BY BRAD JOHNSON

Fostering community engagement to promote the growth of entrepreneurship is seen by some as a vital element in developing a more resilient – and more inclusive – local economy.

Among those sharing that view is David Parker, CEO of Entrepreneurship for All. Known in short as EforAll, this Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization has developed a proven model for engendering the growth of entrepreneurship – especially among women, minorities and the economically disadvantaged – in communities across the state.

“Our focus is on seeing if entrepreneurship can make a difference in the communities we’re in,” said Parker. “And, to that end, we need to engage the community and have their buy-in for what we’re doing.”

Berkshire County has now become the latest community to buy into the EforAll model, joining seven others across Massachusetts as well as one in the Denver metropolitan area.

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EforAll brings proven program for accelerating new business startups to area

BY BRAD JOHNSON

Whether on a global, national or regional level, innovation serves as an indispensable engine for economic growth.

An upcoming event will drive that point home on a very local level by highlighting the many ways that innovation is helping to reshape the Berkshire economy as the era of large industrial operations and major corporate employers fades further into the past.

On Oct. 3-4, Lever will host its inaugural Innovation Summit in Williamstown, with a multifaceted program that will emphasize innovation as an engine of economic growth.

“We talk with a lot of companies in the county through the course of our various programs and activities,” said Jeffrey Thomas, executive director of Lever, a North Adams-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to

continued on page 15
Familiar name resurfaces in downtown North Adams

BY JOHN TOWNES

After several decades, a familiar local business name has returned to downtown North Adams at the same location but in a more contemporary guise.

In late June, Mark Meehan and his wife, Debra Morandi, purchased The Hub at 55 Main St. After briefly closing the restaurant for a cleanup and redecoration of the 1,400-square-foot space, they reopened in early July as the Capitol Restaurant.

The Capitol was the name of a popular workaday eatery that was founded in 1952 on State Street. It moved to 55 Main St. in the late 1960s, where it operated until 1997. After the Capitol closed the space housed a succession of restaurants, including the last 11 years as The Hub.

Meehan, a native of the northern Berkshire counties, said he wanted to honor the original Capitol with the name.

“When I was growing up it was always the Capitol,” he said. “I decided that if we were going to do this I wanted it to be named the Capitol again. Out of respect, I contacted the most recent former owner of the Capitol and got their permission to do it.”

Their remodeling of the interior includes photos and memorabilia from the Capitol’s history.

He noted that the daughter of the original owners of the Capitol, the Cantoni family, has visited the new version. “We stood outside and showed her the photos,” he recalled. “It was very emotional, and she said her parents would have been very happy with this.”

Meehan is full-time manager and executive chef. Morandi, who is co-owner, works at Williams College but also spends a lot of time helping with the business and operations. The restaurant has a staff of 18.

The Capitol is located in what was originally the entrance to the former Paramount Theater. When the space was converted into a restaurant, a lunch counter was installed, as well as individual booths. The booths were later removed for separate tables.

It currently has indoor seating for 85 in two sections, with 60 counter and table seats in the front, and 25 in the rear. It also has seating for 16 outside during warm weather.

The Capitol (413-662-2500 or thecapitol-restaurant.com) is open for lunch and dinner from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday. On weekends it also serves breakfast, and is open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Saturday and 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Sunday. It has a full liquor license.

Meehan described the menu and role of the Capitol as a casual full-service restaurant offering “fresh, quality, comfort food” including meat, seafood, pasta and other entrées, as well as lighter fare and appetizers, rice bowls, sandwiches, burgers, soups and salads.

One of Meehan’s specialties is barbecue, including smoked brisket, pulled pork, pulled chicken and others.

“I’ve been doing barbecue for a long time and have borrowed elements of that from different regions to create my own version,” he said.

However, he also emphasized that the Capitol serves food that all patrons and patrons, including vegetarians and other with specialized requirements such as gluten-free items.

“We have something for everyone, whether you want steak, barbecue, chicken and other meats, seafood or vegetarian,” he said.

Meehan said the common denominator is that all food is prepared fresh. “I don’t like frozen foods, and almost everything we use is fresh from the markets and other suppliers,” he said.

He noted that among their primary suppliers of vegetables is Red Shirt Farm in Lanesboro, MA (September 2019 BT&C). The menu features a variety of appetizers ($7.95 to $10.95) and burgers ($10.95 to $12.95). There is also a variety of salads and sandwiches, including barbecue items, hummus and vegetable flatbread, among others.

Entrées ($12.95 to $21.90) include Hand Cut Rib-Eye Steak, St. Louis Smoked Ribs, Chicken Marsala, Eggplant Marsala, Jambalaya, Grilled Atlantic Salmon, and Fish and Chips, as well as Spaghetti, Chicken or Eggplant Parmesan, Portabella Risotto with Seared Scallops, and Veggie Pasta, among others.

Weekend breakfast items ($7.95 to $9.95) include eggs and sides dishes, French Toast, and sausage gravy and biscuits, among others.

“We also have daily specials listed on the chalkboard and will be adjusting the menu over time based on what people want and request,” said Meehan. He added that the restaurant currently features a prime rib special on Saturday nights.

Meehan said his involvement in the Capitol came about through a combination of his former profession as a construction contractor and a lifelong love of food. He also has operated a catering business.

“I’ve always been a hard-core foodie,” he said. “I’ve been wanting to open a restaurant for at least 10 years, and when this space became available my wife and I decided to do it.”

While his background as a construction contractor may initially seem unrelated, that too was oriented to food.

When he was young, Meehan moved to Florida for about 15 years, before returning to the Berkshires a decade ago. He operated a catering business that specialized in country restaurant and hospitality industries.

“That started when I was asked to build a prototype restaurant for a Connecticut-based chain, and it took off from there,” he said. “Since then I’ve built restaurants all over the country. That gave me a lot of insight into the business, as well as the opportunity to experience different regional foods. When I returned to the Berkshires, I started a catering business.”

Meehan said the Capitol allows him to continue to offer catering. In addition to full-service catering, he is also offering a lower-cost alternative version, which he calls “You Catering.”

“Instead of paying the cost of a caterer coming in and setting up and providing on-site service, you can order the food you want in advance, and then on the day of the event you can come in and pick it up hot and ready,” he explained.

He is also setting up a home delivery service for individuals and families, in which people can call or order items online.

When they first purchased the business, Meehan and Morandi had a true trial by fire. Before closing the restaurant for its refurbishment, they kept it open for several days to serve the crowds that descend on North Adams for the semi-annual Solid Sound Festival.

“It was crazy,” Meehan recalled, adding that, since then, business has been at a less frantic pace. “It was initially kind of slow, but it has been increasing and growing steadily.”

Mark Meehan has fulfilled a longtime business goal, while at the same time reviving a familiar name from decades past, with the opening of the Capitol Restaurant on Main Street in downtown North Adams.
Mall study outlines various strategies for site’s reuse

BY JOHN TOWNS

One of the region’s formerly most popular and now most problematic sites – the Berkshire Mall in Lanesborough – is the subject of an extensive recent study of its potential for revitalization and possible strategies to achieve that.

In essence, the report concludes the mall building is physically sound, and the 86-acre site has many attributes that could bring it back to life.

However, that will depend on de-emphasizing its original role as a retail center and creating a new and coherent identity and mix of activities.

The study was prepared by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and took months to complete. It was funded by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, with additional support from the Baker Hill Road District (an legal entity associated with the mall property through the connector road built to service it).

Ironically, the release of the report earlier this summer coincided with the July 12 sale of the Berkshire Mall for $1 million to Durga Property Holdings Inc., a real estate investment firm based in Ohio.

The seller was Berkshire Mall Realty Holdings, which had purchased the mall for $3.5 million in 2016. That entity was formed by Mehran Kohnasheh (who also uses the name Mike Kohn), a developer based in Great Neck, N.Y. His company, Kohnan Retail Investment Group, specializes in purchasing troubled malls across the country.

However, the sale of the now largely vacant 720,000-square-foot retail complex is a separate issue than the focus of the report.

“The report presents options for the mall’s future, regardless of who owns it,” said Laura Brennan, senior planner for economic development at BRPC.

She explained that the mall study is not binding and does not recommend specific strategies. Rather, it outlines suggested options based on the physical condition and characteristics of the mall, the local and regional market, national trends, and what has been done successfully at other mall properties.

“It lays the groundwork with research and ideas for what could be done by any owner,” said Brennan. “The basic purpose is to encourage proactive planning and action while there is still time. It’s much more difficult and expensive to redevelop a building that has been mothballed.”

The Berkshire Mall study collected a variety of ideas and approaches. These were categorized as either rehabilitation of the existing building, partial demolition of certain sections, or complete demolition and redevelopment of the site. It also looked at possible changes on the surrounding parking lots, such as reducing the paved areas for greenspace or activities.

The study considered 15 design concepts, and then narrowed them down to five possible themes that were refined into more detailed outlines. These include a Sports Destination, with indoor and outdoor athletic facilities. Another is a Family Entertainment Resort, with a hotel, recreational activities and restaurants and retailing. One concept would be focused on economic development as a Training and Technology Center.

Based on the county’s demographics, another possibility is a Senior and Transitional Care facilities theme, which could combine residential, health care and retailing oriented to the senior population.

Another concept is a Green and Agricultural theme, with indoor and outdoor growing facilities such as indoor hydroponics and greenhouses. It could also include food production and processing, as well as retail food outlets and educational programs.

The report examined these and other concepts in detail, such as the extent of work required, possible changes in zoning required, and other factors.

Brennan added that an owner might adopt portions of various concepts or build on them in different ways. “There are overlaps among them, and an owner could mix and match,” she said.


“AT THE END OF EACH MONTH, WHICH SITUATION SOUNDS MORE LIKE YOURS?

