organizations. Alignment of the key inputs must focus on the following; it must be data-driven and grounded in the regional numbers, linked to education/trade certification, engaging in partnership with the business community, connecting the labor force

See GROWTH | 14



Wico van Genderen
Guest Columnist



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Growth

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to business, and ensuring investments are maintained and innovative funding sources are tapped.

And finally, it must be constructed on the premise that the labor/business life cycle is connected to a living, breathing business ecosystem that must be measured, nurtured and managed.

As a business community we are engaging with our educators to align the workforce needs and provide greater connection to job pathways through certification and internships.

A great example is the work being done by Luzerne County Community College (LCCC) as both a feeder system into higher education, and just as critical, to provide specialization and skill set certifications for the trades in critical occupation needs such as machinists, mechanics, CDL drivers, engineers and nurses. Another is with our WB Connect Ecosystem where we endeavor to connect our young talent pool who doesn't think they can find a match for their skill-set, with businesses that didn't know this young talent pool was available at their door step.

Today, Wilkes Barre and Northeastern PA are at a critical juncture. While there is wide agreement in our member surveys and employer round-tables that a skilled talent pool is essential for the future growth of business operations, there is also a looming concern.

And that is with low unemployment trends, baby boomer retirement, and new jobs coming into the region, we are faced with the very real potential of a net deficit in our labor pool. The need for a dynamic workforce has never been greater than it is today.

And this is not a local parochial issue; it is a regional NEPA issue that requires a collaborative partnership of our academic, business and community leaders to create a business ecosystem where NEPA talent can thrive to uplift the community and quality of life in the region.

Revitalizing workforce in Wilkes Barre and the NEPA area holds infinite potential for some economic breakthroughs and a new era of growth.

But to get there we have some heavy lifting to do.

With a region known for its strong work ethic, affordable cost of living and a large college student population to draw from, we have a great start and now need to build upon this solid base.

Hip

From page 14

relationships which enhances the ability to fulfill the college's mission of serving the education and training needs of the region. Since LCCC has the ability to align its academic programs with labor needs in the area, it's important to remain in constant contact with area employers so that students graduate with skills that employers need.

"Additionally, tuition incentive plans offered by the businesses and industries in our region are a great benefit for individuals to assist with enhancing their skills and competencies for mobility within the workplace," he said.

King's College

Rev. John Ryan, president of King's College, said the economy in Northeast Pennsylvania has been improving since 2010, with unemployment in Luzerne County dropping and currently below 5 percent. He said the top four industries in Luzerne County, which includes educational services, account for more than one half of all employment in the county.

"King's College, along with other institutions of higher education, has been a force for positive change in Wilkes-Barre and NEPA," Ryan said. "King's College has provided over \$100 million of direct economic impact to our area in 2018-2019 including: \$13.3 million in new construction projects, \$8 million in student spending, and \$16.3 million for federal, state, local and property taxes."

Ryan said some 60 percent of students at King's College come from outside NEPA. Students from different parts of our state, country and world chose to come to NEPA to live and to study. Ryan said a welcoming, attractive and economically vibrant NEPA is necessary to continue to attract outstanding students from both within and outside our region.

"The fate of our region and institutions of higher education are joined at the hip," Ryan said. "An energetic and lively NEPA economy supports higher education. Higher education, through student formation, workforce training, community services and



Jones

Botzman

Ryan

Leary

Leahy

direct spending, support the NEPA economy."

As a native son of Wilkes-Barre, Ryan said he is one who has benefited from the social and educational formation of this area.

"I am especially proud to see the economy of our region improving and making outstanding contributions to the common good of our state, country and world," he said.

Penn State Wilkes-Barre

Dr. Dale Jones, Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer at Penn State Wilkes-Barre, said the economic health of the Wilkes-Barre area and Northeastern Pennsylvania region depends on the strength of our communities, businesses, and citizens.

"A vibrant economy improves the quality of life in our region," Jones said. "Penn State Wilkes-Barre is an anchor in the region. We have been here for 103 years bolstering the economy."

Jones said Penn State Wilkes-Barre contributed \$23.3 million to the local and Pennsylvania economies in fiscal year 2017, and supported, directly and indirectly, 311 Pennsylvania jobs. A new study, released in February 2019 by Penn State, focused on measuring the university's impact in communities across the Commonwealth.

As part of the Invent Penn State initiative, Jones said Penn State Wilkes-Barre partners with the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry to promote employment growth, business development, and entrepreneurial spirit in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Services at the Wilkes-Barre THINK Center on Main Street in downtown Wilkes-Barre are offered free of charge to community members, Penn State students, other local college students, and employers. Programming and resources include speaking events, pitch competitions, start-up support, networking opportunities, business development, employment outreach, conferences, and business space.

regional economy and improve lives," Jones said. "There are many other ways in which Penn State Wilkes-Barre generates economic activity in Northeastern Pennsylvania and benefits students, families and residents. Examples of these secondary benefits are numerous."

Beyond the \$23 million in total economic contributions measured by the study, Jones said additional secondary impacts of Penn State Wilkes-Barre's presence in the region not measured include: business revenue and personal income generated by visitors to campus educational and cultural events, and other attractions annually; donations of money and time by Penn State Wilkes-Barre students, faculty, staff, and alumni to important regional causes; fostering new business startups and driving student career success and job creation; providing workforce training programs through continuing education; and projecting Penn State through its teaching, research, and service to assist Northeastern Pennsylvania compete and succeed on a global stage.

Wilkes University

Patrick Leahy, president of Wilkes University, said though there are challenges in our region, there are also significant opportunities.

"An example are the recent recombinations of Berkshire Hathaway Guard Insurance and Kris Jones to downtown Wilkes-Barre," Leahy said. "This further supports the idea of creating a technology hub in our host city, generating incredible experiences for Wilkes students via internships, full-time employment or entrepreneurial support."

Leahy said Wilkes' engineering and business programs, as well as the work of the Allan P. Kirby Center for Free Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, are a natural fit for this kind of economic growth.

See COLLEGES | 15

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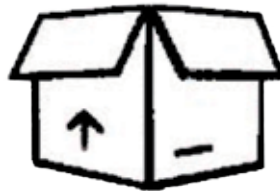
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King's turns to past for the future

School restoring two historic Wilkes-Barre buildings



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

The former Memorial Presbyterian Church on North Street in Wilkes-Barre is being transformed into King's College's campus chapel.

By Mark Guydish | mguydish@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — King's College students can get a physical example of past being prologue this fall, as construction crews renovate two buildings that, combined, have stood for a quarter of a millennium. Both the former Spring

Brook Water Supply Co. building (1907) and the Memorial Presbyterian Church (1872) are set to open for use as, respectively, the new Mulligan Engineering Center and the Chapel of Christ the King at the George & Giovita Maffei Family Commons.

A recent tour shows how conversion efforts focus on making historic and contemporary merge, rather than collide.

At the church on North Main Street, that means restoring wood floors, chestnut wainscoting and meticulous stained glass windows, while making a white marble apse to offset a coal altar — an often overlooked gem sculpted in 1956 by Charles Edgar Patience but relegated these days to a side meditation room in the current chapel.

"The white will really offset the black," The Rev. Thomas Looney predicted. The campus ministry director and college chaplain noted it will also give the 4,500 pound altar a larger audience on a regular basis.

At the Spring Brook Building, renovating history has meant restoration of copper cladding on many windows, new elevator and stair towers, and converting a vault into new

purposes, including a data closet and what may become the most secure janitorial supply closet in the state.

The first floor vault was the hardest to convert. Original builders had not merely made the back wall of the vault a good foot thick, they had placed the metal rails from a train track vertically in the concrete, all of which was cut out to turn the vault into a passageway between rooms.

The church, Looney noted, was built to serve coal miners, echoing the original mission of King's College. It memorialized three children of Calvin Wadhams who died of scarlet fever. Three intricate stained glass windows have been given a like-new look as the sun shines through depictions of the children accompanied by angels.

An organ has been removed and stored "Until we can hopefully afford to restore it," Looney said, and the original pews were sold when the church closed,



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

The exterior stone on the former Memorial Presbyterian Church on North Street was harvested from Campbell's Ledge and barged down the Susquehanna River for the building which was constructed in 1872.

so the college obtained pews from a church in Massachusetts which are being restored, along with furnishings from the original church.

Along with all the restoration, the college is building an addition with office space, restrooms and a conference center. Looney said King's

hopes to reach out to former members of Memorial Presbyterian for the opening this fall, and encouraged any to call him at 570-208-5830.

The Spring Brook building has presented more challenges, in part because it is being con-

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Colleges

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"The idea that we can create professional opportunities that not only attract students to Wilkes, but encourage them to stay and invest in the area after graduation, is a win-win," Leahy said. "To do so in the business and tech sectors can position our region for success now and in the future."

Leahy said Wilkes remains committed to

the downtown and will continue to seek out ways to grow the public-private partnerships that make cities successful.

"A recent example is the next phase of our pedestrian safety project that improves and beautifies city streets not just for Wilkes, but for our neighboring businesses and residents," Leahy said. "That kind of investment would not occur if not for Wilkes. Wilkes-Barre can become the next great college town — Wilkes is thrilled to be

a part of it."

Misericordia University

Thomas J. Botzman, Ph.D., president of Misericordia University, said private higher education has a direct interest in educating students who are skilled and employable.

"Students want value for tuition," Botzman said. "They want good jobs."

Botzman said Misericordia's programs must offer the contemporary literacies and real-word

application needed to attract students so it is clear to them that upon graduation they are employable, able to drive economic growth, and enhance our communities in a positive way.

"Our professional programs are under-pinned by the liberal arts," Botzman said. "Employers have said that people with broad-based thinking skills are needed to solve challenges and drive innovation. Certainly, that must be true for Northeastern Penn-

sylvania. Liberal arts encourages those thinking skills."

Botzman said caring, motivated students, faculty and staff, like those at Misericordia University, also enhance our region by providing thousands of hours of community service, in-depth service learning, and philanthropic support for dozens of worthwhile projects each year.

"Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy offers much potential," adds Botzman. "I have seen

the expert presentations that illustrate how we sometimes lag behind the national economy.

