TAKING THE LONG VIEW

Greylock WORKS remains a work in progress as the pandemic plays out

BY JOHN TOWNES

When Salvatore Perry and Karla Rothstein of New York City visited the northern Berkshires in 2014, the feature that made the biggest impression on them was not MASS MoCA, the scenery or other attractions the county is best known for.

Instead it was the Cariddi Mill at 508 State Rd. (Route 2) in North Adams, one of the impressive but vacant or underutilized industrial buildings that have been a prominent feature of the region’s urban landscape for many decades, since the decline of its traditional manufacturing economy.

While driving past it, they were impressed by its long road frontage and the core complex of interconnected mill buildings. They stopped and examined the property and noticed a “For Sale” sign.

continued on page 17
Safety procedures become child’s play at care center

BY JOHN TOWNES

While social distancing is difficult for adults, it’s even more challenging to enforce for children.

That is one reason schools and childcare facilities were among the first activities to be closed when the novel coronavirus emerged. However, during the emergency order not all parents have been able to stay home during the day or make alternative arrangements for their children to be cared for by family or close friends.

One alternative for parents in jobs that are designated as essential services is being provided by 18 Degrees (formerly Berkshire Children & Families Inc.), an independent nonprofit agency based at 480 West St. in Pittsfield.

The agency is among those operating as an Emergency Childcare Center. These are sites designated by the state to provide care for children whose families are providing what are classified as COVID-19 essential services. That include workers in health care, public health, human services, law enforcement, public safety, first responders, and grocery store staff, among others.

The service is for children from 2 years 9 months through 12 years of age, based on availability. It is free to eligible families, and meals are provided. It operates from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Childcare is just one aspect of 18 Degrees’ operations. The agency provides education, parenting skills and support, prevention and intervention, advocacy and life skills in programs serving children, young people, individuals and families. It has four areas of emphasis including early education and care, foster care and adoption, child and family well-being, and youth and community development.

Among its regular services are childcare programs for infants to pre-school. It also offers after-school care at Conte and Morningside schools, and summer camps.

“When the state closed schools and childcare centers, it allowed existing providers to apply to become emergency childcare sites,” explained Erin Sullivan, vice president of community and donor relations at 18 Degrees. “Our staff was willing to work on that. We applied and were accepted, and we began offering the service on March 31.”

Emergency childcare is focused on providing back-up, drop-in care for vulnerable families and workers who have no other option. Parents and guardians working from home are not a priority. Also, those who have alternatives such as friends or family that can care for children are discouraged from using the service.

“We’re not allowed to provide childcare for our regular families unless they fit the eligibility requirements for emergency childcare,” said Sullivan.

Sullivan said the program has the capacity to serve up to 200 children. “We’ve been adding spaces gradually,” she said in early May. “We started at for to six children. Now we have between 11 and 15.”

She said there has been a core of regular families, but the individual children attending vary somewhat based on their parents’ work schedules and other factors.

They have set up a variety of safety procedures for the childcare operations. The staff wear masks and wash their hands frequently. They also take extra measures to keep the site clean. Sullivan noted that they changed the location from the regular carpeted daycare center to a room without carpets.

“We are using a community room as opposed to our traditional classrooms because we are able to clean it more thoroughly, which happens halfway through the day and again after the children leave,” she said.

They also make an extra effort to balance the natural inclinations of children to mingle with the need for safety. “It’s not easy to keep kids apart, so teachers are making sure hand washing and sanitizing are built into the schedule and done when needed,” said Sullivan.

Children are not allowed to bring items from home. “We also don’t allow cloth toys or anything that can’t be cleaned off thoroughly. Instead we use toys like building blocks that can be cleaned.”

The center’s daily activities are also oriented to safety. That starts when parents drop their children off at the center.

“We talk to the kids and explain why we’re doing these things, and how they help to keep everyone safe,” said Sullivan.

The emergency childcare program will continue to operate until at least June 24. Whether it continues after that depends on the status of the emergency order, and other factors.

For information, call 413-448-8281 ext. 211 or visit 18degreesma.org.

Sullivan noted that the public has stepped up during this period. “The community has been incredibly supportive,” she said.

As examples, she cited meals provided for the children by the Pittsfield Public Schools. “Also Mill Town Capital has been arranging for meals to be provided for the teaching staff to take home, so they can have a dinner that’s ready to eat at the end of the demanding day,” said Sullivan.

The agency is making other adaptations to serve its clients as much as possible within the limitations of the emergency order and other circumstances related to the pandemic.

A press release announcing the Emergency Childcare Center designation noted that “18 Degrees is still open for business, but in ways that adhere to health and safety guidelines. Our staff team continues delivering services. They’ve been rolling with the daily gut-punches with professionalism and compassion.”