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Berkshire Trade & Commerce
GET OUT MINDGAMES

Escape room to add new attraction for spooky season

BY JOHN TOWNES

As Halloween approaches, Get Out Mindgames in Pittsfield is preparing to add a seasonal attraction designed to both chill the spine and stimulate the brain.

“In the spirit of that holiday, it’s a horror movie theme, in which participants have to solve a series of mysteries and puzzles to escape a killer,” said Justin Clairmont, who started Get Out in 2016 in a former doctor’s office at 1450 East St.

While the stakes are not actually life and death, the challenge reflects the overall offerings of Get Out, which is a form of entertainment known as an “escape room.”

An escape room is a type of team-based game where players enter a room and cooperatively discover clues, solve puzzles, and accomplish tasks to progress toward a specific goal and escape from the room in a set amount of time.

The concept is based on video games with similar challenges but transposed into the physical world. It was first introduced in Japan and China about 15 years ago, and then spread internationally, according to Clairmont.

“It came to the U.S. about four years ago, and has become very popular,” he said. “Escape rooms have cropped up in many cities. It’s even become a situation comedy trope.”

Clairmont estimated that, on average, his escape rooms accommodate about 12 groups a week. Teams typically range from four players up to eight or more.

“It’s very seasonal,” he noted. “This time of year we have between 10 or 15 groups a day. While it is a new concept that grew out of video games, Clairmont said escape rooms have an informal community. “I talk to other owners, and we share ideas and feedback,” he said, adding that businesses also buy and sell completed games to each other.

Clairmont has captured the imaginations of a growing number of escape room enthusiasts over the past three years with Get Out Mindgames in Pittsfield. The group-oriented attraction is preparing to unveil its latest game with a horror movie theme in the spirit of the Halloween season ahead.

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Dr. Nancollas, a Board certified and fellowship trained Orthopaedic Surgeon, brings an established reputation of excellence specializing in the procedures of the Hand and Upper Extremity. His office practice is located at 55 Pittsfield Rd., Suite 12B in Lenox, MA. Dr. Nancollas accepts numerous insurances.

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The game lasts an hour. The price is $25 per person, with a discounted price of $20 for students, members of the military and veterans.

Clairmont, who is a Cheshire native, said he discovered the escape room concept while staying in Chicago. “A friend worked at a very large escape room there,” he said. “I found it fascinating and decided to roll the dice and start one here. I put everything I had into it.”

(Although the name is similar to the popular recent horror movie Get Out, Clairmont said that is coincidental, and he came up with it long before the movie came out.)

The doctor’s office he leases has two large lobby areas and four former exam rooms. This space supports having up to two different game themes running at a given time, each with their own props, scenic elements and other effects.

Appropriate to its location, the current theme is medical, in which players enter a laboratory setting. They are then informed that they have been exposed to a pathogen and have one hour to solve a series of puzzles and mysteries to find an antidote before it becomes fatal.

“It’s very science-oriented in the games and puzzles, and people use tools like microscopes,” said Clairmont.

Because it’s all in good fun, the stakes of losing are obviously not succumbing to a disease or being caught by a killer.

However, players do get into the spirit of it. “It gets very exciting as people try to figure things out and do what’s necessary in time,” said Clairmont.

“When it’s over, people can be very enthused and get into discussions of what happened.”

Clairmont is currently the only full-time staff, although his girlfriend, Sam Stier, also helps out.

He develops and builds the settings and games himself. “I create a game and theme based on the space, and figure out what would be interesting to do, and then I assemble them,” he said.

Clairmont noted that operators of escape rooms have an informal community. “I talk to other owners, and we share ideas and feedback,” he said, adding that businesses also buy and sell completed games to each other.

He said that the Halloween theme will debut on Oct. 1 and will continue for a few months.

“I’m planning to do something with a jungle theme next,” he said.

While it is a new concept that grew out of video games, Clairmont said escape rooms have the basic qualities of traditional games, and that they are more physically engaging and personal than video games.

“It’s basically good old-fashioned fun and is very social, as people work together to solve the games and puzzles,” he said.
Sept. 17: Women Serving on Boards Breakfast Networking Event will feature a presentation on creating a successful volunteer role and tips for maximizing your impact. 7:30 a.m. at The Berkshires Taps, Stockbridge. More information at 413-668-4911 or tapstockbridge.com. 3289. Register online at sboce.org.

Sept. 18:﻿using Napoleon Hill Foundation National Program Hosted by the Salvation Army, the program will feature presentations on how to achieve goals and dreams in business, life and beyond. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Salvation Army Hall, North Adams. For more information, contact 413-499-3266 or ihowers@salvationarmyusa.org.

Sept. 18: President’s Weekly Update Meet with President Rick Newton for his weekly update of the College’s work. 10 a.m. at the President’s Office in 109 Alpheus George Lodge. For more information, contact Rick Newton, President at 413-655-2623 or rnewton@msla.edu.

Sept. 20: 3rd Annual Western Mass Food Fight presented by FairStreet. The contest features 15 teams of four from restaurants, bars, and cafes from across Berkshire County. The four winning dishes will be entered into the State Fair through the Massachusetts Restaurant Association. 5-8 p.m. at the Armory in Pittsfield. For information, call 413-864-6337 or visit fairstreetpdx.com.

Sept. 20: Day of the Dead presented by LaCosecha. The event features a Mexican-inspired food and live music with El Jarron de Mexico. Proceeds benefit LaCosecha and a local charity. 6-8 p.m. at LaCosecha restaurant in Pittsfield. For more information, contact 413-499-3266 or ihowers@salvationarmyusa.org.

Sept. 21: Picturing Political Power: Images in the Women’s Political Movement: This program is presented by Berkshire Museum; tickets are free, reservations required. 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield. For information, contact 413-499-5000 or berkshiremuseum.org.

Sept. 21: Berkshire Museum 39th Annual Schumacher Lectures, presented by the Schumacher Center for a New Economics. The lecture features renowned economist, Thomas Sowell. 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield. For more information, contact 413-499-5000 or berkshiremuseum.org.
Excuses provided at no charge
Just in case you need an excuse to treat yourself to something special, there's good news: we've got plenty of them for you! In fact, we have as many excuses for you as we do pieces of beautiful jewelry! So relax, come see us. And let us pamper you with something special made out of gold, platinum, and sparkling gems. You won't even need an excuse!

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Residents of the northern Berkshires who are experiencing joint pain or a sports injury now have convenient access to a new specialist. Ivette Gutmann, MD, a sports medicine specialist, is now seeing patients at Northern Berkshire Orthopedics in Williamstown. She also sees patients at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC) Orthopedics in Bennington, VT, and Twin Rivers Medical in Hoosick Falls, N.Y. SVMC and Northern Berkshire Orthopedics have been partners in providing orthopedic services since early 2018. “The partnership between SVMC and Northern Berkshire Orthopedics is a great way to provide patients with convenient access to our specialists,” Gutmann noted. “It’s a pleasure to be working in Williamstown and helping to provide patients with the care they need closer to where they live.” Gutmann is board certified by the American Board of Pediatrics and holds an American Board of Family Medicine Certificate of Added Qualifications in Sports Medicine. She joins board-certified and fellowship-trained surgeon Suk Namkoong, MD, at the Williamstown practice. Paul Donovan, DO, Kendra Isbell, PA; Katherine Kelleher, FNP; Jessica Moors, FNP; Samuel Smith Jr., PA; and Amy Wheaton, PA, round out the team providing care at Northern Berkshire Orthopedics.

For the second consecutive year, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) has been ranked Top Ten College by U.S. News and World Report. MCLA ranks as No. 7 on the organization’s list of top public colleges and also appears on its list of Top National Liberal Arts Colleges. This is the highest U.S. News ranking earned by MCLA, which has appeared on the list of top 100 colleges for seven of the last nine years. MCLA also appears on a new U.S. News list: Top Performers on Social Mobility. This list measures how well schools graduate students who receive federal Pell Grants, which are typically awarded to students in the bottom 40% of families. MCLA in particular excels in this measure.

In order to help provide clean new socks for the homeless, the Big Y supermarket chain will be collecting socks in all of their pharmacy locations through Oct. 2. As part of their Sock-tember program, flu shot details can be found at www.bigy.com. Socks are also available for purchase in Big Y stores, so customers who aren’t getting flu shots could add to the donations. Last year over 6,000 pairs of socks were distributed to the homeless through the program.

Berkshire Bank has launched its new Friends & Family Fund powered by The Runway Project aimed at helping entrepreneurs of color access the seed capital necessary to fund their dreams and spur economic growth in underserved communities. The fund is one of the first offerings under the bank’s new Be First social impact initiative. The Friends & Family Fund is designed to bridge the gap in access to capital by providing early-stage loans to seed bold ideas and invest in promising new minority-owned businesses. The fund is fueled by a specialty certificate of deposit that provides a safe, NCUA and FDIC insured and certified, market-rate return on investment while providing liquidity for the loans. Loan applications will be reviewed through a community-based underwriting process designed to eliminate historical barriers like an over reliance on credit scores, personal collateral, or historical tax and financial reporting as an indicator of future success. “Our strategy at Berkshire Bank is to be a bank of and for the community,” said Richard Marotta, CEO of Berkshire Bank. “We recognize that all too often banks have been seen as an obstacle rather than a partner – we want to change that. Our new Friends & Family Fund will serve as a model of how banks can expand access to capital in communities that have traditionally been boxed out of the investments needed to help spark economic growth.”

For more information on the Friends & Family Fund, please visit BerkshireBank.com/BeFirst.
Sounding Board

Suicide prevention is everyone’s business

BY MELISSA HELM

Melissa Helm is chairperson of the Berkshire County Walk to Fight Suicide.

When was the last time you took a mental health day from work? Let me rephrase that question: When was the last time you disclosed to your boss that you would be staying home from work because you were mentally exhausted, overwhelmingly stressed or depressed?