"But our colleges and universities are producing new waves of talented graduates each year who offer a high level of professional competence and creative thinking. We also attract brilliant individuals to live and work here and complement the amazing talent who are born and raised in NEPA."

Reach Bill O'Boyle at 570-991-6118 or on Twitter @TLBillOBoyle.

Big things happening at Misericordia

Henry Science Center will be largest academic building on campus



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Misericordia University president Tom Botzman, shown in his office, is overseeing the construction of what will be the largest academic building on the school's campus.

By Mark Guydish | mguydish@timesleader.com

DALLAS TWP. — The big news at Misericordia University is, well, literally *the* biggest, at least by square footage.

The Frank M. and Dorothea Henry Science Center will be “the largest academic building on campus,” University President Thomas Botzman pointed out. When completed it will be larger than the current size

Botzman dives deeper: The study areas will have white board or glass walls, given students a lot of area to write on while they brainstorm. The classrooms will all be wired with computer screens that allow students to see closeups of anything an instructor might be working on (The anatomy lab, for example, will have an overhead camera that can zoom in to a specific feature). Course work can also be pulled on the student screens.

While Misericordia remains “the only school in the area to have a cadaver lab,” Botzman noted simulators will allow students to do

things they can't on real bodies, such as seeing the nervous system on one side of a body while looking at the muscular system on the other.

The center will have a nuclear magnetic resonance machine that can be used to quickly determine things that otherwise require samples to be sent to a lab for analysis. And the whole building will be well suited for work that is “more mat intensive, more statistic intensive, more analytics,” Botzman added.

Plans call for a large new wing added to the existing science center, with a “knuckle” connecting the two into an L



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

George Godlewski discusses the new healthcare analytic program at Misericordia University.

shape. The knuckle, Van Etten said, will contain common spaces for stu-

king, Mercy Hall, which sports about 74,000 square feet.

Director of Facilities Mark Van Etten rattles of some of the feature of this three-story, state of the art colossus: “Seven lecture-style classrooms, 16 teaching labs, 9 research labs, two seminar rooms, three conference rooms, nine breakout study areas for students.”

dents. Total cost of the new section and renovation to the existing building is \$45 million, but that includes a lot of work that had to be done to put the building where it will be.

The University has already paved new parking lots to make up for the space that will be lost to make room for the expansion. Some utilities that run under the existing lot also have to be moved. changes are needed to provide the extra power all that technology will require. And the road that runs in the front of the existing building will disappear, with traffic re-routed to what will, for most people on campus, be the back of the center — though it will look more like a front to those driving by.

The road change means new green space between Mercy Hall and the science center, with a new walkway

wide enough to be used by emergency or maintenance vehicles if necessary. The change, Botzman noted, will help unify the campus visually.

“There was an awful lot of planning over several years,” Botzman said. “We included faculty, staff, students, people at other institutions, consultants, people we met who had good ideas. They all played a part in deciding how we could put this together, how to make it a place that can best serve everyone.”

While the science center is the big news, Misericordia is moving in other directions, both programatically and physically. The school recently purchased the Payne Printery property, just “over the hill,” as Botzman put it, from the athletic area, which is also undergoing upgrades. There are no specific plans for it, but

Botzman is confident a similar review of options will lead to something that serves the school and the region well.

And it is launching the graduate Healthcare Analytics program this fall, a completely online course geared primarily for adult learners who, as program Director George Godlewski put it “ideally someone who has an education in health care, who has experience working in health care.”

Available full-time or part-time, the program can be completed full-time in four semesters, and students who want to focus on something specific to their goals may be given the chance to “design their own course if they have a unique interest,” Godlewski said.

The goal is to look not so much at the process of health care, but to look at broader issues in improving quality, to “provide the opportunity to take a comprehensive dive into quality improvement in health care,” he said. Courses include study on ethics, data and analytics, patient experience and health care policy, among others.

The program includes a “capstone project” designed to let a student actually create a “product” that will improve some aspect of their health care within their real world setting. Make a clinic more efficient, say.

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New beginnings at Wilkes

As some projects come to fruition, others are just beginning



Bill Tarutis | For Times Leader

Wilkes University students are lead by bagpiper Butch Modzelewski and members of the faculty through the school's Gateway that connects South Main Street and South Franklin Street portions of the campus. The Gateway project is just one of several improvements the university has made around its campus. Its latest project is a streetscaping project on second block of South Main Street.

By Mark Guydish | mguydish@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE – On the one hand, Wilkes University is nearing completions: Completion of a major capital expansion that included a new art gallery, engineering center, and outdoor improvements; completion of the long-sought goal to be designated as a doctoral institution; and comple-

tion of Patrick Leahy's tenure as president.

But as usual Leahy, the university's cheerleader-in-chief for the last six years, sees beginnings and opportunities as the school prepares for his departure at end of July — and they extend deep into the community.

Take that doctoral designation, one Leahy predicted as far back as 2017. In January, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Learning fulfilled the goal by reclassifying Wilkes as a "doctoral/professional university."

"Why does that matter?" Leahy asked. "Okay, big deal, you're a doctoral university, what does that mean for this university and the community?"

"This is evidence the scale of the institution is expanding, is growing. It means that, yes, we are serving more students than ever before, but it means we have more faculty engaged in the life of Wilkes University than ever before. And those faculty members all come with their own interest in scholarship and research and spawning entrepreneurial activity, so that grows the kind of impact we can have."

It all spurs interdisciplinary cooperation in the school, which can mean more programs adapting to "needs in the marketplace." It means more improvements to the physical facilities. It means more emphasis on research and what Leahy likes to call "discovery." It means more support for other community programs, such as the SHINE after school program, the Kirby Center for Free Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, the Small Business Develop-



Bill Tarutis file photo | For Times Leader

ment center and the Family Business Alliance. Besides, the new programs and projects will keep coming after he leaves. A new master's degree in pharmacology and medicinal chemistry begins this fall, while renovation of the athletic fields across the river and more streetscape renovations around the

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See WILKES | 18



New students at Wilkes University are greeted by staff member Alex Reynolds.



A fourth floor classroom is near completion at the future Mulligan Center for Engineering.

Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

Wilkes

From page 17

automatically mean more doctoral program, it should make it easier to add programs at any level.

"I won't kid you, it's not likely any time soon we're going to be offering a PhD in English, but there might be doctoral programs in other health fields, doctoral programs in other professional fields like business, if the market presents the opportunity," he said. "Now we feel we're in a better position to move on that opportunity. As a doctoral university we just have more range."

Wilkes will also continue to support faculty research, and include undergraduates in that research. "We have pretty interesting innovations emerging that you wouldn't think Wilkes-Barre would be contributing toward, such as early cancer detection," Leahy said.

The goal, both in traditional research and in supporting entrepreneurship and business development, is always the same. "We want to figure out how the assets of our university can be expanded into the community."

Leahy leaves Wilkes with the school on target to meet all the goals of the current strategic plan by 2020, but he doesn't see Wilkes stopping at that point.

"There will always be the next project at a university that's hungry," he said. "And I think this university is hungry: Hungry to improve hungry to extend our mission, hungry to have a positive impact. And if that's the culture of a place, there will always be other projects."

Reach Mark Guldish at 570-991-6112 or on Twitter @TLMarkGuldish

King's

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verted for use by the expanding engineering department, complete with new labs, new classrooms, and a lot of new wiring for tech equipment — no small effort considering each story has a thick concrete floor (and thus, all but the top have a thick concrete ceiling).

Engineering Department Chair Paul Lamore showed off a second floor fireplace, a front room where arched windows are being restored after several were converted to hold air conditioning units, a large marble counter currently protected by particle board, and a basement that will house a fabrication lab.



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

This addition to the former Memorial Presbyterian Church will house a community room.

The part that is completely new — the stair and elevator towers added to the back

of the building — includes a space between each tower that offers an impressive vista of

the Susquehanna River, Market Street Bridge and mountains beyond. That space will be sheathed on all four floors in glass, giving students the same view once the building is done.

The engineering program has been expanding, with the addition of an option of three years at King's at two at the University of Notre Dame, and a newer 3+2 agreement with Washington University in St. Louis. It also added a civil engineering program, to be included in the new building. Engineering enrollment has been on the rise, from 20 incoming first-year students in the fall of 2013 to 45 in 2017 and 32 in 2018.

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PSU Wilkes-Barre working to benefit students and the community



The Hayfield House at Penn State Wilkes-Barre.

Butch Comegys | For Times Leader

By Patrick Kernan | pkernan@timesleader.com

LEHMAN TWP. — Penn State Wilkes-Barre has some unique programs that one faculty member says helps to better prepare its students to bring thoughtful change to the community.

And, with that logic, the community at large stands

One of those is Penn State Wilkes-Barre's sustainability program.

According to Brennan, the school's definition of "sustainability" goes beyond the standard environmental definitions, teaching students about things like hunger awareness and gender equality.

"We incorporate sustainability into our curriculum," Brennan said, explaining that lessons on the environment and sustainability aren't just limited to science classes. Liberal arts classes also give students a basis on how to live in a sustainable manner.

What's more, she said it's something the whole campus gets in on, with multiple clubs and organizations getting involved.

"All of that helps us as a school to educate students to incorporate

(sustainability) into their daily lives and actions almost innately," she said. "It becomes who they are."

She said, from there, students bring that learning out into the communities they become a part of — which, she said, dovetails with the other program she leads, Invent Penn State.

That program, she said, focuses on networking, entrepreneurship and the business spirit.

"Sustainability even impacts that," Brennan said. "Corporate responsibility is becoming the thing in the business world."

One of the major components of Invent Penn State is the THINK Center, a collaboration between Penn State Wilkes-Barre and the Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce focused on promoting business

growth through networking.

Located on South Main Street in downtown Wilkes-Barre, the THINK Center, Brennan said, provides Penn State Wilkes-Barre students with a unique opportunity.

"It's a really nice opportunity for our students to get exposed to local business leaders," she said.

One of the THINK Center's main innovations, Brennan said, is its Spotlight Speaker series, which is similar in many ways to the online TED Talk series, which sees a local speaker talk about a topic near and dear to them, often focused on the business world.

"It's a great venue where students can be exposed and develop their local business ideas," Brennan said.

to benefit from the school's efforts as well.