The release also noted that, because of community’s support and the diversity of its funding sources, 18 Degrees entered the COVID crisis in a financially strong position. “We are not panicked,” it stated. “We are cautious and determined, taking actions in line with our mission, priorities, and values. We must be ready to support our children and families through recovery and beyond.”
Barrington Stage plans for limited live performances

BY JOHN TOWNES

Barrington Stage Company (BSC) has decided to follow the familiar adage “the show must go on” while adhering to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Like all Berkshire performing arts organizations, BSC was busy in March preparing for the upcoming summer season when they had to drastically change the plans due to the emergence of the coronavirus crisis. Their initial action was to cancel the first production of the season, The Great Leap, and keeping their options open for later shows to evaluate the overall situation.

In late April, BSC announced that it was planning for this season’s planned Boyd-Quinones Mainstage productions until 2021, with the exception of Arthur Miller’s The Price, which is scheduled for Oct. 1-18. Smaller St. and Lee Blatt Performing Arts Center on Linden Street will also be closed for the season.

However, BSC is not going completely dark this year. Beginning in August it is planning a limited season of theatrical programs specifically tailored to meet social distancing guidelines and other safety requirements.

“We thought a lot about this,” said Julienne Boyd, BSC’s founder and artistic director. “We knew we couldn’t do our regular season, but we decided it would be really sad if nothing was offered in Berkshire County this year. People need something to look forward to and enjoy.”

She added that live theater will have a particular importance role in helping to overcome the effects of social isolation and related challenges at this difficult time.

“Live theater is a positive experience that you don’t get from virtual performances on the computer,” she said. “Sharing a story together with other people in person takes you out of yourself and creates a sense of shared humanity. That’s very healing and is something we need now more than ever.”

She emphasized that they will only proceed if circumstances are appropriate at the time of the performances. “We’ll only do what is safe and what federal and state guidelines allow.”

“We’ll be keeping close track of the overall situation. If it hasn’t improved, or if there’s a second wave, we will go by any measures that are required then.”

The 520-seat Mainstage seating is being reduced to one third of its capacity with increased distance between rows and seating, along with other measures.

In addition, the production will be either one-person shows, or very small casts with social distancing and other safety procedures for the performers and crews.

The productions will be crucially acclaimed off-Broadway one-person thriller, Harry Clarke, by David Cale, starring Associate Artist Mark Dold from Aug. 6-23. The production will employ social distancing practices outside.

“After months of isolation, people will really want to be outdoors together by then, even if they still have to be socially distant,” said Boyd. “This is not the full production, but it is an opportunity for people to discover and enjoy the songs from South Pacific in advance of next year.”

A full production of Arthur Miller’s play The Price is scheduled for October, but that will too depend on the situation with the coronavirus at that time.

Among the physical adaptations, alternate rows of seats in the theater are being removed to reduce its capacity to 163 and allow for more space between audience members. Audience members will be arranged into two seats between them.

“We originally thought of keeping all of the rows and leaving alternate rows empty,” said Boyd. “However that didn’t work because people would still be getting close to others when they arrive and leave their seats. So we decided to actually remove every other row, which allows more room around people.”

She added that this task was not as formidable as it sounds. “It was easier than we thought it would be to remove them, because the seats are screwed in place rather than being bolted in,” she said.

There will be other changes in the theatergoing experience and related operations. Masks will be required, and following the performance, the audience will leave one row at a time.

“We’re constantly refining the safety measures,” said Boyd. “For example, instead of handling tickets, people’s names will be on a clipboard, which they’ll give when they arrive.”

The theater will also be deep cleaned after every performance. “It’s going to be different from what people are used to,” said Boyd. “But it’s clear once people get the hang of it. This is going to be the new normal until a vaccine is developed.” Pricing for the 2020 summer season is $35 to $65 for the Mainstage and outdoor venue productions and concerts. Tickets for the fall productions of the 10x10 New Play Festival and The Price are $35 to $49.

“We hope this season will break even,” said Boyd, “but it is an opportunity for people to discover and enjoy the songs from South Pacific. "Live theater is a positive experience that you don’t get from virtual performances on the computer," she said. "Sharing a story together with other people in person takes you out of yourself and creates a sense of shared humanity. That’s very healing and is something we need now more than ever.”

She emphasized that they will only proceed if circumstances are appropriate at the time of the performances. "We’ll only do what is safe and what federal and state guidelines allow." New York, built in 2006, this modern commercial structure is ideal for a wide variety of commercial uses including retail, office, financial services, service businesses, contractor, restaurant and food service, as well as a potential live/work combination. The Route 2/State Road is fully finished and air conditioned, modern and attractive with 10 ceiling, excellent visual appeal and visibility for offices and showroom. The energy efficient building is 26,000 sq. ft., fiber glass insulation in showroom ceiling. Attached and set back is a 1,300 sq. ft. building, currently used as a workshop. Strategically located along the “Cultural Corridor” linking Williamstown with all of its attractions to the west and downtown North Adams to the east.
BY BRAD JOHNSON

As president and CEO of the Pittsfield Cooperative Bank, Jay Anderson has had his hands full helping customers cope with the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 crisis through such things as the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and temporary suspension of commercial and residential loan payments.