I’m willing to venture a guess that most of us are more comfortable blam- ing our absence on a faux stomach bug or migraine than we are having an open and honest conversation about our mental health. Why is that? We’ve been told that mental health is just as real as physical health, and we know that our brain is arguably the most complex organ in our body. It only makes sense that, like the rest of our physiology, our brain may get sick from time to time.

Our society is deeply rooted in the stigma which has historically surrounded mental illness. Because of this, we shy away from conversations about our mental health for fear that we will be viewed as weak, incompetent or unable to perform highly demanding work. We worry that the careers we have dedicated our lives to serve will pull the rug out from under our feet if we are transparent about our personal mental health. This is a critical issue in society today.

During a time when suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals 15-to-34 years old, and the fourth leading cause of death of individuals between 35 and 54, we need to recognize the serious damage that results from keeping quiet about our mental health.

In Berkshire County, placing an emphasis on mental health at work is especially important, as our county’s suicide rate of 17.7 per 100,000 people exceeds well above the Massachusetts average of 9.3 per 100,000. Each year in Massachusetts, we see 682 suicides, on average. In 2010 alone, this cost our state over $728 million in combined lifetime medical and work productivity loss. Across the country, an increasing number of employers have begun to realize the positives of support- ing the well-being of their employees. The corporate wellness industry – which was valued at $48 billion in 2017 and is project- ed to reach $66 billion in 2022 – has taken off and is becoming the modern strategy to recruit and retain high-level employees.

With an increasing number of com- panies offering on-site fitness centers, dog-friendly offices and fully stocked mini fridges for employees to use at their convenience, it begs the question: Are we doing enough to support all facets of employee well-being? Sure, we know that exercise boosts endorphins, that playing with dogs can elevate oxytocin and dopamine, and that healthy, nutritious food can have positive impacts on our mental health. However, while these “nice to have” gestures are great, are they helping the eight of every 10 work- ers with mental health conditions who are prevented from seeking treatment due to the stigma of disclosing mental health conditions at work?

The answer, in my opinion, is a resound- ing no. Taking into account the current state of our nation’s stress epidemic – the estimated 40 million U.S. adults living with an anxiety disorder and another 16 million U.S. adults who have had at least one major depressive episode in the past year – we need business owners, executives and key community change-makers to take a formal stance on mental health in the workplace to even begin to scratch the surface of our nation’s stigma surrounding these issues.

The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Preven- tion (AFSP) is a phenomenal resource for employers looking to educate their workplaces in mental health and suicide prevention.

The AFSP is the nation’s leading non- profit organization dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. AFSP creates a culture that’s smart about mental health by engaging in funding scientific research, educating the public about mental health and suicide prevention, advocating for public policies and supporting survivors of suicide loss and those affected by suicide.

Through their Talk Saves Lives training, attendees learn what suicide is, who it af- fects, what we know about it and what can be done to prevent it. Their training also expands into sector-specific resources which addresses common struggles faced by healthcare, education and law enforce- ment professionals.

It’s important to note that we cannot prevent suicide. However, each of us can be transparent about mental health struggles on our colleagues without provo- cing an environment which is free from judgement and misconceptions about men- tal health. By becoming fully inclusive of our colleagues struggling with mental health conditions in our sick-time or leave policies, promoting employer assistance programs, and creating a workplace that does not discriminate or judge those that are dealing with mental health challenges, we can begin to put an end to this tragic loss of life.

One step we can all take is to participate in the fifth annual Berkshire County Walk to Fight Suicide. The walk unites our community and provides a time to acknowled- ge the ways suicide and mental illness have affected our lives and our loved ones.

Each year in Massachusetts, we see 682 suicide deaths. AFSP creates a culture that’s smart about mental health by engaging in funding scientific research, educating the public about mental health and suicide prevention, advocating for public policies and supporting survivors of suicide loss and those affected by suicide.

Community Health Programs (CHP) believes that the quality of the services we provide comes from the commitment and dedication of our qualified staff.

At our 10 sites in Berkshire County, CHP provides over 220 employees with a work environment that encourages relationships. CHP supports diversity in the workplace and provides a time to acknowledge the ways suicide and mental illness have affected our lives and our loved ones.

Contact us at HR@CHPBerkshires.org to learn more about us and our available opportunities!

Or check out job openings: CHPBerkshires.org/careers

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BY LIANA TOSCANINI

Support for nonprofit sector serves us all

Depending on your point of view, we either have a scary or healthy number of nonprofits in Berkshire County – over 1,000 if you include all the churches, fire departments, teachers’ unions, international aid organizations, arts and cultural organizations, and civic and social groups. Each of these nonprofits has dedicated founders, volunteers and staff, and each manages to forge ahead fulfilling its own mission to improve life in our community despite limited resources.

Sure, the competition for funding is intense. But resources have always been limited for nonprofits. That’s practically the definition of nonprofit, and certainly the daily reality for many. If you’re a local business, you’re experiencing limited resources too! It’s called “donor fatigue.” Requests for funding far outpace available dollars no matter how philanthropic you’d like to be. Processing the multitude of requests from many great organizations isn’t easy and has probably developed into what seems like a full-time job for someone in your organization. It’s hard to turn people away, and it can all seem utterly unsustainable.

Significant part of economy

While corporate (and individual) donor fatigue is of real concern, it’s important to continue to invest in our vital nonprofit sector. It is a huge economic engine, employing a significant chunk of our local workforce. In fact, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Berkshire County has one of the highest rates of nonprofit employment in the U.S. And, as we’ve seen since the economic downturn of 2008, it’s a resilient sector too.

What’s more, over the past decade, nonprofit job growth outpaced for-profit job growth by 3-to-1 in the U.S., as reported by Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies.

At Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires (NPC), we believe our community has what it takes to support a large nonprofit sector, and that there are underutilized assets in Berkshire County. Our mission is to connect nonprofits to those resources.

Our local legislators are well aware of the vitality and importance of nonprofits and they work hard to advocate for funding. Berkshire media outlets do an admirable job covering nonprofit life and events. Local businesses are extremely generous, investing private capital to effect social change.

Corporate earnings have increased under the new tax laws, so corporate sponsorships and grants may even fuel nonprofit program growth. Many long-time secondhome owners are feeling the desire to become more involved and supportive of their Berkshire neighbors. And retirees, some of whom are choosing the Berkshires over Florida, are looking for community engagement opportunities. We are sitting on a wealth of skilled volunteers and potential donors waiting to be connected to those nonprofits that can creatively find and engage those folks.

Identifying resources

The NPC, itself a small nonprofit, supports other nonprofits by connecting them to resources such as educational workshops, consultants, publications and networking vehicles. Founded in 2016, the NPC is a support and capacity-building organization helping nonprofits connect, learn and grow.

In our trifurcated county, with no regional government and thousands of nonprofits, this is a challenging job. With hard work, persistence and the help of their Berkshire neighbors. And retirees, some of whom are choosing the Berkshires over Florida, are looking for community engagement opportunities. We are sitting on a wealth of skilled volunteers and potential donors waiting to be connected to those nonprofits that can creatively find and engage those folks.

The NPC, itself a small nonprofit, supports other nonprofits by connecting them to resources such as educational workshops, consultants, publications and networking vehicles. Founded in 2016, the NPC is a support and capacity-building organization helping nonprofits connect, learn and grow.

Within those profiles are descriptions of mission and program, fast facts, a list of ways to help, and contact information. The guide is used by individuals, giving circles, camps, schools, and agencies to assist with giving decisions, community service projects, job placement and volunteerism. One enterprising church even used it to attract candidates to an open pastor position!

The NPC’s value is in connecting nonprofits to those who can and want to help. Local experts serve as educators, guest columnists, service providers and pro-bono consultants, and our community is richer for it. This work is time-consuming but critical to planning programs that steward the best use of our existing resources.

Tapping more regional resources

In other positive developments, many regional resources have sought out the Nonprofit Center as a vehicle for connections to the Berkshire nonprofit community. The Massachusetts Nonprofit Network, our statewide advocacy association based in Boston, now makes annual visits to the Berkshires.

On Sept. 25, the NPC will host the Massachusetts Service Alliance, which offers trainings and technical assistance to help organizations more effectively and efficiently engage volunteers (go to npcberkshires.org for more information). The Nonprofit Center recently entered into a partnership with Philanthropy Massachusetts (formerly Associated Grant Makers) to provide webinars at discounted rates to NPC members.

By partnering with individuals, businesses and foundations, and focusing on capacity building, skills-based volunteerism and network creation, we have built an enormous amount of human and intellectual capital. We’ll harness those relationships to explore more complex solutions going forward, including resource sharing, more formal collaborations and earned income streams.

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Lee Bank & Berkshire Grown
TOURISTS WELCOME: Innovative North Adams hospitality venue quickly makes name for itself

BY JOHN TOWNES

As it enters its second fall foliage season, the eclectic hotel and riverside retreat known simply as TOURISTS continues to make its mark as a popular new part of the northern Berkshire hospitality scene.

The appeal of its concept and success of its implementation since opening in July 2018 have helped bring thousands of new visitors to the region. In recognition of this, TOURISTS has been selected to receive the “2019 Putting the Berkshires on the Map” award, presented by the 1Berkshire regional economic development organization.

Although it is still new, TOURISTS was selected for bringing high-profile publicity and new visitors to the Berkshires. Since opening just over a year ago, it has been featured in many articles in the national media, including the New York Times, Vanity Fair, Vogue and other prominent publications.

“In the past 18 months, no property has garnered as much press or shone a light on the Berkshires more consistently than TOURISTS,” said Jonathan Butler, CEO of 1Berkshire in a statement announcing the award.

With over $15 million in private investment, this project has assembled and reimagined a diverse collection of properties that illuminate the deep and complex history of North Adams,” he continued. “They’ve held this year at Jiminy Peak in Hancock (www.touristswelcome.com) is the result of extensive research, creative innovation and attention to detail, according to the principals.