Erin Brennan is a faculty member on campus, teaching in the business program and acting as a pre-law adviser. But, in addition to those roles, she heads up two programs that she says are surprisingly intertwined.



Participants in the Spring Innovation Challenge at Penn State Wilkes-Barre. The Innovation Challenge is part of the Invent Penn State initiative and was organized by WB Connect. From left: Gordon Roberts, Penn State Wilkes-Barre student; Asher Smart, Penn State Wilkes-Barre student; Joseph Boylan, executive director, Wilkes-Barre Connect; Camaryn Lokuta, Penn State Wilkes-Barre student; Erin Brennan, J.D., assistant teaching professor, Penn State Wilkes-Barre; Meghan Flanagan, communication and resource manager, Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry



The Penn State Conference Room at the THINK Center in Wilkes-Barre.





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LCCC: School's 50th year a strong one



Butch Comegys | For Times Leader

Luzerne County Community College, seen here, has had many exciting developments over the past year.

Staff Report

NANTICOKE — The past year has seen many exciting new developments at Luzerne County Community College. Among them:

- Last May saw a banner moment: LCCC's 50th graduating class. Another unique thing was that the graduating class included Ted Geffert, 82, of Moun-

M&T Bank donated the building to the city for \$1 in exchange for a \$374,000 tax credit through the city's Neighborhood Assistance Program. The city then leased it to LCCC for 15 years with option periods after that.

"They're emphasizing arts, culture and a synergy with opportunity in the city. You walk down Main Street, and it's a model for a city," LCCC President Thomas P. Leary said. "We're now part of that renaissance, and the impact of the college will be greater as time goes on."

- Also in August, Luzerne County Community College recently got bragging rights as the top-ranked community college in Pennsylvania.

The ratings were devised by WalletHub and released online at wallethub.com. The online explanation notes it used "17 key indicators of cost and quality" in reviewing 715 community colleges nationwide. Those 17 indicators were grouped into three broad categories: cost and financing, education outcomes, and career outcomes, which were combined for a total score.

- In December, a new agreement was reached between LCCC and Wilkes University to allow Early Childhood Education students from LCCC to "seamlessly transfer" into Wilkes' program.

The deal covers LCCC graduates who've obtained an associate in applied science degree in Early Childhood Education. They will be allowed to transfer into Wilkes' Elementary and Early Childhood Education (PreK-4) bachelor's degree program, with junior, or third-year status.

"We have had a long-standing relationship with Wilkes Univer-

sity," Leary said. "Our partnership has helped thousands of students in

tain Top, who is the oldest graduate in the history of the college.

- Last August, Pittston and Luzerne County Community college held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the M&T Bank Educational Campus, a satellite campus at 13 S. Main St. in Pittston in a former bank building.



Times Leader file photo

LCCC President Thomas P. Leary thanks the City of Pittston officials, M&T Bank as well as state officials for making the downtown Pittston campus a reality during a grand opening ceremony last August.



Butch Comegys | For Times Leader

Luzerne County Community College, seen here, has had many exciting developments over the past year.

sity," Leary said. "Our partnership has helped thousands of students in

Northeastern Pennsylvania and it's never been stronger than in this

point in time."

- Board of Trustee members in Febru-

ary saw a sampling of baked goods created by Luzerne County Commu-

nity College culinary students prior to a monthly meeting that included approval of a contract for a company to manage the bookstore — expected to save students up to 50 percent on textbooks — and an application for nearly \$2.3 million in state money for five projects that could include a new firing range at the Public Safety Training Institute.

Leary said the project were in order of priority: \$472,876 to replace roofs on the Campus Center and the library buildings; \$1.2 million to repave the main parking lot; \$240,000 to upgrade restrooms in four campus buildings; \$60,000 for a new storage building; and \$310,000 for a Public Safety Training Institute firing range.

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At 130, still a vital resource

Osterhout Free Library serves a variety of functions

By Marcella Kester
For Times Leader

The Osterhout Free Library truly defines the phrase “something for everyone.”

The library opened its doors on Jan. 29, 1889, as one of the first libraries in Northeastern Pennsylvania. It’s named after real estate mogul Isaac Smith Osterhout, who funded much of its inception through his estate following his death.

It added another notch in the history books by having none other than Melvil Dewey – creator of the Dewey Decimal System – on its board of directors. Dewey was also responsible for deciding the location of the Osterhout, believing that the Gothic architecture of the former First Presbyterian Church was perfect for such an establishment.

The Osterhout calls home to a variety of locations across the greater Wilkes-Barre area. Aside from Franklin Street, it provides three other branches that covers Plains Township, Parsons and South Wilkes-Barre.


Combined, it boasts hundreds of thousands of print volumes, more than 40 computers, and numerous multimedia



Butch Comegys | For Times Leader


See OSTERHOUT | 24 The Osterhout Free Library in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

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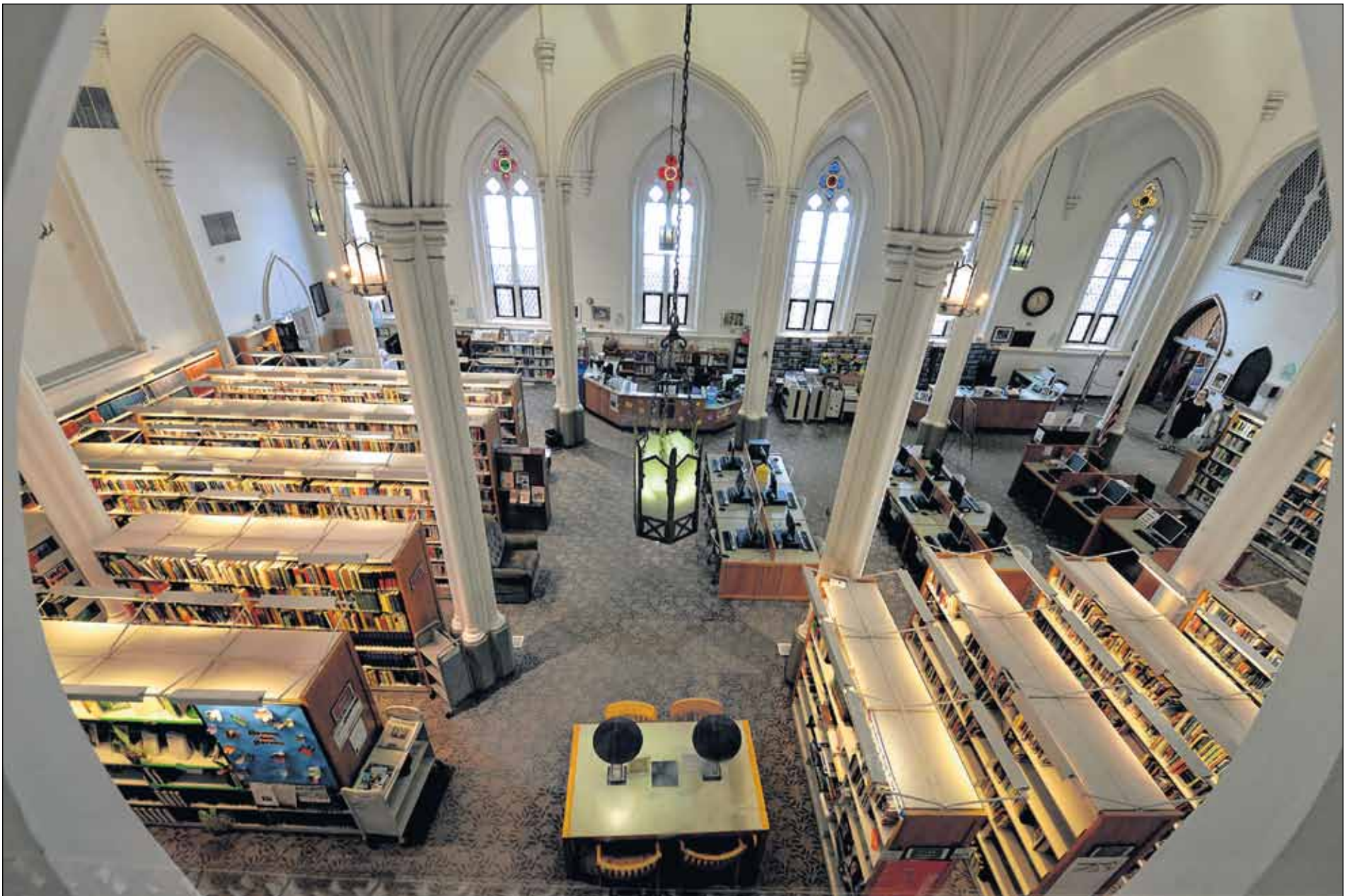
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Butch Comegys | Times Leader

Inside the Osterhout Free Library area residents will find hundreds of thousands of print volumes, more than 40 computers, and numerous multimedia materials in the forms of DVD's, audio and video cassettes and more.

Osterhout

From page 23

materials in the forms of DVD's, audio and video cassettes and more, according to Executive Director Richard Miller.

"The Osterhout is a historic place that is treasured for what it has been able to accomplish in the past, but it is also very valued for the potential that it holds today and tomorrow," he said. "The library has always created a shared sense of community, and that is becoming more important."

Between a deep-seeded friendship with its community plus all it has to offer, the library has been able to adapt to an ever-changing culture so it may continue to thrive.

One of its greatest strengths lies within the surreal amount of free programs it offers to patrons of any age.

Perhaps best known for its multitude of children's programs, the Osterhout provides supreme opportunities to entice young minds – starting as young as birth. The children's center also travels outside of the Osterhout's walls on a regular basis, providing outreach to area schools and learning centers.

Teens can enjoy everything from a weekly movie night to finding help on a school project. Many local students now frequent the library for educational services – like GED, SAT and ACT prep – to help combat financially struggling or eliminated local school library systems.

For adults, the Osterhout provides knitting and crochet classes, book discussions, sketching and DIY programs among others. It's also home to numerous historic facts and pieces, making it a one-stop-shop for learning about local history.