While these programs are providing the intended breathing room for many customers whose businesses, jobs or financial stability have been affected by the crisis, Anderson sees additional questions and uncertainty on the horizon once these temporary measures run their course.

Specifically, he’s concerned about unintended consequences of the PPP, and the potential for unpleasant surprises that may await some businesses that have participated in the program.

“I’m scared to death about this,” said Anderson in an early May interview as round two of PPP lending was in progress. Since its debut in early April, the PPP has provided a lifeline to hundreds of Berkshire County businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and has helped them to keep thousands of employees on the payroll. Many of those businesses have applied for the program through the Pittsfield Cooperative Bank, where Anderson joined members of the bank’s commercial lending team to handle the wave of business customers looking to participate in the PPP.

Anderson said the initial crush of applications in early April reflected the unprecedented impact that the pandemic was having on local, state and national economies. “No one has ever seen anything like this,” he commented. He added, however, that demand for PPP loans was driven primarily by the “forgivable” nature of these loans when they are used for their intended purpose.

“'And that intended purpose is eight weeks of payroll,' he said, referring to the stipulation that at least 75 percent of the loan amount go toward the cost of keeping employees on the payroll during the two-month period following receipt of the loan.

Jay Anderson, president and CEO of the Pittsfield Cooperative Bank, believes the chaotic rollout of the federal Paycheck Protection Program in April may be followed by another wave of confusion for banks and their business customers when the program enters the phase of determining forgiveness for the loans.

PAYCHECK PROTECTION
Challenges ahead in ‘forgiveness’ phase of federal program

BY BRAD JOHNSON

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It was all hands on deck,” said Anderson regarding the crush of inquiries about the program when it first rolled out on April 3. “We got inundated by requests from customers.”

Anderson, who has served as the Co-op’s president and CEO since 2009, joined Mike Barbieri, senior vice president of lending, and Joel Scussel and Brad Felix, both vice presidents of commercial lending, in working with individual customers on their applications for the PPP.

The program, part of the federal CARES Act passed by Congress in late March to address the economic turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, authorized $350 billion of lending to small businesses impacted by the crisis. This first round of funding was depleted in less than two weeks, with thousands of applications yet to be processed. That prompted additional legislation that provided another $310 billion in lending for the program, which resumed accepting applications on April 27.

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° And that intended purpose is eight weeks of payroll,” he said, referring to the stipulation that at least 75 percent of the loan amount go toward the cost of keeping employees on the payroll during the two-month period following receipt of the loan.
That 75-percent payroll threshold includes not just wages, but also amounts paid by employers toward health insurance, retirement plans and other qualified benefits. The other 25-percent, which inclusions of PPP funds could be used to be towards specified business expenses such as rent, utilities, and interest on existing commercial loans.

This attractive prospect of receiving forgivable loans led to frenzied rush to submit applications across the country in early April, which included many well-publicized instances of loans being given to large public corporations and other businesses that were not the intended target of the program. Public outcry over this led some of these loan recipients to return the funds, citing lack of clarity about eligibility and other confusion about the program.

Anderson agreed that the rollout of the PPP was rife with confusion. “Chaos, I would call it,” he said, noting that other local bankers he’s spoken with have expressed similar sentiments. “Nobody had any clarity on this until a few days after the program launched. And there have been clarifications and guidance coming from the SBA and Treasury every day since then.”

He attributed this to the PPP’s hurried launch and the unprecedented volume of lending done through the program’s first few weeks. “Just think about it,” he said. “The SBA processed $30 billion in loans in 2019 in just a few weeks. That’s more than 10 times what they did for all of last year.”

While the second round of PPP applications has been less frenzied than the first, Anderson said there continued to be hiccups that took to delays in applications being accepted. He added, however, that the bank has successfully processed all applications for its customers with some still pending approval.

“We’re generally seeing a lessening of these delays that are now getting to the end of the program are being accepted,” he said. “As of today, there is no guidance on how these loans can be forgiven on a case-by-case basis.”

The administration of this is going to be a nightmare. It’s going to be a whole second round of determination of how these loans can be forgiven on a case-by-case basis.

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The “no one complaint we’re hearing from our small business customers is that they have people not wanting to come back,” he said. Anderson noted that, by law, laid-off workers who decline the offer to return to their jobs are subject to loss of future unemployment benefits. “But some employers are not wanting to report (the employees) under these circumstances,” he added. “It’s creating a lot of frustration for them.”

In these and other situations, Anderson said he anticipates that many customers who have taken out PPP loans may find themselves liable for repayment rather than forgiveness despite their efforts to adhere to the program’s intent.

“Telling customers that they don’t qualify for forgiveness is not something I look forward to doing,” he said. “For those required to pay back the loans, there will be a six-month grace period before payments begin. They then have 18 months to pay off the loan in full. Even if the current period of economic upheaval improves, many businesses may still find it difficult if not impossible to handle those payments. ‘Economic activity is going to lag for an extended period of time,’ said Anderson. ‘What are businesses and consumers willing to do when things are opened up? There is just no way of knowing what things are going to look like in the months ahead.’