The rapid rise to prominence of TOURISTS (www.touristswelcome.com) is the result of several factors, including its physical transformation of the former Redwood Motel, a small 1950s-era lodging facility that had seen better days, into a 48-room destination resort. The partners also acquired nearby properties to create a site that encompasses 70 acres and numerous buildings extending north from Route 2 and across the Hoosic River.

“We all decided that it would be interesting to start a hospitality business that reflected our ideas,” said Svenson. “We initially didn’t have a plan to grow the site beyond the core motel. But people came forward with opportunities to add other properties at good prices, and it evolved into something much larger and more ambitious. It blew all of our original expectations out the window.”

However, it wasn’t just luck. The unique design and sensibility of TOURISTS has also drawn attention, as a mix of nostalgic and rustic qualities with contemporary elements and an individualistic edge.

“The rapid rise to prominence of TOURISTS has sold approximately 9,300 room nights during its first 13 months of operation. “If you factor in that most people come in couples or family groups, that’s more than 18,000 people who have stayed here,” said Svenson.

Project’s origins

Svenson is also a managing partner at Broder Development, a family-owned firm based in Boston that invests in, develops and manages commercial, residential and hospitality properties.

He said he discovered North Adams several years ago during a visit when he stayed at The Porches, an inn adjacent to Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) that also combines the heritage of North Adams with a contemporary sensibility.

“I had a great experience at Porches and North Adams, and it stayed in my mind,” he said. Another original partner is John Stirratt, the bassist with the band Wilco, which hosts the semi-annual Solid Sound Festival at MASS MoCA.

““As a musician, John travels a lot and stays at many hotels,” said Svenson. “He has a strong interest in – and many ideas about – the hospitality business. He is very astute at picking apart the hotel experience for what works and what doesn’t.”

The idea germinated when Svenson met Scott Stedman, who has a background in media, and was a co-founder of Brooklyn Magazine.

“We all decided that it would be interesting to start a hospitality business that reflected our ideas,” said Svenson. “North Adams was at the top of our list.”

Kerns, who is co-founder of Bright Ideas Brewing at the MASS MoCA campus, also subsequently joined the partnership. An-
other original partner was Corney Burns, a prominent chef from California, but she recently left to pursue other activities.

During their search for a site, they discovered the Redwood Motel at 915 State Rd. (Route 2), just across from the Stop & Shop supermarket. They purchased it in 2015 and spent the ensuing years developing the concept and preparing for construction.

The project was financed by a combination of private investment and a loan from MountainOne Bank.

While all of the partners are involved in the venture, Kerns, who lives in North Adams, and Svenson, who has moved to Williamstown, have been most active on a regular basis.

They took down the original motel and constructed an all-new complex of buildings for the inn’s rooms and other functions. An adjacent house that had served as owners’ quarters was adapted for the new inn’s lobby and lodge, with a large fireplace and space for relaxing and dining.

They have also integrated a nearby 1830s farmhouse, which at one time was a tourist guest house called Airport Rooms. They have converted that into a restaurant and lounge, also called Airport Rooms. They are using the original sign for that business.

The overall name of TOURISTS was also inspired by that sign, which has that word in bright letters.

The partners also envisioned TOURISTS to be a destination in itself. They compared it to resorts in places like the Catskills.

“Eric and I are both nerds about the tourist industry of many years ago,” said Svenson. “When planning this we started with a basic question: Why were people coming here to resorts in places like the Catskills.

“In that sense, Kerns said they consider their competition to be other resort regions and places like Marfa, Texas, an isolated town in the desert that has become an unlikely center for contemporary art.

“Many guests are already familiar with the Berkshires, others are not and come specifically to stay at TOURISTS.”

“People respond to the level of customization we wanted to create a reason for people to come here, with a setting and activities that would be a draw on their own. People respond to the level of customization we see a model for this as the old resorts where people bring their families every year.”

“Eric and I are both nerds about the tourist industry of many years ago,” said Svenson. “When planning this we started with a basic question: Why were people coming here to resorts in places like the Catskills.

“Eric and I are both nerds about the tourist industry of many years ago,” said Svenson. “When planning this we started with a basic question: Why were people coming here to resorts in places like the Catskills.

“We made a list of everything that should be in a hotel room, and then carefully considered what was justified and what was not,” said Kerns. “For example, we had long conversations about the details of closets.”

Other immediate plans for the property include converting the former Our Lady of Incarnation Church on Massachusetts Avenue into a facility for weddings, conferences and other events.

Beyond that, the partners say TOURISTS will continually be a work-in-progress that evolves and changes over time. There are still buildings and sites on the property that are presently unused.

“We have a lot of ideas of what we want to do,” said Svenson. “Eric and I are both interested in the idea of iterative improvement, which means we’ll continue to experiment and try new things.”

Both men said they feel a great sense of satisfaction in their project, although they rarely have time to appreciate what TOURISTS has accomplished. “We tend to get lost in the details and what has to be done,” said Kerns. “It’s easy to forget that people are also here having a great time.”

Svenson noted that, despite the complexities and business-like strategizing, its purpose boils down to a simple idea. “I think of this place as a smile factory,” he said.
Entreprneurship for All
continued from page 1

As in these other regions, EforAll Berkshire County will hold community-centered pitch contests on a regular basis that connect budding entrepreneurs with business leaders to share ideas, receive feedback and compete for funding.

It will recruit participants for an intensive 12-week accelerator program, held twice a year, that will provide aspiring entrepreneurs with instruction on building a company from the ground up and a chance to win seed money for their startup, along with a full year of support from a team of mentors and other local experts.

EforAll Berkshire County will be administered locally by Deborah Gallant, who has been hired as executive director, and a program manager yet to be named. They will receive ongoing support from staff at the organization’s Lowell headquarters.

In addition, local business and community leaders will participate in the process as experts, judges, mentors and advisory board members.

The advent of EforAll Berkshire County was announced at an Aug. 21 press conference held by local officials, community leaders and other stakeholders who played a role in bringing the organization to the region.

Central to those efforts was the roughly $1 million collectively committed by several foundations, institutions and organizations to fund EforAll’s operations here for the first three years.

Among these are Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, the City of Pittsfield, Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation (PERC), Greylock Federal Credit Union, Mill Town Capital, Berkshire Bank Foundation, and others.

“EforAll Berkshire County is the culmination of a great partnership between a committed and diverse group of leaders in the Pittsfield area and EforAll,” said Parker in remarks prepared for the Aug. 21 announcement. “Over the past six months, we’ve devoted many hours of work toward making sure EforAll’s program is the right fit for the community. We’re thrilled to be in Berkshire County, and we’re highly confident we will help many local residents successfully launch their business and nonprofit ideas.”

“In subsequent interviews with BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE, Parker and Taylor discussed the program’s origins and evolution, and the process by which it came to the attention of local leaders as a means of promoting economic vitality through entrepreneurship.

Working to make a difference

Parker explained that his involvement in EforAll dates back to its founding in 2010 as the Merrimack Valley Sandbox. At that time he had just spent the prior 15 years founding and working on a series of entrepreneurial ventures including Viaweb, SoundBite Communications and TripAdvisor.

“I had done six startups in a row,” he recalled. “I wanted to stay in entrepreneurship but wanted to work in a way to make the world a better place, and make a difference on a social level.”

With that goal in mind, Parker and others launched Merrimack Valley Sandbox as a public-private project focused on building a community-based entrepreneurial ecosystem in the economically disadvantaged cities of Lowell and Lawrence. “In 2010 and 2011 we

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conducted research on what entrepreneurship meant to people living in these cities,” he said. “We did a bunch of pitch contests, and, based on the success of those, we said, ‘Let’s go for it and start our own accelerator program.’”

Among other outcomes, this led to the launch in 2013 of the nation’s first Spanish-language accelerator program, reflecting the high concentration of Spanish-speaking residents in those two cities. “It had to be tailored to the needs of the people we were working with in those communities,” Parker noted.

In 2013 the organization became a registered 501c3 nonprofit and changed its name to Entrepreneur for All to better reflect its mission of accelerating economic and social impact through entrepreneurship. These changes also set the stage for expansion of its work into other communities over the next few years.

“Our success in Lowell and Lawrence led us to wonder whether this model would work in other communities,” said Parker. “So, we built up our organization and staffing with that in mind: to replicate our program in other communities that were ready to support— and benefit from— an acceleration of entrepreneurial growth.”

This led to the launch of EforAll programs in Fall River and New Bedford in 2015, Lynn in 2016, and Cape Cod and Holyoke in 2018. This expansion has been made possible by continued and broadening support from private and corporate philanthropic interests to fund most of the roughly $3 million annual operating budget of EforAll’s headquarters and staff. Additional financial support comes directly from the communities in which EforAll operates its programs.

Parker noted, however, that none of EforAll’s funding comes from the aspiring entrepreneurs in its programs. “All of our programs are free to those participating in them,” he said. “We are serving folks in our communities who are classically underrepresented, and we charge no fees for this.”

This basic model underscores the importance of buy-in for the communities in which EforAll operates—both philosophically and financially. “The funds raised locally for each of our programs are a vital part of this process,” Parker said.

Using the new Berkshire County program as an illustration, he noted that the rough annual operating budget of $300,000 comes exclusively from funds committed at the local level. Of this, about half goes toward local staff compensation, while the other half covers cash grants and awards to entrepreneurs, support services provided by headquarters staff, and other sundry expenses related to local operations.

Philosophical alignment

While local funding is essential for bringing EforAll to a new community, Parker stressed that the community’s philosophical alignment with its mission is of even greater importance. If local leaders and stakeholders are not fully behind the concept and value of accelerating entrepreneurship in their community, he said, their ability to cobble together financial support for the program becomes more of a question.

“It all starts with a conversation, and it varies from community to community,” said Parker.