"The library is increasingly becoming a place where people can come together to learn and connect and to have real human interaction. As a result, our programs are becoming more diverse and important," Miller



Times Leader file photo

Amier Johnson, of Wilkes-Barre, and Aaliyah Dennis, of Plains, play while author Cynthia Post Mitchell reads a book from her 'Carrie Flower' series at the Osterhout Free Library in Wilkes-Barre last year. The event was one of the many children programs held at the library.

said of the dozens of available programs.

While cities across the nation have seen local libraries dwindle over the decades, the Osterhout has continued to act as a central part of its community – and that's something Miller doesn't see changing anytime soon.

"Though the internet has made information more accessible to the general public, it doesn't always mean the information patrons are finding is accurate, or that they even know how to access said information," he explained, adding that many of the library's patrons either don't believe information that's online, don't have internet access otherwise or simply don't know how to use the technology.

Due to that, Miller said that libraries – including the Osterhout – will always have a place in the community. Another problem he's frequently seen

patrons face online is the inability to get a solid, concrete answer to their questions. Most times, librarians have the answers people seek, or can take you directly to a piece of information that has it.

"Librarians are an invaluable resource. We provide the most accurate information possible. With the onslaught of data out there, libraries and librarians are even more important than they use to be as we help patrons find the best answers to their questions — whether it be standing at the computer with them or answering over the phone," he said.

For those who have either never visited the library or haven't stepped through its doors in a long while, he suggests to stop by and see all that it has to offer, adding that a new passion or hobby can very well be waiting inside its walls.

And the best part? It's


free.

Many people visit the library to learn a new skill or find a new hobby," he said. "We

offer such a wide variety of programs, that we will definitely have something to spark your interest."

Visit Osterhout.info to learn more.

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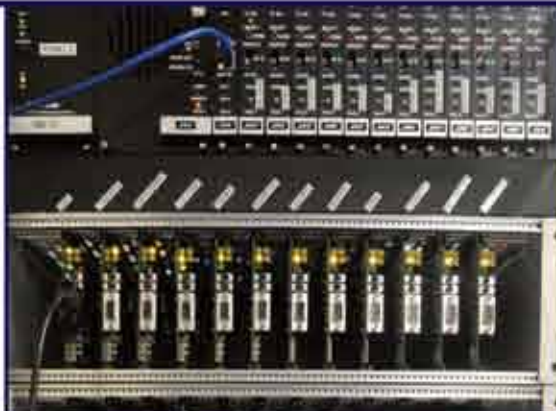
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Kingston making the most of its assets



Businesses line Wyoming Avenue in Kingston.

Butch Comegys | For Times Leader

By Jennifer Learn-Andes | jandes@timesleader.com

Kingston Mayor Paul Roberts views his municipality as unique because it holds two busy bridges over the Susquehanna River.

“It’s basically the gateway to the West Side,” Roberts said, referring to the Market Street and Veterans Memorial (Pierce Street) bridges linking

the municipality to downtown Wilkes-Barre.

The municipality’s bustling commercial strips and continued strength as a thriving bedroom community are evidence of a commitment to maximize its assets, said Roberts and Kingston Administrator Paul Keating.

Making the most of existing space is essential because the municipality is landlocked, they said.

“For a 2-square-mile community, we offer a lot,” Keating said. “All of us work very well as a team together and remain focused on keeping Kingston one of the premier communities in Northeastern Pennsylvania.”

Commercial properties on Market and Pierce streets and Wyoming Avenue rarely stay vacant for long because the thoroughfares have become appealing to banks, two car dealerships, eateries and a mix of businesses, Keating said.

“It’s prime commercial real estate. It’s in demand. It’s high value,” Keating said.

Recent projects include the new Sidney and Pauline Friedman Jewish Community Center off Third Avenue in a building once housing a grocery store and the Geisinger Health System’s completion of a multi-specialty clinic on Pierce Street.

While attracting and keeping businesses is important, satisfying the needs of residential property owners is essential for the municipality’s financial health, Keating said, describing the its high-density housing as the “driving economic force behind Kingston’s budget.”



Pierce Street in Kingston, home of Geisinger Health System’s new multi-specialty clinic, is one of several commercial thoroughfares in the mostly bedroom community.

Butch Comegys | For Times Leader

Approximately \$4.2 million of Kingston’s \$9.5 million general fund operating budget comes from earned income tax, Keating said.

In comparison, the municipality receives about \$150,000 annually from business mercantile taxes and a little over \$1 million from all real estate taxes — commercial and residential, he said.

“It’s very important to us to offer top-level services that attract a key wage-earning residential tax base here,” Keating said.

He described Kingston’s police, fire and public works services as “second to none.” The municipality has 19 career police officers and 15 public

works employees who have saved millions of dollars in recent year by performing construction, road paving, excavation and other work in house, he said.

Recreation enhancements are another amenity designed to keep and attract residents, Roberts said. The municipality of nearly 13,000 owns seven parks and playgrounds in addition to a community swimming pool.

For example, around \$1.8 million was invested improving the pool and Keiper Park in the last five years, Keating said.

Another \$425,000 is being spent in improvements at the Church Street Park, including conversion

of an old field into a soccer complex with three fields that will open this fall and refurbishing of a mini football field, the mayor said.

A \$300,000 grant for work at the recreation center on Third Avenue also has been awarded to Kingston, Keating said.

Then there are the trees. The municipality has been designated a Shade Tree USA community for more than two decades and has an active shade tree commission.

“It makes it homey,” Roberts said of the trees gracing the public space between curbs and sidewalks.

Understanding regional economic development

I’m often asked by people in the community, “What exactly is Penn’s Northeast?”

Penn’s Northeast (PNE) is Northeastern Pennsylvania’s regional nonprofit economic development organization, dedicated to attracting quality employers to our region.

Its roots go back to the early 1990’s, when volunteers from local economic development organizations throughout the region began working together as one unified voice to increase Northeastern Pennsylvania’s visibility to national and international site selectors, developers, and corporate decision makers.

They took the next step in 2002, when business and community leaders from six different counties signed an agreement founding a new organization – Penn’s Northeast - to collectively market the region and attract companies to Northeastern Pennsylvania. PNE was created to perform a specific set of responsibilities – collaborative external marketing and site selection assistance - on behalf of its member organizations.

Northeastern Pennsylvania is a large and varied region; consequently, the organization works hard to be responsive to its diversity of strengths, to its geography, and to its stakeholders. Today, Penn’s Northeast serves Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Schuylkill, and Wayne Counties, as well as the community of Berwick in Columbia County.

Funded through annual contributions from its Founding Partners and through memberships held by private industry and investors, PNE maintains a staff of two: President/CEO John L. Augustine III, and Marketing Director Rachel Antosh Hawk.

PNE facilitates the creation and retention of quality jobs in our region by marketing Northeastern Pennsylvania to the world, and by providing site selection and incentive financing assistance to businesses, real estate brokers, developers, and site selection consultants.

It serves as a single regional point of contact for businesses looking to relocate to or expand within Northeastern Pennsylvania, functioning as a liaison between local development partners, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and businesses seeking new facilities.

PNE does this in the following ways:

Site Selection Services: PNE serves as a first point of contact for representatives of companies considering investments in the region, helping them to define their needs, identifying potential sites, providing them with demographic and salary information, connecting them with economic development groups and chambers of commerce in specific areas of interest, and coordinating site tours.

When PNE sells Northeastern Pennsylvania, the story always begins with the region’s key assets:

- Only a 2-hour drive from NYC and Philadelphia
- Five major interstate highways running directly through NEPA
- More than 1 million residents living in the region
- 19 colleges and universities with 40,000 enrolled students
- A skilled and reliable labor force
- Lower utility and living costs
- Amazing quality of life and year-round outdoor activities in a safe & family-friendly region

Lead Generation: PNE’s marketing activities are intended to generate leads from businesses that are actively seeking a new location for relocation or expansion purposes. For economic development organizations, the ability to turn a lead into a sale can mean a new multi-million-dollar project and hundreds of jobs for a community.

PNE works to increase both the number and quality of prospects for commercial investments in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Much of this work occurs in partner-



John L. Augustine III
Guest Columnist

Kingston

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Picking up fallen leaves consumes several public works staffers for weeks in the fall, but Keating said he believes most residents consider this investment a worthy trade-off for the aesthetic benefits of the trees.

"The trees add much value to the community, and I think the people who call Kingston home are very fond and proud of the well-kept, tree-lined streets that make up their community," Keating said.

Future plans

Painted murals will soon grace exterior portions of several commercial buildings in Kingston and some other West Side municipalities thanks to a \$50,000 casino gambling grant, said Amy Bezek, of the Street Art Society of NEPA.

Roberts said the art will add personality and provide "something to ponder" for residents, visitors and passing motorists.

Municipal officials also want to attract companies interested in providing fiber optics to boost technology capabilities and pursue other recreation improvements, including a dog park at the Church Street Park and a trail with pedestrian crossings linking Keiper Park to the recreation center,



High-traffic Market Street in Kingston has attracted numerous businesses.

the new Friedman Jewish Community Center and Wyoming Valley Levee.

Recreation also is a priority in neighboring Forty Fort.

The borough recently took over management of Luzerne County's 35-acre sports complex as part of an overall plan to make Forty Fort a recreation center.

Borough officials said they want to enhance the complex soccer fields to attract tournaments and visitors from other states, boosting business for local hotels,

restaurants and stores.

Grants also may be pursued to add a playground and lighting at the complex, which would allow evening events.

Forty Fort also is trying to create a recreational path so bicyclists and other levee trail users won't have to cross busy intersections due to a gap in the levee trail. A rainwater park near the Cross Valley Expressway also is under discussion.

Reach Jennifer Learn-Andes at 570-991-6388 or on Twitter @TLJenLearnAndes.

Butch Comegys | For Times Leader



Geisinger Health System's completion of a multi-specialty clinic on Pierce Street in Kingston is just one example of the municipality's bustling commercial sector.

Butch Comegys | For Times Leader

Economic

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ship with the Governor's Action Team, a state

economic development organization whose job is to recruit out-of-state companies to Pennsylvania, or from the Pennsylvania Office of

International Business Development, whose job is to recruit foreign direct investment to the Commonwealth. Other opportunities originate

from former clients, from the organization's own prospecting efforts at trade shows, and through PNE's award-winning advertising and marketing campaigns.