That uncertainty also extends to the fate of many of the workers whose paychecks have been protected through the PPP once the eight-week program ends.

Anderson said he sees a scenario where the program is simply shifting the potential for layoffs a few months further down the calendar. “Come summer, the question will be whether these businesses are back at a level of activity where they can keep [their workers] on,” he said. “I think that’s going to be the telling sign.”

In what has been a fast-moving situation since the COVID-19 crisis fully registered to the CARES Act and PPP to respond to the crisis have been hastily drafted and clumsily enacted. “We’re driving a car while building it,” he said. “It’s crazy.”
City rolls out $1.1 million COVID recovery program

BY JOHN TOWEES

The city of Pittsfield is moving forward on the first phase of a $1.1 million package of local and federal funding that was proposed by Mayor Linda Tyer on April 17 to support residents, small businesses, community organizations, and cultural institutions impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. "I have designed a robust economic recovery program that will help to meet some of the critical financial needs in our city brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic," said Tyer in announcing the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Program.

On April 28, the Pittsfield City Council formally approved $789,382 in funding allocated to the city from the federal CARES Act, which will be administered through Pittsfield’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The total $1.1 million proposal for Tyer’s COVID-19 Economic Recovery Program also includes $110,000 from the city’s Community Preservation Act funds to provide rental assistance for those economically impacted by the pandemic. Another $200,000 will come from the city’s Small Business Fund to help small businesses with cash flow.

"We’re being inundated with calls for assistance," said Tyer. "In addition, Tyer’s proposal will provide money to eligible homeowners and renters for up to three months or a maximum of $5,000 per household, mortgage payment, or utilities. That will be administered by the Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority. Grants will also be available to cultural institutions for job retention, creation, and programming. "Cultural institutions are essential to Pittsfield’s economy and to our sense of well-being. They have been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and I am proposing funds to help these creative cultural organizations re-open and re-establish their presence and programming in our city," Tyer said.

The specific details and processes for applications will be announced as the funds become available. Dodd said that there is a clear need for this support in the city. "We’re being inundated with calls for assistance," she said. "We intend to be responsive to the needs of the funds to use as rapidly as possible."

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Williamstown Farmers Market (WFM) will be operating an e-commerce market for pre-ordered items that will be available for pickup at the Williamstown Farmers Market - Essentials (WFME), will offer contact-free, curbside pickup and online ordering at a website (www.wfme.is), a virtual pickup location, and delivery within a seven-mile radius (reserved for those who are unable to make it to WFME). The WFME also offers items from a dozen local farms and food producers. Orders can be placed out for Wednesday to Monday delivery on a rolling basis per the WFME-F blog at williamstownfarmersmarket.org or the Williamstown Farmers Market Facebook page (See page 22 for a story about virtual farmers markets in Pittsfield and North Adams.)