For the Berkshires, that conversation came about as an outgrowth of behind-the-scenes efforts by a group of local leaders and interests to find new and effective ways to support enterprise development in the region.

“This is the result of a public-private partnership that brought together a number of stakeholders with a shared common commitment to promoting economic vitality through entrepreneurship,” said Taylor with Berkshire Taconic. In addition to his organization, Taylor said this group included representation from the City of Pittsfield, PERC, Mill Town Capital, Greylock Federal Credit Union, and Berkshire, among others.

Over the past year or so, this ad hoc group had been taking stock of the county’s existing resources and support system for promoting entrepreneurship. “We looked at the landscape of capital availability, and looked at what was already available in business and technical support services and where there were gaps,” said Taylor.

This process was facilitated by an in-depth analysis conducted by a consulting firm that pointed to a need for more tangible support for emerging entrepreneurs and enhanced availability of resources for underserved communities.

“We used this to inform our own further analysis, and to guide us in taking action on these recommendations,” said Taylor.

This process of analysis on the local level coincided with the continued growth and expansion of EforAll into new communities.

“As we were looking at gaps and identified (support for emerging entrepreneurs) as a need, EforAll was becoming more visible in the state,” said Taylor. “It was a nice convergence of what they were doing and what we were looking for in this community.”

Parker added that, from EforAll’s perspective, the research and analysis done by this group of Berkshire interests provided a solid base on which to begin building a relationship with his organization.

“This group of leaders had already taken the initiative to look at what Berkshire County needs to prosper going forward,” he said. “They took the step of hiring a consultant to inform and guide them in this process, and then committed themselves to act on the recommendations that they heard.”

continued on next page
Continued from previous page

So, when EforAll came to the group’s attention, there was already a strong alignment of its mission and the region’s needs. That connection was further developed as Berkshire representatives attended EforAll’s annual conference last year, and EforAll representatives came to the Berkshires for information sessions with a wide range of local interests and constituents.

“We had David and his team come twice in January and April,” Taylor said, noting that these information sessions drew over 100 people who learned about EforAll’s model and gave their feedback on how it might fit in the Berkshires.

“That whole community engagement that’s important to the launch and success of EforAll in a community,” said Taylor.

Parker agreed, noting that the group’s efforts to bring the overall community into the process really stood out. “The Berkshire County folks elevated it to a new level of involvement,” he said. “To have so many interests so active from the very beginning is super impressive. They did an extraordinary job of ensuring there was buy-in and bringing together possible sources of funding.”

“I can see us using this as a model for other communities going forward,” he added.

Program’s nuts and bolts

In terms of going forward, those involved with EforAll Berkshire County will be wasting no time in implementing the first programs and activities.

“Deborah Gallant, our executive director, will get a lot of attention from our director of programs, Shelly Cardoos, who manages all of our executive directors,” said Parker. “They’ll quickly set up a pitch competition and at the same time Deb will begin recruiting mentors for the first accelerator.”

He explained that, under the EforAll model, the pitch competitions serve as a precursor to the accelerator programs. “Our goal for the pitch competitions is for them to be really fun community-building events,” he said, noting that members of the public are encouraged to attend. “We’ve designed the pitch competition to get everybody happy about entrepreneurship. Everybody’s smiling when they leave the competition.”

The basic format is for up to 20 aspiring entrepreneurs to participate with a table or display where they describe what their concept or venture is about. “For those eight, are selected to do brief pitches in front of assembled members of the public and a panel of judges. Cash awards of $1,001, $750 and $500 go first-, second- and third-place competitors. Another $500 award goes to the ‘fan favorite’ who is determined by those attending the competition.

“Everyone gets to vote,” said Parker, adding that the fan favorite occasionally turns out to be a competitor not finishing in the top three.

Parker noted that the pitch competitions also serve another purpose of helping to market and promote the upcoming accelerator program to potential candidates.

“The accelerator is our bread and butter,” he said. “It’s where we give these entrepreneurs a big community hug.”

That “hug” comes in the form of 12 weeks of instruction on the basics of starting a business led by content specialists, along with ongoing interaction with a team of three dedicated mentors for each participant throughout the year-long program.

Parker noted that the accelerators generally have an enrollment of 15 entrepreneurs, which means that a total of 45 mentors need to be recruited for each program.

“The three mentors per entrepreneur is a fixed ratio for all of our accelerators,” he said. “They’re a very important part of the program, so it’s crucial that we’re able to attract highly qualified people from the community who are willing and able to make a commitment to working with our entrepreneurs for the duration of the program.”

Executive director’s role

Recruiting those mentors will be a key responsibility of Gallant’s as she settles into her new position as executive director.

“There’s a great pool of talent to tap into,” said Gallant, expressing confidence that potential mentors throughout the community will step up to support the program. “I’ve already gotten quite a few emails from people who want to get involved.”

Gallant, who lives in neighboring Canaan, N.Y., brings a strong background of working with small businesses to her position with EforAll. “I’ve been a business and career coach since 2003, working primarily with small businesses of all sorts,” she said.

After working in other parts of the country for several years, Gallant and her husband moved to Canaan, where she continued to do small business coaching and become active in Berkshire County business and entrepreneurial circles.

“I wasn’t really looking for a job, but this posting popped up in my social media feed,” she said. “It seemed like a good fit for what I’ve been doing for the past 15 years.”

During her first few days on the job, which she officially began on Sept. 3, Gallant was joined by EforAll Director of Programs Shelly Cardoos, who traveled from her eastern Massachusetts base to assist with coordination of EforAll’s first pitch competition and accelerator.

“It looks like we will have our first pitch competition on Oct. 22 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Berkshire Museum,” said Gallant, noting that the application deadline is noon on Oct. 11. “Our accelerator program will begin in Jan. 7 in Pittsfield, and applications for that program will be due by Nov. 6.”

To promote these programs, EforAll is planning a day-long “County Caravan” on Oct. 7, with stops and events in communities throughout the Berkshires (see calendar listing on page 5). “This Caravan is meant to tell everyone about our program and encourage participation by both entrepreneurs and volunteer mentors,” Gallant said.

In this and other ways, Gallant said she plans to be very accessible and active in her outreach efforts throughout the community. That will include holding information sessions at various locations around the county, as well as making the circuit of coffee shops, co-working spaces and other gathering places.

Taylor noted that Gallant’s “office” will be wherever she is at any given moment.

Parker said this is consistent with how EforAll operates in other communities, noting that local staff generally use co-working spaces as a base as opposed to a fixed office. “In a typical office, people feel like they have a place to go, but not here,” she said. “It’s super important for our staff to be out interacting within the community.”

Countywide presence

Parker added that Gallant and her yet-to-be-hired program manager will be involved covering a lot of territory given the relatively large geographic size of the Berkshires.

“We like to move our events around a community, and that will be important in Berkshire County as well,” he said, noting the county’s three distinct southern, central and northern regions.

Taylor also stressed the importance involving the entire county in EforAll and its activities, as opposed to having them centered around the largest city.

“The City of Pittsfield has been instrumental in bringing EforAll to the Berkshires,” he said, noting that the city has the largest representation of minorities, immigrants and other constituencies that EforAll strives to include in its programs. “And, yet, indeed it is countywide.”

In addition to hiring local staff and planning the first formal activities of EforAll, Taylor said an early priority is also to establish an advisory board for the Berkshire program.

While noting that there is some overlap between EforAll’s mission and the role played by existing entrepreneurial support resources in the county, Taylor said there are clear differences in the constituencies being served.

“This is going to complement and support existing services for entrepreneurs,” he said, noting that those other services “are targeted toward more advanced high-growth potential startups or existing businesses. “EforAll works with emerging entrepreneurs with drive and conviction to bring their ideas forward. It really helps fill a gap.”

With funding in place for the next three years, Taylor said he anticipates the program continuing beyond that initial period. “The formula that EforAll uses has proven results in identifying and encouraging entrepreneurs to get involved,” he said. “We have great confidence that we are going to see the same results here in Berkshire County.”

For information about applying for the upcoming pitch competition and business accelerator, or about serving as a mentor for the program, contact Deborah Gallant at deborah@eforall.org. Additional information about the organization and its programs is available at eforall.org. ◆
Innovation Summit continued from page 1

develop a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Berkshires. “And we’ve been struck by the level of innovation that’s happening here but has been flying below our radar. With our upcoming summit, we want to highlight the fact that Berkshire County is a great place for innovation.”

Included among Lever’s objectives for the summit are:

• affirming that the Berkshire region remains an innovation leader,
• highlighting continued innovation and its importance for a vibrant regional economy,
• promoting a collaborative environment among Berkshire region organizations,
• highlighting the teachings of Pittsfield natives Donald and Armand Feigenbaum and their influence on contemporary innovation practices,
• providing students at regional colleges the opportunity to participate, learn and network, and
• increasing awareness of Lever’s innovation programs and other regional innovation support resources.

The program begins on Oct. 3 with the final pitches for Lever’s inaugural Intrapreneur Challenge, a competition among a half-dozen established companies in the region for a $25,000 cash prize that will be awarded to the team with the best innovation for growth within their existing operations (see related story on page 16). Later that evening will be a keynote presentation by Steve Case, AOL founder and CEO of Revolution, which invests in people and ideas as part of its mission “to build disruptive, innovative companies that offer more choice, convenience, and control for both consumers and businesses.” This will be followed by an announcement of the winner of the Intrapreneur Challenge.