Companies such as Pepsico/Gatorade, Two Chefs on a Roll, Archer Daniels Midland, c3i, Johnson & Johnson, SECCAS, IRIS-USA, and many more are located in Northeastern Pennsylvania today because of the marketing and sales efforts of Penn's Northeast and its economic development partners.

Requests for Information: PNE is routinely called upon to create and coordinate responses to Requests for Information (RFIs), which are essentially requests asking a region to make a formal case regarding their ability to accommodate a business's needs.

In 2017, PNE coordinated Northeastern Pennsylvania's response to the Amazon HQ2 RFI. Amazon's search for a second headquarters location - projected to be a \$5 billion project resulting in the creation of 50,000 direct jobs - captivated North America to an extent unprecedented for a site selection project.

Amazon received 238 responses from cities and regions throughout the continent. Because of PNE, one of those was a submission from Northeastern Pennsylvania. While our region was not ultimately selected as one of the twenty finalists, this effort paid dividends that will continue well beyond HQ2. PNE continues to use the data assembled for the Amazon HQ2 project, repeatedly drawing upon it for subsequent proposals.

The Amazon HQ2 RFI was Northeastern Pennsylvania's first truly regional RFI submission.

However, thanks to PNE, it will not be the last.

Signature Events: PNE holds a variety of signature events designed to showcase Northeastern Pennsylvania and its assets to the site selection community and to potential businesses.

These events include Fall Fest and Winter Fest, which highlight specific outdoor amenities available within the PNE region; and Broker Events, which connect PNE members with real estate professionals working within the metropolitan areas that produce most of our leads.

In 2018, Penn's Northeast introduced its newest annual event: the inaugural NEPA Real Estate Summit. It featured a group of expert panelists who discussed every aspect of Northeastern Pennsylvania's commercial real estate sector - the commercial/industrial market, the office market, health care, and downtown redevelopment - in deep detail, allowing participants to come away with new insights about regional trends and opportunities.

More than 200 people are scheduled to attend our 2nd Annual Real Estate Summit which is being held on Wednesday, April 24 at 11:00 at the Hilton in Scranton and features a panel on the new federal opportunity zones.

Trade Shows and Conferences: PNE promotes the region at numerous real estate trade shows and specialty conferences. These events allow the organization to make new contacts, keep current on specific industry trends, and connect with industry practitioners on behalf of the region.

Real Estate Database: PNE created the

region's first comprehensive online real estate database. It provides prospects with available office and industrial sites and facilities from our partners as they come on the market. The database can be accessed by going to www.pennsnortheast.com.

Penn's Northeast also uses this same information to populate the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's "SiteSearch" website with the same data. It can be accessed at www.pasitesearch.com.

Business and Industrial Park Maps: PNE maintains a business park map portfolio with detailed maps of 27 different business parks in Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Schuylkill, Pike, and Wayne counties. These maps, which are regularly updated, highlight available land and buildings, existing businesses, infrastructure and available tax incentives. Versions of all maps are available at www.pennsnortheast.com.

All of these activities are undertaken in service of Penn's Northeast's mission: to bring quality employers to Northeastern Pennsylvania. The more businesses Penn's Northeast brings, the more jobs will be created. The more jobs created, the stronger the economy will become. If the economy strengthens, Northeastern Pennsylvania will flourish.

And, in fact, Penn's Northeast and its partners have helped to bring more than 12,000 jobs to its six-county service area since 2002.

For more information about us or to learn how to become a member, please visit us at www.pennsnortheast.com.

John L. Augustine III is the president/CEO Penn's Northeast.

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JCC finds a new home

State-of-art facility opens in Kingston



David Schwager take a photo of the progress on the new gymnasium in the Jewish Community Center in Kingston.

AP photo

By Geri Gibbons | For Times Leader

KINGSTON – The Friedman Jewish Community Center completed its move to Kingston in April, and now stands ready to serve area residents with opportunities for recreation, education and fellowship.

The \$13 million project, which stands at the site of what was once Price Chopper, makes great use of its 58,000 square feet of space, with many multipurpose

areas, 18 skylights, an open design and ample parking.

One of the centerpieces of the construction is a soon-to-be-completed 9000-square-foot gymnasium that will provide opportunity for basketball, steam and sauna, volleyball, pickle ball, squash and a host of other sports and recreational activities, as well as a fitness center.

The center's move from Wilkes-Barre was well received by its membership, with young and old pouring into the center to resume their time-honored activities and add some new ones.

On a recent morning, Building Committee Co-Chair David Schwager walked through the building enthusiastically describing the use of each space, reflections of Jewish tradition and history.

Schwager is quick to point out that several rooms utilize wood from the bowling lanes from the basement of the JCC when it was in Wilkes-Barre.

Not only has the wood from the lanes been used, but the bowling pins were also brought to the new location.

As Schwager passed the bowling pins, he carefully rearranged them.

"There you go," he said smiling, almost as if the pins were a window into the past.

The project itself was designed to both look back on a rich history and forward to new growth, with many long-time members coming to the center with their children and grandchildren.

Schwager also took time to detail the many benefits of the social hall, accompanied by two state-of-the-art kitchens, one Kosher and one general.

On a recent evening, the social hall was filled with nearly 400 people for a special presentation, complete with three large-format projection screens and a full array of audio and video equipment.

But, Schwager said, the space is also equally appropriate for chair yoga or group discussions, using high-tech dividers that make the most of each square foot.

The JCC has a room dedicated to a Tallis weaving program, which provides opportunity for the weaving of special ceremonial garments and is one of only three such programs in the country.



Pictured is the toddler room in the Illumination Early Learning Center in the Jewish Community Center in Kingston.

AP photo



The new Jewish Community Center's weaving room.

AP photo

Also coming to the JCC is the Illumination Early Learning Center designed by Bill Grant who carefully designed

a student-driven learning environment which encourages discovery, play and inquisitiveness.

Grant, who has described the environment as a "third teacher," designed both the indoor area of the school and

the outdoor area of the school, a playground which provide opportunity for children to learn from nature and experience old-fashioned play.

Schwager seems to be acquainted with every detail of the building's construction and to fully appreciate it.

As he walks from area to area, lights go on automatically.

"We're environmentally friendly," he said, as the lights go on suddenly as he enters a room. "We're environmentally friendly throughout the whole building."

He also seems to have a great appreciation for the HVAC system, which now occupies only a small room, unlike the JCC's previous headquarters.

As Schwager looked around at the small clean quiet system, softly humming as it provided heat to the entire building, he said, "This might be one of my favorite rooms."

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A long road to recovery after last year's tornado



Times Leader File Photo

Joe Stager of Barnes and Noble talks about the night the tornado ripped through the store in the Arena Hub Plaza.

By Bill O'Boyle | boboyle@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE TWP. — Not far from Wilkes-Barre City's downtown, a lot of economic activity has been going on in Wilkes-Barre Township.

When the Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Avenue

opened, the surrounding area saw an increase in retail stores, restaurants and hotels.

And then an EF-2 tornado ripped through Mundy Street, causing millions of dollars in damage and as long road to recovery.

But nearly one year later, many of the affected businesses are back. The Arena Hub Plaza has seen all of its stores and restaurants reopen. But nearby, the Wilkes-Barre Township Commons faces a major rebuild that has begun with the demolition of the buildings that were so severely damaged, they were condemned.

But just a couple of weeks ago, good news was spewing forth from the township. A new hotel, several restaurants and a Turkey Hill, complete with a car wash, are all coming to the township soon.

The new Turkey Hill will be located at the corner of Blackman Street and Route 309, according to Thomas Zedolik, township zoning and code enforcement officer.

That news came as the Times Leader also learned more about plans for a new hotel, a Chick-fil-A restaurant, and the rebirth of Panera Bread in the township nearly a year after that chain eatery's longtime location was shattered by last June's tornado.

Zedolik said he spoke with an attorney representing Panera Bread who informed him that the plans have changed for the location of its store in the Wilkes-Barre Township Commons, off of Mundy Street.

Panera planned to occupy a free-standing building to be built on the site by Urban Edge Properties of New Jersey, on the right side of the site. Zedolik said Panera now wants to locate on the left side of the property, near where the former store was, and add drive-thru service.

"Panera will have to submit new plans to and go through the approval process again," Zedolik said. "This could take up to two months before anything can start up there."

Urban Edge will also build another building that will offer retail space for several businesses.

Zedolik said a new Residence Inn also will be built near the Mohegan Sun Arena on High-



Times Leader File Photo

Barnes and Nobles construction contuned months after the tornado damaged the building.

land Park Boulevard. He said it will be a four-story, 110-room hotel that will face Interstate 81.

"The land development plan is not finalized," Zedolik said.

Zedolik said the property is owned by Singh Realty. He said two other adjacent parcels are being sold by Singh Realty.

Zedolik also said he spoke with the contractor that will be re-formatting the former Lucky's Sports Bar into a full-service Chick-fil-A. Zedolik said the contractor estimated that the project should take 16 weeks to complete.

The new Turkey Hill plan calls for existing buildings at the busy intersection — which once housed a repair garage, a bar and other businesses — along with three residential homes — were purchased by Turkey Hill's new parent company, U.K.-based E.G. Group.

"Everything will be demolished and a new Turkey Hill will be built, with a car wash," Zedolik said.

Cindy Rantanen, vice president of brands and public rela-

tions for E.G. America, said the company has the property under contract. She said five properties were purchased from four different owners and the site measures three acres.

"We're going to do a full new rebuild there," Rantanen said. "We are doing our due diligence and the site work must be completed. Our plan is to begin construction in spring 2020."

Rantanen said the new Turkey Hill will include a full convenience store, a fast food restaurant with a brand partner still to be named, a car wash and fuel stations.

"We will build a beautiful new store there for our customers," Rantanen said.

Two other buildings on Mundy Street, owned by TFP Limited, have been demolished and two new buildings will be built. Robert Tamburro, trustee/general partner of TFP, said one or possibly two restaurants will be part of the 6,336 square-foot building to be built closest to Mundy Street next to the AT&T store.

Tamburro said a second building of 10,000 square-feet will house office space.

"We are excited about constructing two new buildings in the Arena Hub Plaza area," Tamburro said.