MCLA’s Berkshire Cultural Resource Center (BCRC) is presenting all fall seasons of virtual programming this spring and summer, with a visiting artist, a virtual art exhibit, portfolio reviews for local artists, a virtual Downstreet Art kick-off, and more. The majority of BCRC’s virtual season is open to the public, and is designed to create art and culture experiences in a time of social distancing. Community members can sign up for these classes at www.mcla.edu/BCRC. Listings will continue to be updated through the season.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) announced the Berkshire Cultural Resource Center’s kick-off initiative, which will deploy the first tranche of the college’s federal CARES Act funding allocation to directly aid students in need. Under the CARES Act, which provides nearly $14 billion to support postsecondary education students and institutions nationally, MCLA will receive $1.3 million in funding. Colleges and universities are required to utilize the first tranche of this funding according to a formula that specifically assists students experiencing financial hardships due to COVID-19. A large portion of this funding will be distributed through the MCLA Resiliency Fund, which was set up in collaboration with the Berkshire Community Foundation to support students. The first tranche of the fund is now available to the community center. Home-bound community members may make a reservation for delivery by emailing meals@berkshiresouth.org. Delivery will be available as long as the center has volunteer drivers. For more information, please visit, said Barbara Varacca, CEO of Kripalu for Berkshire South. "We are happy to be part of this effort. We know that we had to react quickly and create something revolutionary that would allow us to bring services to people that otherwise may not have access to them. The service is initially available via web browser at kripalu.org, although there are plans to make it available by phone. We are thrilled to be part of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. For over 40 years, Kripalu has been offering programs that help people find their inner peace,” said Barbara Varacca, CEO of Kripalu for Berkshire South. "We are happy to be part of this effort. We know that we had to react quickly and create something revolutionary that would allow us to bring services to people that otherwise may not have access to them. The service is initially available via web browser at kripalu.org, although there are plans to make it available by phone. We are thrilled to be part of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. For over 40 years, Kripalu has been offering programs that help people find their inner peace.”
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tions from those who would like to support the
130 people receiving meals during the program’s
nutrition program. The community meals program is one
aspect of the Wigwam’s response to the COVID-19
impact. Wayne Gelinas and Lea King, owners of the
Wigwam Western Summit in North Adams, have
launched the Wigwam Community Meals Program to help those in the community who may be experiencing hunger for the first time due to the
COVID-19 crisis. Our wish is to provide some
relief, joy and feed the community – addressing concerns about families not having enough funds for food,” said Lea King. The program provides the free-to-go meals on Sundays, with more than 130 people receiving meals during the program’s
first month in April. The Wigwam accepts dona-
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program. The community meals program is one aspect of the Wigwam’s response to the COVID-19
crisis. Gelinas and King originally expected to open
April after a long winter season off, but found it necessary to adapt to a new
economic climate. The rental cabins, adjacent to
the shop, were booked up for MCLA and Williams College graduations, weddings, and the LEMS MAEC events
outside the summit. The Wigwam had to cancel and refund those reservations due to
the pandemic. “The closure is destroying us from
a financial perspective,” King said. “I feel like I’m serving the community and I want to continue to do this.” Wayne Gelinas has also shifted what he sells. When the doors closed under the state emergency order, the
Wigwam has been accepting online sales through its
website (wigwamwestermsummit.com) and has added hard-to-find items such as hand sanitizer, toilet paper, masks and gloves to the inventory.
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) has announced that its new health sci-
cences bachelor’s degree with a concentration in radiologic technology is now accepting students
for the fall 2020 semester. The program has been approved through the MCLA governance process and the Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology, and students completing the program will be eligible to sit for the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT) Board of Registration examination. In January 2019, MCLA became the official teach-out partner for the ra-
diologic sciences program of Southern Vermont College (SVC) following its closure (January 2020). SVC, MCLA partnered with Berkshire Health Systems and its North Adams Medical Center Campus to ensure that students in the program were able to complete their degrees without interruption. MCLA now offers one of
only five accredited programs in the Northeast in a field that demonstrates 100-percent job place-
ment. MCLA will also be able to provide students in health sciences and radiologic technology programs with the most up-to-date training to prepare them for careers in radiology through a $421,548 Skills Capital Grant awarded by the Balo-Bini-Potino Partnership.

PPP loan forgiveness continued from page 5
He added that, while there is growing awareness among legislators and business
groups of the need to address these and other glitches in the PPP, exactly how they
will be ironed out remains to be seen. “For the next few months it will all be about the
PPP,” said Anderson. “All we can do is hope for the best.”
Deferred payments
Anderson noted that the pandemic has had an impact on his bank and its employees, as well as its customers.
“We were the first to close our lobby,” he said, referring to measures taken to limit personal interaction between staff and cus-
tomers. “We did our due diligence and took precautions.”
With the lobby closed at its offices, the bank’s retail staff has been rotating in two-week shifts, with half at home and half
in the office. “We’ve done similar things with our mortgage team,” Anderson said.
“Everyone’s been working hard to make sure everything gets done and our custom-
ers’ needs are taken care of.”
Anderson pointed out that what many customers have needed during this period of economic upheaval has been flexibility
on their loan repayment obligations. “We’ve been doing payment deferrals for 90 days, on
request, for our small business and residential mortgage customers,” he said.
These deferrals are both for principals and interest, he added, with the deferred pay-
ments simply added to the end of the loan term. “We just thought it was the right thing
to do for people who are being impacted by this,” he said.
Requests for these deferrals have been pouring in.
over the past two months. “We’re seeing a significant demand,” said Anderson.
He also noted that the source of requests for deferrals has shifted during this period.
“Initially – and our board was surprised by this – we had a large number of small business
[requests] than residential,” said Anderson. “Business people were on it right from the start.” More recently, he said, the balance has shifted toward customers seeking residential
deferrals as people have had time to assess how their own financial situations have been
impacted by the pandemic.
“Forbearance is a word that everyone is coming to know,” Anderson said regarding the banking industry term for the
temporary postponement of mortgage payments.
He noted, however, that the three-month forbearance period is not something randomly
determined by the bank. “Ninety days is not a number that is just chosen,” he said. “When you go to 90 days, you go to nonaccrual.” That’s another banking industry term for when loans are no longer generating interest income
for the bank and are therefore considered non-performing. That status opens the door
for the bank and are therefore considered
loans are no longer generating interest income
That's another banking industry term for when
people were on it right from the start.”
“If you have questions or comments, please contact us at:
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PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON FARMERS

Crisis reinforces need for strong regional food system

BY MARGARET MOULTON

“How are you? “Hang in there!” “Take Care.”

These everyday greetings mean so much more now in our COVID-19 life. We have all jumped in to help, support and respond to an emergency of critical proportions. The humanity and generosity captured in these sentiments commonly heard across the Berkshires is inspiring, but one of the darker comments I also hear – albeit said with warmth and a grimace – is “See you on the other side.”