Day two of the summit will feature a morning program on Regional Innovation, featuring presentations on Currency Innovation (Doug Crane, the New Dalton Group); High Performance Glass Laminates (Chris Kapiloff, Laminated Technologies Inc.); Management Innovation and the Legacy of the Feigenbaums (Jeffrey Thomas, Lever); DesignMeetsMedical Garments (Josh Levin, LymphDiva); Special FX Meets Medical Models (Lisa Chamberlain, the Chamberlain Group); Hotel Innovation (Ben Svenson, TOURISTS); and Full Living Buildings (Charley Stevenson, IntegratedEcoStrategy). Following lunch and a keynote presentation by Carlo Zaffanella, vice president and general manager of General Dynamics Mission Systems, Pittsfield, will be a panel discussion on Regional Innovation Centers. Panelists include Steve Boyd, Berkshire Innovation Center, Pittsfield; Kristen Leutz, Valley Venture Mentors, Springfield; Chad Casey, Tech Valley Center of Gravity, Troy, N.Y.; and Peter Reinhart, Institute of Applied Life Sciences, Amherst.

Interspersed among these programs will be a number of receptions and networking sessions, which will be held at the new Williams Inn and other venues on the Williams College campus. The summit is open to the public, but advance registration is required. For a full schedule and registration information, go to leverinc.org.

Evolving mission

Thomas noted that the Innovation Summit and Intrapreneur Challenge represent somewhat of an evolution of Lever and its mission. Founded in 2014, the organization has been focused primarily on the support and nurturing of promising start-up ventures with high-growth potential. That role has become most visible with its series of challenge events for start-ups in manufacturing and industrial technology sectors that were launched during the past year (see related story on page 18).

But we also want to do more to foster innovation in general, not just that led by entrepreneurs,” said Thomas. “It’s a connecting and filling out of our approach to developing an entrepreneurial ecosystem here.”

He noted that the summit’s keynote speaker, AOL founder Steve Case, has been active in promoting this type of entrepreneurial ecosystem on a broader basis with his firm, Revolution.

“Since he retired from AOL, he’s been focused on entrepreneurship in small and mid-sized areas away from the large tech- nology centers,” said Thomas. “He refers to it as ‘the rise of the rest.’ And what he’s focused on now lies up exactly what we’re trying to do with Lever.”

Thomas said that being able to secure Case as keynote speaker was a bit of opportunistic good fortune that helps underscore the summit’s main strategic goal of positioning the Berkshires as an innovation leader.

“We do not have a reputation – in recent years – of being a place of innovation,” said Thomas. “There’s a perception that the innovation has left along with the companies that historically drove innovation here.”

He reiterated, however, that the region is far from barren in this respect, and that much of the innovation here is taking place outside of public view.

“There are companies in our area who are making unique products – best in class stuff – predominantly in the manufacturing sector,” he said. “But there are other examples, such as VidMob, which is leading video creation network and platform; and TOURISTS, which is showing innovation in the hospitality industry; and even MASS MoCA, which is innovative in its own way in terms of what a contemporary art museum offers. All of this stuff is really exciting when you examine it from a business perspective.”

Thomas said he anticipates that organizing events such as the Innovation Summit and Intrapreneur Challenge will have tangible downstream benefits for the region and for businesses here.

“For one, we’re hoping to foster a greater level of collaboration,” he said. “We’re already beginning to see this in our Intrapreneur Challenge with some interesting cross- synergies taking shape [among participating businesses].”

“We also want to change people’s perception of the Berkshires,” he added. “We want to help people realize that the Berkshires can be a destination for innovation.”

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Participants put to test with Lever’s first Intrapreneur Challenge

Six established companies developing innovations for new business growth

BY BRAD JOHNSON

A lot of learning is taking place during Lever’s first Intrapreneur Challenge. Teams from six established businesses and organizations in the Berkshires are deep into a three-month process of developing their respective innovation projects involving a new product or service with the potential to bring additional top-line growth and job creation to their existing operations.

These projects will be front-and-center at Lever’s upcoming Innovation Summit, a two-day program of events and activities being held to celebrate innovation in the Berkshires (see related story on page 1).

The summit will kick off on Oct. 3 with a final pitch competition for participants in the Intrapreneur Challenge, in which a panel of judges will select the innovation with the most potential for top-line growth and job creation. A $25,000 cash prize, along with additional support and guidance from Lever, will be awarded to the winning company for further development and roll-out of their project.

While this process is similar to the pitch competitions that Lever has been holding for start-ups in manufacturing and health technology sectors (see related story on page 18), the Intrapreneur Challenge is breaking new ground as what may be the first of its kind to engage companies in an experiment of sorts in terms of how well Lever’s established businesses can work with promising start-ups in developing their business models.

“We have not found a program similar to this,” said Brent Filson, director of operations and programming at Lever, a five-year-old North Adams-based nonprofit organization that provides a range of support services for regional start-ups and entrepreneurs.

As such, he said, the participating companies are engaged in an experiment of sorts in terms of how well Lever’s established businesses can work with promising start-ups in developing their business models. The innovation being developed by B&B Micro Manufacturing Inc., a custom tiny-home building business in Adams that produces RVIA-certified tiny houses, that produces small, single-module turnkey homes built in Adams and then permanently affixed to a foundation.

Boyd Technologies, a Lenox-based company that provides material sourcing, product development and advanced manufacturing services to medical device and life sciences companies, is developing a proprietary online tool that makes it easier to access information required for new medical device regulatory approval.

LTI Group, a Pittsfield-based producer of specialized laminated glass and polymer products for architectural, security and decorative purposes, is developing a new line of windows for U.S. Marine Corps vehicles that are resistant to delamination, which reduces visibility and is a leading reason that military vehicles are removed from service.

Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health in Stockbridge, a nonprofit organization specializing in wellness retreats, yoga and Ayurvedic teacher training, and the RISE resiliency training program, is developing a new service to certify workplace wellness programs, which would allow companies to showcase their commitment to bringing additional top-line growth and job creation to their existing operations.

At a workshop for participants in the Intrapreneur Challenge, lymphedivas President Josh Levin (left) makes note of suggestions from Lever’s Brent Filson regarding Levin’s pitch presentation for the innovation being developed by his company. Several participants in the program said that feedback from Lever staff – as well as from fellow participants – has been very helpful in refining their business models.

He noted that the projects being developed are not aimed at reducing costs through enhanced operational efficiency and productivity. Rather, the focus is on fostering innovation and entrepreneurial thinking within the company to identify and develop new products or services that have the potential to generate new revenue streams.

The companies participating in the Intrapreneur Challenge include:

• B&B Micro Manufacturing Inc., a custom tiny-home building business in Adams that produces RVIA-certified tiny houses.

• Boyd Technologies, a Lenox-based company that provides material sourcing, product development and advanced manufacturing services to medical device and life sciences companies.

• LTI Group, a Pittsfield-based producer of specialized laminated glass and polymer products for architectural, security and decorative purposes.

• Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health in Stockbridge, a nonprofit organization specializing in wellness retreats, yoga and Ayurvedic teacher training, and the RISE resiliency training program.

• LympheDIVAs, a Pittsfield-based company that designs and produces medically correct and fashionable compression sleeves for breast cancer survivors with lymphedema.

LympheDIVAs is developing a line of medical compression-wear products to serve a broader market.

• SVE Orthopedics, a global online retailer based in Lenox that supplies commercial gyms and facilities with products needed to maintain their business. The innovation being developed by Zogics is a new service to certify workplace wellness programs, which would allow companies to showcase their commitment to bringing additional top-line growth and job creation to their existing operations.
process," she said. "It’s really been invaluable to us. We have really benefited and has been a great learning experience."

While noting that the prize money would still be too early toward helping launch the RISE program online, Borden said their particular project was restricted by the intern's boundaries. "It has really pushed us to think this through, and we help the organization understand our readiness for an online program," she said. "We’re moving forward on this with or without the award."

"Pet project" unleashed
The team had a private competitor company in the Intrapreneur Challenge that touches on a different aspect of health and wellness.

"We’re working on a service that certifies companies’ workplace wellness programs," said Jon Pierotti, who works in marketing and e-commerce at Zogics and is a member of the company’s Intrapreneur Challenge team. "The goal is to help companies showcase their commitment to employee wellbeing for talent acquisition and retention purposes, and help to increase the value of wellness programs."

Pierotti noted that this project has been backburnering for the past as something of a pet project. "The concept is definitely within our wheelhouse," he said. "It was just a question of time and not enough hours in the day."

That equation changed with the opportunity to participate in Lever’s program. "When we found out about the challenge, it seemed like a perfect fit for our company," said Pierotti. "It provided the context to dive in and pursue it."

In the ensuing months the team at Zogics had a perfect fit for the company. "We have already gotten a lot out of this," said Pierotti, noting that it has helped guide their concept through an evolutionary process. "Overall the idea has stayed true to our original intention. But we have also pivoted in some ways, such as broadening our pool and refining our audience."

He said that feedback and support from Lever has been invaluable in this process, as has input from fellow competitors during the pitch practice sessions. "We’ve gotten the most feedback from other teams on what amounts to a fast and furious look at what we’re doing," he said. "Lever has really helped us understand the support and assistance from the interns that Lever provides as part of the program. The intern was a great extension of the team," he said. "They were very proactive and super helpful, especially in helping us with the research we needed to push this forward."

The Zogics team has also benefited from exposure to the lean methodology that Filson and Lever emphasize. "We’ve been putting the lean model to work and following it to the T," Pierotti said, noting that this has enabled them in development of their product, which is minimally viable product – for the certification product.

She added that their participation in the Intrapreneur Challenge has been very helpful in that process. "We’ve changed the concept since starting the Lever program, and it could change again," she said.

Among them is the innovation being pitched by another team in the Intrapreneur Challenge involves tiny houses, particularly in helping us with the research we needed to push this forward."

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Pierotti and other team members will be further honing the details of their concept in the weeks leading up to the Innovation Summit and final pitch competition.

Regardless of the outcome there, he said, the process of participating in the challenge program has been well worth the time and effort. "It’s been a pleasure to be a part of this," he said. "It has opened a lot of discussions and has been a very good process to accelerate this concept."

He added that Lever’s interest in promoting innovation is a good fit with the corporate culture at Zogics. "What Lever is doing is right in line with what we do with our core business at Zogics," he said. "We’re always looking to move forward and try new ideas. And we’re starting to use some of what we’ve learned in other areas of Zogics."