TFP Limited has also purchased the former site of Ashley Furniture. Tamburro did not say what the plans are for that land.

In a recent Op-Ed in the Times Leader, Gov. Tom Wolf talked about the after-math of last June's tornado.

"This was costly to businesses, which faced damage to property and lost revenue due to disrupted operations," Wolf said. "It was costly to local governments, which had to support emergency crews and make repairs to roads, bridges and other infrastructure.

As a result, when I toured some of the damage, I found myself repeating, 'I'm sorry for your loss. There's not much we can do,'" Wolf said. "It was heartbreaking."

But despite all the damage and heartbreak, there was a story

that stood out when the tornado hit.

Joe Stager was working at the Wilkes-Barre Township Barnes & Noble in the Arena Hub Plaza when an EF-2 tornado formed and barreled right through the store.

Stager said the wind was so powerful, he thought the roof might collapse. While fearing for his own life, Joe still shielded two of his fellow employees from flying glass and other debris by hiding them under an anchored information desk.

Stager covered them as the tornado ripped through the building. The wind left substantial damage to cars in the parking lot and the store itself, but Stager's quick thinking and selflessness kept his colleagues safe.

For his heroic efforts, Stager was honored recently by the local chapter of the American Red Cross as one of its "hometown heroes."

Reach Bill O'Boyle at 570-991-6118 or on Twitter @TLBillOBoyle.

A commitment to the community

Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre continues to evolve



Mary Lou Kotch, operations manager at Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre, shows off the new lighting system in patients' rooms on the sixth floor of the facility in Wilkes-Barre.

Fred Adams photos | For Times Leader

By Geri Gibbons | For Times Leader

WILKES-BARRE – Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre has been part of the Geisinger family since 2005 and is ever evolving in response to the needs of the South Wilkes-Barre community.

Since 2015, Geisinger has invested more than \$20 million to offer additional services to the South Wil-

This new addition brings the total number of beds available to 48, with a multidisciplinary team of physicians, nurses, laboratory and radiology technicians, physical, occupational, speech and respiratory therapists available to care for patients.

The detail of each room has been carefully planned out from lighting that can be adjusted to allow medical personnel to check on patients in the middle of the night without waking them up to wide screen televisions and internet accessibility.

“The opening of this new inpatient unit is our latest investment to better serve our community,” said Dan Landesberg, Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre administrative director

The addition complements the Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre Emergency Department which reopened last summer and cares for more than 50 patients a day.

Many residents of South Wilkes-Barre remember using the emergency room under previous ownership of the hospital for everything from bringing a loved-one in after an accident to bringing children to the ER because they had a respiratory illness.

The reopening of the ER, a \$5 million project, Landesberg said, reinforces a sense of community to the facility, with residents no longer having to drive past the hos-



The main entrance to Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre is undergoing construction.

pital and away from their neighborhoods to receive emergency treatment.

Not only have South Wilkes-Barre residents appreciated having emergency treatment close to home, many staff members that previously worked at the facility returned to the hospital.

“As we were recruiting doctors, nurses, physician assistants and other medical personnel to care for our patients, something special happened,” said Angelo Venditti, chief nursing Officer, Geisinger Northeast.

“Providers who worked here in the emergency room before 2009 have

returned. For them, this Emergency Department re-opening means coming home.”

The round-the-clock emergency room provides comprehensive emergency care, working closely Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township and Geisinger Medical Center in Danville.

The facility has not only been attentive to the medical needs of the community, but has also responded to the mental, emotional and behavioral needs of patients.

In September of 2017 in partnership with Geisinger Health Plan,

Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre community and is continuing to improve the building both aesthetically and in regard to provision of services.

In January of this year, the facility opened a new 8,000-square-foot \$3.1 million inpatient wing on the hospital's sixth floor, with 14 private rooms available to those with medical and surgical needs.

logically and socially.

The care team includes a peer recovery specialist, obstetrician/gynecologist, pediatrician, social worker, addiction medicine specialist and behavioral health specialists.

The program is open to all pregnant women or those who have recently given birth and are enrolled in medication-assisted treatment, regardless of ability to pay.

Geisinger also opened an outpatient clinic at 560 Pierce Street, Kingston, in December of last year.

The \$8.5 million facility offers primary care, outpatient services for children and adults, pharmacy, medication-treatment management, radiology and laboratory services.

The 21,000 square foot state-of-the-art space includes 26 exams rooms and two treatment rooms.

Staff features physicians, advanced practitioners, a clinical pharmacist, a licensed social worker, community health assistant and teaching faculty for family medicine residents.

The goal of Geisinger's Kingston facility, according to the website, is to maintain a caring, comfortable and convenient health care destination for patients and families on the Westside.

Reach the Times Leader newsroom at 570-829-7242 or on Twitter @TLnews.

a Medically Assisted Treatment clinic came to Geisinger's South Wilkes-Barre location, which combines medication and behavioral health therapy to treat addiction.

As a part of treatment, patients are connected to drug and alcohol counseling and behavioral therapies designed to provide the tools for living a productive life while avoiding relapse. A dedicated case management team at the clinic involves community resources and family members in the treatment process as needed, and at the discretion of the patient.

Also responding to the

ever increasing problem of opioid addiction, Geisinger South has recently launched a Free2BMom program which aims to support moms in recovery, provide moms and babies with support services and improve quality of life.

Free2BMom will help women who are in recovery during pregnancy and two years after childbirth. The program is compassionately designed to provide counseling, community-wide social support and medication-assisted treatment, empowering the mother and her baby to thrive physically, psycho-

Luzerne County in 'economic wave'



The CenterPoint Commerce and Trade Park in Jenkins and Pittston townships now houses 51 tenants employing nearly 6,000.

Butch Comegys | For Times Leader

By Jennifer Learn-Andes | jandes@timesleader.com

As the son and grandson of coal miners, state Sen. John Yudichak said he will always appreciate Luzerne County's anthracite heritage and the rich history and strong work ethic it fostered.

But mining also left a negative environmental legacy that set back the county, requiring more work to

make the land usable and attract investors, said Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

After decades of reclamation and infrastructure enhancements, Yudichak believes the county has finally redefined its image in the eyes of major corporations, many that now have a presence here.

"I'll always be proud of mining families that built this region, but you have to build a new future — a very diverse economic portfolio for Northeastern Pennsylvania — that will help us weather any storm," Yudichak said. "It can't be based on one industry."

The Interstate 81 corridor that runs through the county is booming, but not only with e-commerce and logistics, he said.

The Hazleton area recently experienced "three big wins" in manufacturing with synthetic wood manufacturer Highwood USA's expansion to a Hazleton building, IRIS USA's 500,000-square-foot plastic manufacturing facility under construction in the Humboldt Industrial Park in Hazle Township and the Hershey Company's \$60 million expansion of its Kit Kat manufacturing line, also at Humboldt.

Distribution growth

Earlier this month, Yudichak and a contingent of officials celebrated an announcement that Lincoln, Nebraska-based e-commerce company Spreetail.com will occupy a new 610,000-square-foot building along Kosciuszko Street across from Luzerne County Community College in Nanticoke, with plans to start fulfillment team members at \$16.50 per hour.

Established in 2006, the company will hire 50 employees this year and expects to employ 120 by 2021. Spreetail.com offers a "simple and enjoyable way" to shop online for home, garden and backyard products, a release said.

The new \$40 million fulfillment center is tentatively expected to open



Bill Tarutis | For Times Leader

State Sen. John Yudichak, photographed at the new Spreetail.com distribution center in Nanticoke earlier this month, said Luzerne County is redefining its image as a coal region.

June 1.

It was the second tenant announced for Missouri-based NorthPoint Development's 322-acre Hanover 9 Industrial Park, which falls in both the city and Hanover Township. Chicago-based True Value Company said in February it will occupy most of a 1.4 million square-foot distribution center also under construction and set to open this fall. Two more buildings are planned at the site, which has become accessible due to the new \$90 million South Valley Parkway, officials said.

NorthPoint also brought Chewy.com, Adidas and Patagonia Inc. to its first 172-acre project in Hanover Township known as the Hanover Ridge Trade Center, and it is working on a third development with three structures planned on 173 acres it purchased along Dundee Road in the township.

Yudichak had said Spreetail.com's investment is the largest single economic development project in the city in four decades, noting the last

was the community college construction.

Most of the land NorthPoint is developing had been mine-scarred and partially reclaimed and prepped by the nonprofit Earth Conservancy. The nonprofit spent more than \$9 million filling deep mine pits and contouring the unattractive Hanover Ridge site visible from 81.

Meanwhile, Mericle Commercial Real Estate continues to attract tenants to its CenterPoint Commerce and Trade Park in Jenkins and Pittston townships, which also was on former blighted coal mine land. The park now houses 51 tenants employing nearly 6,000, with plans to expand to 10,000 jobs when the park is fully built out over the next decade, its website says.

Revitalization efforts are underway in all four Luzerne County cities in Yudichak's district, he said — Hazleton, Nanticoke, Pittston and Wilkes-Barre.

In downtown Wilkes-Barre, for example, Berkshire Hathaway Guard Insurance Companies expanded its corporate

headquarters through the purchase of the office tower at 39 Public Square. McCarthy Tire also is housing its corporate headquarters in the city, he said.

"It really is a remarkable time, where there are job opportunities as far as the eye can see in Northeastern Pennsylvania," he said.

County view

Years of work by Earth Conservancy and others has been invested to get to this point, said county council Chairman Tim McGinley.

"As a result, land is now available at reasonable costs, and we're seeing major developers coming into the county to use those sites for mass distribution," McGinley said.

Other businesses are benefitting from the warehouse growth, McGinley said. For example, a local propane dealer has expanded operations primarily because the forklifts at Chewy.com are propane-powered, he said.

"That's the stuff that happens, and people don't see it because it is not

publicized," McGinley said.

To compete with other areas, the county and other taxing bodies have approved tax breaks for many of the major projects.

These properties will generate significant new real estate tax revenue down the road when the breaks expire, McGinley said. Some of the breaks also are structured to apply only to new structures, not the land, and taxing bodies had received no payment from the tax-exempt Earth Conservancy, he said.

As the development increases, the demand for workers with specific skills is rising and will largely be met by customized curriculum at the community college, McGinley said.