The other side of what? Once the emergency response to COVID-19 transitions into recovery, what will the other side look like? And how do we learn from our emergency response and recovery planning to build a support system that does not just take us back to the ways we lived before, but moves us forward to a world where this does not happen again? How do we build a growing future out of this tragedy?

Berkshire Grown’s mission is to keep farmers farming: we work to support and promote local food and farms as a vital part of the Berkshire community, economy and landscape. We do this by promoting awareness of local agriculture, and by helping to make fresh, local food accessible community-wide. So much of Berkshire Grown’s work in “normal” times dovetails with the needs of our community right now – on some level we are simply continuing with business as usual. For instance, our Share the Bounty program supports farmers by purchasing CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) shares during the winter season to support their purchase of seeds and supplies, and we then work with the farmers to deliver the food to local food pantries and community kitchens. In this time of stores, online purchasing and more. Our program staff now offers COWD – a technical assistance as farmers shift their sales approach and adapt to the new guidelines, regulations, and realities of marketing and distribution – everything from setting up pre-order systems and developing on-farm pick up safety protocols to strategizing about marketing or social media outreach. We also launched “digital” gatherings for farmers, providing a forum to talk and figure out how to deal with the issues related to COVID-19, as well as simply to provide a space to catch up and connect.

It is the determination and dedication of those farmers that has kept local food on our tables, and the strength and resilience of volunteers that has re-modeled our food access avenues. In the Berkshires, where families and communities truly know their farmer, it is these close relationships that keep us fed, inspired and connected – through food.

True cost of food

So, what will we see when each other on the other side of this crisis? If local farmers have saved the day in our region and the local food system does its work, what about food security in the future? What does it tell us about what we need to do to protect our farm land as a place to provide food for our future generations? What have we learned about our food supply chain in the Berkshires?

I sometimes hear people say that they don’t shop at farmers markets because they are “too expensive.” But we need to value the true cost of food. When food costs more at a farmers market, why is that?

We need to understand what it means to pasture hens on a ever-changing field of grass, to feed them healthy grains and give them access to fresh air every day of their lives. We need to design a food system that factors in the real costs associated with planting a field of wheat to eat, keeping the field weed and pest protected and harvesting and selling that fresh, nutrient dense food, all done without the aid of pesticides or other chemicals. What does it cost to buy or rent arable land that can feed thousands of community members if you also have to pay for child care, health care, student loans, and pay a living wage to your farm workers?

It adds up to the cost of the food at the farmers market – a fair price to pay. We need farmers to earn a living wage, and we need state, local, and federal governments to factor into their planning that not all families can afford to pay the equitable price of food. Governments need to make up the difference on one end or the other of the food supply chain.

How do we move forward to build an equitable and healthy food system in our region, our state, our nation? One of the immense rewards for adapting Berkshire Grown’s efforts to increase food access and support local farmers has been the collaborative spirit and the many coalitions that have developed in creating emergency response strategies. Our new approach is stretched well beyond their capacity, and community support has kept us afloat.

At Berkshire Grown we look forward to continuing to build a regional food system that answers the needs of all members of our community, from children who get their basic nutrition at school to visitors and residents who revel in the diverse bounty of crops grown by the small-scale farmers of the Berkshires.

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As COVID crisis plays out, David Moresi sees reason for optimism in Berkshire economy

Optimism is in short supply today, as people struggle to come to grips with the long-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the extent that life has changed as the novel coronavirus settles in. That has also prompted confusion and discord as society grapples with the most appropriate way to “reopen the country.” There are many differing opinions about how soon and to what extent we should be able to leave our homes and re-enter the workplace.

One local optimist is David Moresi, who operates a diversified slate of businesses in North Adams under the umbrella of Moresi & Associates. In that position, he is involved in several sectors that have been affected by the pandemic. Moresi has always been bullish – and outspoken – about North Adams and its prospects. Despite the recent upheavals, his belief in the city remains strong. A native of North Adams, he studied at Union College in Schenectady, N.Y., graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1997. He returned to the Berkshires and in 2000 established Moresi & Associates, which grew into a multifaceted enterprise that includes real estate, investment and development, property management, construction and critical services. He is also involved in the food service sector as co-owner of Grazie Italian Ristorante and Tres Ninos Taqueria. He lives in North Adams, and owner of the Norad Cafe at the Norad Mill complex in the city.

Among his development projects, he converted a former industrial mill on Route 2 in North Adams into a large mixed-use commercial center named Norad Mill, with 52 businesses as tenants. He also currently developing several projects with market-rate rental housing in the city center (March 2020 BT&C).

Moresi resides in Williamstown with his wife Amy (who owns and operates Adams Plumbing & Heating) and their two daughters. In mid-April, Moresi reached out to BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE to express his view of the serious stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is room for optimism in looking at the region’s prospects for new economic opportunity.

“How is something right now should not be looked at with fear and uncertainty for the future about being out of opportunities and unlimited potential,” he wrote. “I would love to talk to you at BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE about this and feel that we need to start now to rally residents and get excited about what lies ahead.”