New foundation for growth
While some innovations taking shape in the Intrapreneur Challenge are tied directly to, or supported by, an online presence, others involve much more tangible products. Among them is the innovation being driven by B&B Micro Manufacturing, which for the past few years has been tapping into a space that had been explored by trailer-mounted and used at resorts, campsites and other situations.

"The concept we’re developing in the Lever challenge involves expanding into modular homes," said Katie Jackson, who works in sales and marketing at B&B Micro Manufacturing, and recently purchased and moved to a larger manufacturing facility in Adams (August 2019 RIA).

She explained that the tiny-home trend has taken off in recent years as people have looked at the diminutive dwellings as more affordable and less impactful alternatives to conventional housing – whether for primary residential or vacation/recreational purposes. A roadblock to even greater growth in this market has been a variety of local restrictions and regulations governing tiny houses, and where tiny houses can be situated, especially those mounted on trailers.

"A lot of people want tiny houses, but there are restrictions on how to do this," said Jackson. "That’s the reason we’re getting into this, and are designing the concept of a “modular home” that can be set on a foundation."

She noted that launching a modular division was a way to get feedback for B&B Micro Manufacturing, but that demands of their core business have not allowed them to pursue it. "When the Lever call for entries [for the Intrapreneur Challenge] came out, it was a prompt for us to do this," she said.

While the basic idea of building tiny modular homes that can be transported to a waiting foundation can seem relatively simple on its surface, Jackson noted that there are several factors, decisions and considerations that B&B has had to weigh.

Regulatory pain relief
In many cases, innovation comes about by being highly receptive to the needs of customers or clients and proactively finding solutions to meeting those needs. The concept being pursued by FoodTech laboratories in the Intrapreneur Challenge falls into that category.

"We’re always looking for ways to differ- entiate ourselves from the regulatory industry," said Linnea Morrison, marketing associate with Boyd Technologies.

The company’s work as a contract manufacturer within the medical device industry also includes material sourcing and testing, and is well versed in the various levels of FDA regulation involved in the development, manufacturing and commercialization of new medical devices.

"The whole regulatory process is very cumbersome," said Morrison.

continued on page 19

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17OCTOBER 2019 BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE
MANUFACTURING INNOVATION & HEALTH TECHNOLOGY

BY BRAD JOHNSON

As Lever moves toward completion of its first Intrapreneur Challenge (see related story on page 16), the organization is gearing up for its second round of competitions for promising startups in specific sectors. Up next is the Berkshire Manufacturing Innovation Challenge (BMIC), in which manufacturing startups can compete for incubation at Lever and $25,000 in funding. The goal of the BMIC is to attract and develop new startups that can operate or manufacture their product in the Berkshire region.

Applications are open and will be accepted through Oct. 27, with four finalists announced Nov. 1. A “Shark Tank”-style pitch competition will be held on Feb. 27, at which a panel of investment professionals will select one finalist to receive funding and mentoring through Lever’s resource network.

A second iteration of Lever’s Berkshire Health Technology Challenge (BHTC) will follow, with an application window from Nov. 1 to Jan. 6. The purpose of this challenge is to attract and support entrepreneurs with a scalable innovation in health technology.

As with the earlier competitions, these challenges are supported by a combined $450,000 in grant funding Lever secured in 2018 from the Mass Life Sciences Center, the MassTechCollaborative, Berkshire Bank and Williams College.

Meanwhile, the winners of the first BMIC and BHTC competitions are taking tangible progress on their business models.

United Aircraft Technologies

Last winter United Aircraft Technologies (UAT) got Lever’s new series of entrepreneurial startup competitions off to a flying start as winner of the first BMIC.

Since then, the Troy, N.Y.-based company has used the $25,000 cash prize and four-month no-cost incubation period that it was awarded to continue the development of its specialized products for the avionics industry.

UAT has also used the overall Lever challenge experience as a springboard for continued success in subsequent design competitions as it moves its way into the aviation and defense contracting systems.

“Our work in the Lever program really helped to solidify our presentation format and our message of the competencies that we are participating in,” said Daryian Rhysing, who co-founded and operates the company with his wife Evaguel.

UAT arose from Daryian Rhysing’s more than 10 years of service as an aircraft technician in the U.S. Air Force. He explained that hours spent installing and replacing clamps for aircraft wiring systems caused him physical pain and stress due to the constant strain in his hand muscles.

After leaving active duty, he enrolled in an engineering program at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy through a veteran’s program. “I took an inventor’s studio course they offered there,” he explained, “I came up with a technology for a wiring clamp that was more ergonomic,” he said.

He then was working for an interconnecting clamp that would involve far less muscle fatigue and repetitive strain compared with conventional clamps used in many military and civilian aircraft applications.

“I was really focusing on the human factor,” he said, noting that the main issue from years of installing clamps were also experienced by other aircraft technicians. “The problem is people don’t want to see their mistakes, they don’t want to give it too much attention but are also looking for solutions. It’s a band-aid for the injuries they’re experiencing.”

In addition to being an ergonomic solution, the clamp’s design also addresses other important issues. “There are significant weight savings because it is made out of lightweight composite materials instead of metal,” said Evaguel Rhysing, who serves as UAT’s CEO. She explained that, given the hundreds or thousands of such clamps used in various aircraft, the combined weight reduction can lead to significant improvement in fuel efficiency.

Based on positive feedback for the innovative design, the Rhysings decided to establish their own company to further develop the clamp for use within the defense and commercial aircraft industries.

“We were starting to move the company forward when the Lever program came up,” Daryian Rhysing noted. “We saw it as a perfect opportunity, so we applied and were named one of the finalists.”

Along with other competitors in the BMIC, the Rhysings worked closely with Lever staff and other mentors on development of their business model for the clamp.

“Jeffrey and Brent were wonderful!” said Evaguel Rhysing, referring to Lever Executive Director Jeffrey Thomas and Brent Cappiello, director of operations and programming.

“We’ve had other mentors, but they really helped us polish it off.”

After being selected as winner of the BMIC, UAT entered an incubation period with Lever and applied the cash award to continue development of a prototype of their interconnecting clamp. “We’re there at Lever at least once or twice a week, and we’re in constant communication with them,” she said.

They also connected with David Allen of Siconio Plastics in Dalton for help in their search for a contractor to work on the mold-making and production of the clamp. “When I went to visit his facility, I was super amazed,” said Daryian Rhysing. “We have a commitment to them, and they are excellent to work with.”

For the past few months since completing their incubation at Lever, UAT has continued to test and refine their clamp design.

“We’re at the prototype stage right now,” said Evaguel Rhysing. “This involves 3D printing, which is very important to the prototype process.”

In addition to the basic model – or Phase I – for their clamp, they are also working on Phase II, a “smart clamp” that will integrate electronic sensors and other technology to support real-time monitoring of wiring systems.

The Rhysings said it will take another two years to bring these products to market, and that’s a timeline dictated in part by the bureaucratic complexities and rigorous vetting involved in aviation and defense contracting. “It takes a while to get into these industries,” Evaguel Rhysing commented.

She added, however, that they are making significant strides in that process. “We have secured support from BAE Systems for the development of our clamp and have frequent meetings with them,” she said, referring to the multinational defense and aerospace company. “We also got accepted into an Air Force Research Lab program for technology acquisition and transfer.

UAT has also raised over $200,000 in equity and non-equity funding toward their goal of $500,000 to move them through the next stages. This has supported the creation of five new jobs and the launch of an internship program for aspiring engineers.

They have also remained in contact with Lever’s annual innovation’s annual Demo Day event on Aug. 8.

While continuing to gain confidence in their work, the Rhysings also acknowledged and expressed gratitude for the support they have received along the way.

“It’s scary to start something and put it out there and take risks,” said Evaguel Rhysing. “But there are people like Jeffrey and Brent at Lever who have helped us along the way and have really pushed us.”

My Core Floor

Brittney Cappiello was at a pivotal point in her My Core Floor when she learned last January that her pelvic-health-related venture was selected to participate in Lever’s first Health Technology Challenge.

At that time she and her team had assembled the basic format and workings of My Core Floor as a web-based resource for individuals seeking information and assistance on a range of pelvic health issues.

What was missing, however, was a firm grasp of how to make the transition from a promising business concept to a viable business model.

“I’m a great pelvic floor physical therapist, but I still have a lot to learn about business,” she commented.

Native of Adams and mother of two teen-age children, Cappiello has been a physical therapist for 18 years. And, for the past two years, she has focused on the specialized area of pelvic health.

“This evolved early on in my career, and was a newer area [of specialty] when I got into it,” she said. “It is my whole focus now.”

Cappiello applied for the Lever program as it moved its way into the aviation and defense contracting systems.

“I relocated to my hometown of Adams in 2003 and was working with clients with incontinence and pelvic pain, and after six years they were reporting symptom improvements. I also found that women kept signing up repeatedly for the class because they enjoyed the safe space to talk about these issues with other women, and the class held them accountable which helped them to maintain the benefits.”

The popularity of the class led to requests for Cappiello to offer it in other parts of the county – something she was hesitant to do because of scheduling complications and her commitment to her work and family.

“I began to explore the idea of putting the program online, and My Core Floor was born,” she said.

For the last three years, Cappiello has been working on the business model and website for My Core Floor (mycorefloor.com), which consists of educational videos about pelvic health topics for women. It features a series of workouts consisting of mobility.
flexibility, strength and stability exercises. My Core Floor also offers a community forum where women can ask questions about pelvic health topics or talk to other women who may have similar issues.

Cappiello noted that the name for the business reflects her wholistic approach to addressing the core region of the body.

While predominantly working with women, she pointed out that in her physical therapy practice she also treats men for pelvic health issues. “When I first started the website, I was going to market to everyone,” she said. “But I realized that marketing to men would involve an entirely different approach than with women, so I decided that might be something for down the road.”