"That's going to help our job market," McGinley said.

County Manager C. David Pedri said county officials have made economic development a priority, largely through the community development office.

Last fall for example, the county awarded \$1.85 million in community development funding needed for a \$4.1 million extension of White Birch Road in the Humboldt Industrial Park. That extension is required to proceed with a \$20 million, state-funded extension of Route 424 so the two roads can connect, providing secondary access to the growing park.

The Humboldt park has nearly 60 tenants and more than 10,000 workers, officials said.

The county community development office also provides funding for business development and training programs

and low-interest business loans, including a \$1 million loan to Kris Jones for the acquisition of the former Berkshire Hathaway GUARD property on South River Street in Wilkes-Barre, which is slated for a business accelerator and numerous high-growth businesses, Pedri said.

"Luzerne County continues to be a strong supporter of a regional economic development strategy because that is the best way to promote the many positive attributes of the county," Pedri said.

Returning home

Yudichak predicts increased competition for employers will bump up wages and said the county now offers more job opportunities for workers at all levels — college graduates, those who have learned a trade and high school graduates who are not pursuing advanced education or training.

He said he has heard numerous cases of natives who have returned to this area because they can now find family-sustaining jobs, including some in the pharmaceutical industry now working at CVS Caremark in Hanover Township.

The "economic wave" will continue, Yudichak said, because national companies are "paying attention" to the growth here and the unified welcoming they are receiving from officials at all levels.

"We're building a regional economy and not trying to pit one section of the county against another," Yudichak said. "We sell the whole county and are going to bat for the entire region."

Restaurant-inspired hospitality



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

From a tuna sandwich, mac and cheese, salad and soup for Alex Tirko, of Wilkes-Barre, left, to a fish taco and hush puppies for Tony D'Eliseo, of Laflin, right, the two physical therapy majors found plenty to enjoy at the Misericordia University dining hall, run by Metz Culinary Management.

By Mary Therese Biebel | mbiebel@timesleader.com

As Frank Varvaglione tossed pizza dough into the air, Paul Hill ladled out creamy macaroni and cheese and Katrina Fotiadis rocked a curved, two-handled knife called a mezzaluna back and forth to chop salad greens.

With fish tacos, marinated vegetables, grilled chicken, a choice of soups, fresh fruit, apple pie parfaits and a salad bar that included everything you'd expect plus raw spinach, black beans and even artichoke hearts, students had plenty of options.

"We eat here a lot," Alex Tirko, a physical therapy major from Wilkes-Barre, said after polishing off a tuna sandwich, some macaroni and cheese and a salad. "I'm going back for some tomato soup."

"They're pretty good," said physical therapy major Tony D'Eliseo, of Laflin, said of the hush puppies he was enjoying alongside a fish taco that included his choice of toppings — jalapeno peppers, sour cream and shredded cheese.

"We're not a cookie-cutter operation. We cater to the individual," general manager Paul McMillan said, pointing out gluten-free, low-fat, vegetarian and vegan items along with freshly made salad dressings and freshly baked cookies.

In honor of Earth Week, retail manager Diane Walker said, Metz was planning a meatless Monday with plant-based proteins — healthy for the planet and healthy for the people who are eating.

"We see ourselves as stewards. We buy local whenever we can and we use reusable containers," McMillan said, adding the food service's used cooking oil is sent away to be reused as a biodiesel fuel.

With the almost dizzying array of food choices available at Misericordia, it's even more remarkable to consider that dining hall is only one among many places where The Metz Group works to fulfill its mission "to deliver restaurant-inspired hospitality to each and every guest."

With more than 6,000 team members, as

It was close to noon on a recent Friday, and the three workers were just a few of the Metz Culinary Management employees who staffed a wide array of food stations at Misericordia University's dining hall.



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

Paul Hill, right, a 15-year employee of Metz, works at the macaroni and cheese station during a recent lunch time at Misericordia University.



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

Frank Varvaglione, a Metz employee, has 38 years of experience making hand-tossed pizzas.

the company calls its employees, Metz serves food in several states.

Locally, you can enjoy a Metz fine dining experience at Ruth's Chris Steak House in Plains Township or find more casual offerings at TGIFridays in Wilkes-Barre Township, Lucky's Craft Food & Drink at the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport and the dining service at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital as well as at Misericordia, where the community — not just

the student body — can purchase a meal.

"I'm a really big fan of TGIFridays ribs," said Rick Sell, Metz vice president of restaurant operations. "It's been a signature brand for a long, long time and really is a guest favorite. If I'm feeling indulgent, I'll go there."

"If I want to be really healthy, I'm a real big fan of The Chopping Block at Misericordia. It's fast; it's affordable; it's fresh. Your salad is chopped right in

front of you, hence the name."

While a chef at Ruth's Chris might be grilling a Cowboy Ribeye or Porthouse for Two steak to the guests' preferred degree of doneness, and the staff at TGIFridays might be whipping up Spinach & Queso dip or Loaded Potato Skins for folks who want to relax after work, Metz Culinary Management hasn't forgotten another hungry group — children whose families might not have a nourishing meal to give them.

"We prepare 80 Dinners For Kids, three times a week," McMillan said as he led the way into the kitchen at Misericordia University's dining hall on a recent Friday.

Here, employee David Little was ladling a thick tomato sauce over sausage and pasta that volunteers would soon pick up and deliver to the children's homes. Metz donates the free Dinners For Kids to youngsters in the Back Mountain, Sell said, while Ollie's Restaurant provides them for children on the West Side.

"It's something we're proud to be part of," Sell said.

Reach Mary Therese Biebel at 570-991-6109 or on Twitter @BiebelMT



Bill Tarutis | For Times Leader

Executive chef Wendy Fritz adds a balsamic glaze to a dish of scallops and puffed pastry, in the kitchen at Jonathan's Restaurant in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

Jonathan's Restaurant a labor of love

By Mary Therese Biebel
mbiebel@timesleader.com

"The crab au gratin is to die for," Tom Monie, of Plains Township.

"We love the steaks," said Lissa Smith, of Wilkes-Barre.

"They have roast duck here!" added Smith's husband, Dick.

Those were just a few of the comments from satisfied guests who treated themselves to dinner on a recent Friday evening at Jonathan's Restaurant on North River Street, where the decor — from a portrait of Seinfeld co-star Kramer to a leg-shaped lamp like the one in "A Christmas Story" is as interesting as the food.

"It reminds me of home, very cozy and warm," said Monie's wife, Sharon.

"We always end up talking to people we didn't know," Tom Monie said.

Providing the cozy ambience and a wide variety of food and drink, Jonathan's Restaurant is a labor of love for Jonathan Grimes and George DuMont, who moved their restaurant from Harveys Lake to downtown Wilkes-Barre a year and a half ago.

"We get more foot traffic here. It's not a place you have to get into the car and drive to," DuMont said as he stood behind the bar, ready to pour such drinks as a Diamond City Cosmo, named in honor of Wilkes-Barre's nickname, or an Aunt Clara Martini, named in honor of actress Marion Lorne.

Lorne was born in West Pittston in 1883 and studied at Wyoming Seminary before she started appearing on the 1960s sitcom "Bewitched" as Samantha's Aunt Clara.

There is an undeniable sense of history at Jonathan's — not just in cocktail names but in the building itself, which served as an American Legion and, before that, was a private residence of the wealthy Phelps family.

But the big attraction, guests will tell you, is the food.

"They're always changing it," Sharon Monie said. "There's always something new and different to try."

Executive chef Wendy Fritz gives her bosses credit for that.

"George and Jonathan, they're fantastic to work for," she said. "They give me a lot of creative freedom. Every chef loves that."

"Every two weeks we change the menu," she said, mentioning she was looking forward to serving Red Snapper Oscar, grilled and served over crab and asparagus and a Gruyere tart, finished off with Hollandaise sauce.

"Then there will be a blood orange marmalade-glazed veal chop on a Brie pocket," she said, "and chicken Provençal with artichokes and cherry tomatoes."

The sous chef and pastry chef, Melissa Smyda, happens to be Fritz's daughter, so they have a long history of cooking together, even before they worked together professionally.

"I can read her mind," Smyda said. "She doesn't even have to ask for anything. I know which tool or ingredient she wants and I just hand it to her."

Smyda enjoys making desserts at Jonathan's, where she recommends the flourless chocolate cake.

"It's very good," she said. "We use eggs rather than flour. It gets all of its lift just from separated eggs."

"Everyone asks for it," she added.



Bill Tarutis | For Times Leader

Wendy Fritz prepared a dish of scallops over puffed pastry on a recent Friday afternoon at Jonathan's Restaurant.



Submitted photo

Jonathan Grimes and George DuMont are your hosts at Jonathan's.

Banner year for businessman and restaurateur Friedman

Staff Report

WILKES-BARRE — From Kevin's to jazz to French cuisine, it has been a banner year for businessman and restaurateur Rob Friedman:

- Last October, Kevin's Bar & Restaurant in Kingston welcomed the public to a grand re-opening under Friedman's ownership.

No detail was too small for Friedman, who purchased the restaurant in July and immediately set to work planning what he called "a much needed face-lift" to the upscale space that boasts a chic warehouse feel and a hometown clientele.

"With the help of an architect, I designed the carpeting, flooring and all the booths," Friedman said.

Guests raved about everything from the decor and the space to such delights as champagne and oysters, crab cakes, salmon and Kentucky fried quail.

Its location near Kingston Corners makes Kevin's convenient to Wilkes-Barre, Kingston and the West Side.

- In November, Friedman's River Street Jazz Cafe celebrated 25 years of music with a party that brought together friends, former employees and fans of the Plains Township venue.

"Twenty-five years. It's really amazing," Friedman said slowly. And then, with the timing of a master, landed the blow.

"Obviously I was very, very young when I opened up this place," he added, sending the audi-



Le Manhattan Bistro Head Chef Jonathan Minor, owner Rob Friedman, Operations Manager Sheila Humphrey and General Manager Patrick DeRojas, stand outside of Le Manhattan Bistro on S. Main St. in Wilkes-Barre in February. Times Leader file photo

ence into appreciative chuckles.

The club, on the lower level of the Cross Valley Center, opened Friday, Nov. 5, 1993.