We contacted Moresi and took him up on his offer to share his views on the current situation and what lies ahead.

In the following interview, Moresi discusses the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on his own businesses, his opinions of how the crisis has been managed, and why he has confidence in the future of the region.

Also, shortly before the pandemic, I had done a restructuring of the business. Last summer I alluded to our staff about a potential downturn in the economy that could be coming. I made some changes in our operations to prepare for that possibility.

This situation with COVID-19 has been more extreme than I had previously envisioned, but we were ready. When it all slowed down, we also applied for and received about $250,000 through the Paycheck Protection Program for our construction, property management, and electrical businesses and the Norad Cafe. Those funds covered eight weeks of payroll and enabled us to retain our staff and even hire two new positions.

BT&C: One high-profile aspect of your business has been the redevelopment of the Norad Mill, a multi-use commercial redevelopment that you completed shortly before the pandemic. How has that been affected?

Moresi: The parking lot is a lot emptier and quieter, for sure. I’m looking forward to seeing the lot filled with cars and the mill filled with life again.

There are 52 small businesses as tenants there. This is obviously difficult for them, but they’ve been holding their own. So far none of them have gone out of business.

I’ve made it clear to them that, if they are having difficulties, they should talk to me so we can work something out.

On a lighter note, one of my priorities is to set up an old-fashioned candy and toy store in the mill. We had been planning that before. Now, I want to make sure we get that finished and ready to offer something fun that people can look forward to.

Also, some of the small businesses that are still around are thriving. In fact, we’ve managed to keep all of our employees working.

In some ways it’s been business as usual. The major change is that we’ve integrated the safety guidelines for protective measures with frequent hand sanitizing, masks and personal distancing.

In general, I’m very optimistic about the future overall. I believe there will be many opportunities for businesses in Berkshire County once we move through this period.”

— David Moresi

As COVID crisis plays out, David Moresi sees reason for optimism in Berkshire economy

Moresi: Part of it is a result of what I experienced in the recession of 2008. That was devastating. My business was really hurt by that, and I was scared to death. After that, I told myself I would never be going to be in that position again. So I took steps to make sure the business was resilient and could handle whatever might come along.

Berkshire Trade & Commerce: How are your businesses handling the COVID-19 situation and the overall shutdown of activity under the state emergency order?

David Moresi: We’re doing well, all things considered. Our individual businesses had a huge demand before all this happened. It’s changed, but we’re still keeping busy. When things started to go down, I made sure nobody would be laid off and we’ve managed to keep all of our employees working.

In some ways it’s been business as usual. The major change is that we’ve integrated the safety guidelines for protective measures with frequent hand sanitizing, masks and personal distancing.

In general, I’m very optimistic about the future overall. I believe there will be many opportunities for businesses in Berkshire County once we move through this period.

But I also really worry about all the businesses that are struggling right now. And the workers who have been laid off.

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“…and the workers who have been laid off.”

Berkshire Trade & Commerce: What’s happened with COVID is a last straw for many people in the big cities. They want to get out and move to places like the Berkshires. Also, with the new emphasis on work-from-home, people realize they can live here and still do their jobs.

At our real estate agency we’re already seeing more people finding North Adams. There has been an increasing number of professionals moving to this area, which creates a market for more housing for them.

I think that is going to accelerate as a result of the present situation. I believe we’ll see something similar to what happened after 9-11, with an increased demand for housing here from people coming out of New York.

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**MORESI:** The overall situation does seem to be getting worse instead of better, though.

**MORESI:** Nationally it’s been inconsiderant. But in Berkshire County, we’re going in the right direction. I track the numbers and they’re declining.

In the northern Berkshires, the virus emerged earlier than most areas. We had to deal with it early on. We’ve witnessed the COVID emergency respond here, and everyone involved in that deserves a lot of credit. They’ve been on top of this. The Northern Berkshire COVID-19 Operations Center is doing an excellent job.

Frankly, I think other areas like eastern Massachusetts should look here for a model of how to handle this.

**BT&C:** Opinions may differ on how best to achieve a balance on this. Nevertheless, many people see this as a bleak period in which hope is often in short supply. What accounts for your optimism?

**MORESI:** We will pull out of this, and I truly believe it will open up many new possibilities. There will be strong demand for goods and services. We’ll also see new types of opportunities emerge. That’s what businesses do.

To be honest, if I’m truly nervous about anything, it’s not being able to keep up with the demand that will exist for my own businesses when we come back. I think that will be the case for many businesses here.

And, as I mentioned, this region is very well positioned to capitalize on all of this. So, rather than being caught up in fear, I think we should all get ready to take advantage of those opportunities.

**MORESI:** I don’t take it lightly at all. I’m not insensitive to how severe the virus is. I’ve had family members affected by it.

We must find a balance. Caution is the key word. We have to protect the elderly and those whose immune systems are compromised. And we can’t rush into anything. We need to continue with measures to protect ourselves and others from the virus.