Cappiello also put together a team to work with her on My Core Floor. “Each member of our team shares the unique bond of physical therapists,” she said. “However, it is our business model for My Core Floor beyond challenge participants, Cappiello and her team that “they teach nothing about business.

Brust, an online business owner who advises on various pelvic health and female-specific knowledge from her personal businesses said Cappiello, noting that she meets with working closely with the individual teams and also helped them move forward on key aspects of the business. Some of the award has gone toward website development and marketing, including a course that she and other team members took on building a successful business website membership website. “We also have some of the money set aside for [development of] Android and iOS apps,” she said. When the ramp-up of activity at My Core Floor, Cappiello has had to reduce her schedule at Williamstown Physical Therapy. “I’ve cut back to working part-time there to dedicate more time to My Core Floor,” she said. “I would like to continue to treat patients,” she added. “But I see what we’re doing with My Core Floor as a way to change the conversation about pelvic health problems and to help more women gain access to the resources that will help them deal with these issues.”

BUSINESS FOR SALE / TURNKEY BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

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Intrapreneur Challenge continued from page 17

She explained, for example, that FDA regulatory guidelines require medical device companies to understand the landscape of existing devices, adverse events, and the proper classification of a new device as they are being developed and before they are commercialized.

Accessing this required information through existing databases and other resources has long been a challenge for medical device companies. “It’s been on our radar as a pain point for our customers,” said Morrison.

The innovation Boyd Technologies is developing in the Intrapreneur Challenge looks to ease that pain for its customers. “We plan to develop a proprietary online tool that would collate and aggregate this information that is necessary and vital for FDA regulatory processes,” said Morrison.

“Access to this database will be provided as a quarterly subscription and sold as a supplement to our Product Development services.”

Morrison said the company’s involvement in the Intrapreneur Challenge came about through existing connections between Boyd and CEO Stephen Boyd (who is also chairperson and president of Berkshire Innovation Center, the nonprofit organization that owns and operates the soon-to-open facility of the same name in Pittsfield).

A team comprised of Morrison, Brianna Sporbert, vice president of engineering, and Matthew Boyd, chief commercial officer, was tasked with pursing the concept through the Lever program.

Morrison noted that the online tool was just at the concept stage and was not yet under development when the company entered the Lever program.

“Being part of the Lever challenge has been very useful as a way of going through the methodology for moving this concept forward,” she said. “It’s about marketing out to customers, anticipating their needs and finding a solution that doesn’t already fall within our service structure.”

Morrison noted that winning the $25,000 prize in the pitch competition would impact the company’s timeline on bringing this innovation to market.

“If we don’t win, we’ll need to evaluate things going forward. But I see this as a way of getting the allocation of time and other resources that would be necessary to commercialize the concept. “We’re not sure how this would have to compete with all of the other things we’re dealing with at the time.”

(Other two participants, LympheDIVAS and LTI Group, did not respond to requests for additional information about the projects and participation in the Intrapreneur Challenge. Another original participant, Shire City Herbals, the Pittsfield-based manufacturer of Fire Cider, found it necessary to bow out of the challenge due to other business obligations.)

Learning process for Lever As the Intrapreneur Challenge heads into its last few weeks, Filson said he will be working closely with the incubator to figure out how as they put the finishing touches on their pitches for the Oct. 3 competition.

While noting that the feedback he’s been getting from participants through the first stages of the challenge has been largely positive, he said there are also aspects of the overall experience that can be improved going forward.

“This is intended to be an annual challenge, and I’m learning a lot about what to change for next year,” he said. “There are definitely going to be some tweaks.”

Some of that, he said, may involve adjustments in how the programming is structured so that it’s easier for companies to free up time for key staff members to participate. There are also the matters of timing for both the challenge and the outreach for participants.

“The parameters of the challenge are kind of rigid, and the timing has to be just right for companies looking to participate,” he said. “Overall,” he added, “we want this to be a process that is effective, and we want the [participating companies] to be delighted with the experience.”

Filson cited studies showing that the presence of innovative companies in a region has more of an impact on the organic formation of vibrant innovation clusters than does proximity to research centers.

“We believe it’s the companies that are already here that will help us turn Berkshire County into an innovation hub,” he said. “We’re trying to inoculate culture of innovation, and we think that incentivizing innovation with a program like the Intrapreneur Challenge is a great way to do that.”

FALL WORKSHOPS FOR NONPROFITS

GivingTuesday Roundtable

October 1, 3:00pm – 5:00pm
Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield
FREE

Everything DISC Workshop

October 3, 8:30am – 12:00pm
8CC South County, Off. Barrington
$50, includes a DISC assessment

Workshoping the Annual Appeal

October 17, 10:00am – 12:30pm
MCLA Design Labs, North Adams
$40 NPF Members/$50 Not-yet-members

Introduction to Grants Research with Philanthropy Massachusetts

October 21, 2:30pm – 4:30pm
Berkshire Community College, Pittsfield
FREE

Capital Projects: How to Plan and Pay for Them with MassDevelopment

October 23, 8:30am – 12:00pm
Wilton Garden Inn, Pittsfield
Check out our web site for more details & to register.

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## Berkshires Trade & Commerce

OCTOBER 2019

Full details at https://www.loopnet.com/Listing/12-Harmony-St-Adams-MA/156719618/
Robert Burnell has been appointed executive chef of all dining venues at the Red Lion Inn. In his new role, Burnell oversees the day-to-day culinary operations of the main dining room, Widow Bingham’s Tavern, the Lion’s Den, and the seasonally open Courtyard. In addition, Burnell will collaborate with Brian Alberg, vice president of culinary development, on all future food and beverage-related development, including specialty menus for inn guests and private parties. With nearly 20 years in the food, beverage and hospitality industries, Burnell was previously the executive chef at Gedney Farm in New Marlborough.

Dr. Len Radin has been selected as Grand Marshal for the upcoming 64th Annual Fall Foliage parade presented by Berkshire. The parade will be held in downtown North Adams on Oct. 6 at 1 p.m. This year’s parade theme is “The Wizard of Oz, both in celebration of the 80th anniversary of its Hollywood premiere, and in the promotion of the message that “There’s No Place Like Home in the Berkshires.” Radin was selected for this honor not only because of all he has done for the community, but for his enduring love for this parade. The Wizard of Oz, Radin has spent over 60 years in the theatre business, including founding the Drury Drama Team and serving as its volunteer director for over 25 years, during which he led four productions of The Wizard of Oz.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) has announced the addition of nine new faculty members for the college’s fall semester. They include: Katelyn Born, who joins the Biology Department; Margaret Clark, a professor in the Education Department, Alyssa Dufresne, assistant professor of radiologic sciences; Linda Lipipacher, radiologic sciences program; Michaela Petrovich, Department of Fine & Performing Arts; Clio Stearns, Education Department; Xin Shen, assistant professor of electrical engineering in the Department of Computer Science; Joshua Uhalt, visiting assistant professor in the Psychology Department; and Julie Walsh, clinical coordinator for the radiology program at MCLA.

Like Home in the Berkshires.” Radin was selected for this designation for his success as a financial advisor in providing exemplary service and comprehensive solutions for his clients.

Berkshire Hills Bancorp Inc. has announced the promotion of Jacqueline Courtwright to senior vice president and chief human resources officer at Berkshire Bank. In this role, Courtwright will lead all aspects of human resource strategy and execution for Berkshire Bank’s workforce, including compensation and benefits, talent acquisition, assessment, and development, and organizational effectiveness. Courtwright brings more than 25 years of human resources experience to this position. Prior to her promotion she served as senior vice president, human resources business partner leader at Berkshire Bank.
Andrew Alcaro, a commercial lines producer in the Williamstown office of Greylock Insurance Agency, has earned a Commercial Lines-Coverage Specialist designation. The National Underwriter Company (NUC) established the designation to highlight agents who demonstrate extensive knowledge in the areas of property and casualty insurance, and have applied that knowledge through case study exercises. Alcaro joined Greylock Insurance Agency in 2018.

Jennifer Fox has joined Berkshire County Day School as head of school, bringing 35 years of experience in both primary and secondary schools in the United States and overseas, most recently at the Delta School in Wilson, Ark., which she founded. Fox is internationally recognized in the field of strengths-based education, which uses experiential learning activities to help students identify their greatest talents. Teachers then work with children to develop and apply strengths based on those talents to facilitate learning, intellectual development, and academic achievement. As the founding head of school at the Delta School, Fox spearheaded the design of the project-based-learning school, which included a 6,500-square-foot maker space to facilitate hands-on learning.

The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America has announced that Lawrence Hazzard has been named president of Berkshire Life Insurance Company of America (Berkshire Life), a wholly owned stock subsidiary of Guardian. Hazzard replaces Senior Vice President Gordon Dinsmore, who will focus on new product innovation and ensure a smooth transition of his responsibilities before retiring at the end of the year. Hazzard, vice president, head of individual claims, as well as become the 16th president of Berkshire Life. His new responsibilities include developing and executing the development plan, budgeting, planning and implementing fundraising events and annual campaigns, and maintaining relationships with other organizations, charities and individual donors. Melissa Orazio has been promoted to program director of the Brookside Intensive Treatment Unit. Her new responsibilities include developing and executing the development plan, including admissions, staff development, student services, and budgeting.

Hillcrest Educational Centers (HEC) has announced that Lauren Russo has earned the Financial Paraplanner Qualified Professional (FPQP) designation from the College of Financial Planning. To receive this designation, Russo completed a course of study encompassing the financial planning process, the five disciplines of financial planning and general financial planning concepts, terminology, and product categories, and passed an exam that tested her ability to apply theoretical concepts to real-life situations.

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If you’re looking for a bank with integrity, character, and deep local roots, bank with The Co-op. We’re easy to find – the Berkshires have been our home for 130 years.