"The band was Merchants of Groove," club owner and founder Robert Friedman recalled. "They had a horn section, the place was packed. Everybody had a great time."

Friedman still has a copy of the first month's calendar, along with a copy of a Times Leader preview story from October of that year.

More importantly, he also still has the club.

There have been changes over the years, notably the mix of acts. What started out as a strictly blues and jazz club has evolved to include R&B, jam-based music and tribute bands.

"You really have to adjust the music to what brings people in," Friedman said.

And so he has.

"I hope that for many more years to come I can provide live music."

- The new year of 2019 brought an all-new venture for Friedman: French cuisine in a downtown setting.

On March 1 the ribbon was cut, applause filled the room, and the real moment of truth neared closer.

Wait staff in black uniforms darted around the dining room of Le Manhattan Bistro following a ceremonial re-opening Friday afternoon, deftly gliding past dignitaries to make sure everything was just so before the dinner crowd arrived.

For new owner Friedman, weeks of hard work were about to culminate in his latest project: Bringing a downtown staple back to life and add-

ing to his portfolio of fine dining establishments.

"I don't want to just arbitrarily pick a place, but the ones I've purchased in the past have excellent reputations and have been successful," he said. "Part of the key is hiring the right people."

Friedman and his staff welcomed lawmakers, chamber and community development officials to the event, which came three months after the restaurant closed suddenly on Nov. 30 when its former operator and chef was evicted due to back rent and fees.

Friedman's decision to take over the business boosts a restaurant and hospitality portfolio that already includes Kevin's Bar & Restaurant in Kingston, the Beaumont Inn in Dallas, Cork Bar and Restaurant in Wilkes-Barre, Grico's Restaurant in Exeter, Back Mountain wedding venue Friedman Farms and the River Street Jazz Cafe in Plains Township.

It also boosts the downtown dining scene.

"I'm just really excited to see everything come together," Friedman said on opening night.

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Butch Comegys | Times Leader

The Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Airport International Airport topped 500,000 passengers in 2018.

AVP continues to see strong passenger demand

Staff Report

PITTSSTON TWP. — The past year has seen the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport continue to soar.

In 2017 the facility marked its 70th anniversary, but also smashed an old record: Nearly 532,000 passengers flew in and out of the airport that year, breaking the old record of 491,416 set in 1990.

In 2018 the facility came close to another record: AVP topped 500,000 passengers once

again, putting the year second only to 2017.

Heading into 2019, Executive Director Carl Beardsley noted that passenger boardings for the month of December 2018 as compared to December 2017 increased by 6.9%, making it the highest December monthly enplanements on record, with a total of 22,100 passengers, airport records show.

That also made it the fifth consecutive month in 2018 that AVP had

record monthly enplanements — and this despite the departure of Allegiant Air from AVP earlier in the year.

Several other factors underpin those numbers.

As Beardsley has noted, the airport is not just drawing on the local population, but attracting a significant number of passengers from upstate New York: A 10-year review of New York vehicles parked overnight has increased from 11,858 in 2008, to 30,072 in 2017

— and AVP has been marketing to that region.

Beardsley also “cited new, larger aircraft in the markets we serve, as well as the loyalty of our community,” Airport Board meeting minutes show.

Beardsley has said the airport is a “multi-layered economic engine” with a regional economic impact of \$327 million, directly and indirectly.

In other developments:

- Last August officials at the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International

Airport joined representatives of Marywood University and Aviation Technologies Inc. to announce the university will begin offering its flight program at AVP starting the following month.

Captain Joe McDonald, director of the aviation program at Marywood, said the university was in need of a place for internships. He said the airport offers the best facilities for a successful program.

McDonald said there were 37 students

enrolled for the fall semester; 31 of them are already flying as of August.

“We hope to expand our program,” McDonald said. “Our students will meet pilots, mechanics, fuelers and people in all related jobs. There are many career opportunities available.”

McDonald said some 2,957 pilots were hired this year by major airlines. He said the market is expected to be excellent through 2026.

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It's 'more fun than a mall'

Business owners credit vibe at 900 Rutter for aiding success



The main entrance at 900 Rutter complex in Forty Fort.

Butch Comegys | For Times Leader

Times Leader staff report

FORTY FORT — Towering over much of the rest of Forty Fort, right off the Cross Valley, stands a building that bills itself as being “full of possibilities.”

Situated at 900 Rutter Avenue, the building, which is named for its address, is owned by David Koral, and provides a unique blend of retail space, restaurants, residential space and even an event space.

Built in 1903, the building has since been converted into this blend that is unlike any other space locally, complete with oddball art tucked around every corner.

Eric Kuhn, who owns a men's clothing store in the building called The Haberdashery along with his business partner Zack Graham, said being a part of the building's culture has been tremendously successful.

“It's more fun than a mall,” Kuhn said.

To him, it's the building's ability to adapt to any need that allows it to succeed.

“This is such a fluid environment, you could put anything in here with the right people and it'll work,” he said.

Graham agreed, adding, “It's really about the



Zach Graham seated and Eric Kuhn, co-owners of The Haberdashery in the 900 Rutter complex in Forty Fort, say being part of the building's culture has been tremendously successful for the business.

Butch Comegys | For Times Leader

synergy of businesses.” That synergy of businesses is dedicated to providing unique experiences one might not find at a more traditional mall.

In addition to The Haberdashery, there are nearly two dozen other businesses that call 900 Rutter home. Some, like The Sweet Lush Cupcakery and Sugar Plum Chocolates, will satisfy the cravings of any sweet tooth. Sakari Salon and Spa along with The Shop: Barbering Redefined will provide for all the grooming needs of both men and women.

And that only scratches the surface of what is

provided at 900 Rutter; several fitness programs call the building home, along with a construction company, a photography service and even Commonwealth Health's home health program. The building is also home to several apartments.

Additionally, each month, a marketplace is held which allows local artists and craft makers to sell their wares. While the vendors line the halls of the building, most congregate in a large space which has been dubbed The Room at 900.

The Room is the building's event space, serving as a large hall to fit any

kind of gathering you can imagine.

John Phillips, owner of MCR Design Group which runs The Room, told the Times Leader recently how much the space means to him.

“One thing that's different about 900 is that it's still a little hidden gem,” he said of the building. “The one thing about the 900 building is mystery. We want people to discover the atmosphere.”



The 900 Rutter complex in Forty Fort offers a unique space to businesses.

Butch Comegys For Times Leader

Calling 900 home

- The businesses located in 900 Rutter
- HocSoxc
- Sweet Lush Cupcakery
- Balance Yoga & Wellness
- Boote Photography
- The Room at 900
- Commonwealth Home Health of Wilkes-Barre
- The Haberdashery
- Sheri Pilates
- MCR Productions
- The Nook
- Valley Running Co.
- Sugar Plum Chocolates
- TA300 Pole Fitness
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Lori Sedlak, an employee of Sweet Lush at 900 in Forty Fort, shows off a selection of the shop's cupcakes.

The Barn Nutrition & Fitness

Mary Dragon, owner of The Barn Nutrition and Fitness, was born and raised in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

"After school, I moved to Long Island and later settled in South Florida for 26 years," Dragon says. "Throughout the last 30 years, I had the opportunity to study nutrition abroad. I also pursued a bodybuilding career which taught me nutrition on a whole new level."

"When I came back home to Northeastern Pennsylvania, I felt there was a huge opportunity in this area to make a difference," she says. "This area needed some help – some Mary Love. It was time to share all of my learnings from the past 30 years."

"Since I've been back, I've been working with hundreds of people who are passionate about health, wellness and fitness," Dragon says. "I've partnered with local restaurants who are on board and are now serving up some healthier menu options – from cauliflower pizza crusts to zucchini zoodles instead of pasta. I am honored to be part of a healthier community and excited to see where we go from here."

With her focus on healthy eating and physical wellbeing The Barn Nutrition and Fitness, a nutrition and fitness center located at 100 East Overbrook Road in Shavertown, was born.

"We operate classes on three different levels," Dragon says. "Our first level consists of our Spinning Room and includes treadmills and rowers. Our second floor is the home of our Old General Store, along with our Meeting Room and Barre Room. Our third floor is where we typically hold our Boot Camp, Density, POWER and Circuit classes."

The Barn's classes are available for all fitness levels and abilities. Mary says that whatever your experience level is, there is a fitness class for you at The Barn.

"And because we are not your typical gym, no one feels intimidated," she says. "It's a fun atmosphere that allows you to work out at your own pace and ability."



Before The Barn Nutrition & Fitness



After The Barn Nutrition & Fitness



Mary Dragon, Owner of The Barn Fitness & Nutrition

Fitness Advice from Mary Dragon

"I place a big emphasis on the 3 macronutrients (proteins/carbohydrates/fats) as I believe they are the backbone to achieving your weight loss and/or fitness goals."

"In order for our bodies to function properly and stay healthy, it is important that we follow a balanced lifestyle that includes eating the right foods for you and incorporating some type of physical activity. If you fail to do these things, eventually your body (and mind) will break down. However, if the right steps are taken you will be well on your way to living a healthy lifestyle and realizing the benefits that come with it."

The Barn offers 35 fitness classes throughout the week, including a mix of cardio, strength and flexibility. All fitness levels all ages are welcome.

So, what sets The Barn Nutrition and Fitness apart from other gyms? They focus on nutrition first, a key component to getting on the right track to becoming (and staying) fit and healthy.

"Although we offer several fitness classes like spinning, barre, circuit classes and boot camps, one must attend a nutrition seminar before attending any class," Dragon says.

"We've all heard of the expression 'you can't outrun a bad diet.' We couldn't

agree more and that's why at The Barn Nutrition and Fitness, we focus on nutrition first."

Along with having two floors of fitness, The Barn's General Store gives clients the opportunity to pick up the essentials, no matter what kind of nutrition plan they are on.

"Whether it's KETO, Paleo or their own customized plan," Dragon says, "we offer protein powder, protein bars, healthy snack alternatives, multi-vitamins and supplements."

"The Barn's message is about providing nutrition, health and diet guidance

based on individual needs and goals," she says. "Everybody is different and every body is unique. At The Barn, we are empowering you to take charge of your health and encouraging you to make mindful food and lifestyle choices."

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