It will be a while before we can get back to the point where professional basketball games are held in public, or restaurants can reopen to full capacity.

However, we must stop pandering to excessive fear. A little more tact in dealing with the public by our leadership is in order.

There’s too much speculation in the media and by politicians. Several weeks ago we were told that week would be the apocalypse. A week later were told it would be this week. Instead of constantly predicting the worst, we should look at the numbers in the healthcare system.

**BT&C:** Earlier, you mentioned a feeling of strong optimism while also being both angry and concerned. Can you explain that?

**MORESI:** What are you angry about?

This was not handled correctly from the start. Fear was instilled from the outset, and it’s been perpetuated all along. Because of that, it’s been much more damaging to society and the economy than it should have been.

I have not been a fan of how some of our leaders have come out in the national press and painted an overly grim picture for the times ahead, and seemingly continue to do this. What is more contagious than this virus is fear, and that has spread to almost every American. We have to come out of our shells. More people are harmed by being out of work.

I’m angry at what this has done to so many people and businesses. For many, everything has been taken away from them, through no fault of their own. For many, everything has been taken away. It’s also true for big business. Look at how many businesses are suddenly hit so many businesses won’t be able to sustain this much longer. If the emergency orders continue being extended out, many businesses won’t be able to sustain this much longer. I’m confident that my business will sustain. But I see a lot of bad things happening for other businesses if this continues.

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Dear fellow business owners,

A crisis is a problem that comes as a surprise, exceeds the resources that are typically used, changes the status quo, and threatens a person or organization. Facing a crisis head-on can result in your business emerging stronger. Business owners can serve their community by surviving, prospering, and retaining employees. We must prepare ourselves to come out of this crisis and take advantage of opportunities and:

- Avoid paralysis. Prioritize speedy decisions over precision plans.
- Scrap pet projects (like consulting jobs that bring little profit and drain capacity).
- Ditch accommodation services (such as offering customized work without charging premiums).
- Cancel legacy favors that have been in place for years, but you were hesitant to disengage from.
- Consider acquiring one of your elder competitors who would rather ride into the sunset than ride out another crisis.
- Do NOT be afraid to promote your business, even during a health crisis. You provide something of value, and people want to know how you can help them.
- Don’t let the fear of what's happening in the short term stop you from having the guts to make a change that will help you outpace your competition in the midterm.

You don’t want to be merely resilient. Being resilient means just getting back to where you were before. Do not wait for the crisis to “be over” – your competition certainly won’t.

Stay connected. We’re here with you.

Warmly,

Allen Harris and the BMM Family

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Registration with the SEC should not be construed as an endorsement or an indicator of investment skill, acumen or experience. Investments in securities are not insured, protected or guaranteed and may result in loss of income and/or principal.
The process of starting a new business can be exhilarating, exhausting and expensive—with entrepreneurs tapping every bit of their time, energy and financial resources to get their ventures off the ground.

To improve their chance of success, this rite-of-passage into the realm of business ownership should include detailed planning for a wide range of situations and scenarios the business might confront once the “open” sign is hung on the door.

But who plans for a pandemic?

While businesses of all sorts and sizes are being adversely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, it is those ventures just getting started that are perhaps most vulnerable to the unprecedented economic disruption the pandemic has precipitated. And this heavy rain of hard times is likely to wash the fragile foundation out from under more than a few start-ups before they get a chance to get going.

However, with youth often comes resilience, and some start-ups may find themselves in a better position to pivot in response to the pandemic than older, established businesses that are set in their ways.

Over the past few weeks, BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE contacted operators of several new businesses that had been featured in recent issues of this newspaper to see how they have been affected by the coronavirus crisis, what they have been able to do, and how they view the prospects for their ventures going forward.

Their tales of how they are grappling with a situation none could have envisioned are presented below.

### BOTTOMLESS BRICKS

57 Park St., Adams

Once the coronavirus crisis reached Berkshire County, the bottom fell out of the business model for Bottomless Bricks.

“We were just starting to hit our stride,” said Erin Laundry of Pittsfield, who launched the LEGO-themed play spot and party center in downtown Adams with her husband, Shane, last autumn (February 2020). “We were making big plans for the year and projecting what we would be doing as summer came.”

A central component of their business involves hosting LEGO parties for children at their brightly decorated shop at 57 Park St. Other activities, such as open play periods on the weekends and a growing schedule of adult-oriented programs contributed to the start-up’s bottom line.

All of these activities became incompatible with growing concerns about the looming pandemic, even before measures were taken on a statewide basis to shut down nonessential businesses and ban group gatherings to slow the spread of the virus.

“We started to see signs during the week leading up to the school shutdown,” said Laundry, referring to Gov. Charlie Baker’s action to close schools statewide on March 13. “It looked like a freight train barreling down on us.”

Bottomless Bricks hosted the parties that were scheduled for the weekend of March 14. “People asked about our cleaning protocol,” Laundry noted. “As the following week developed, we saw a change, and parties for the coming weekend were cancelled.”

With the school closings, Laundry quickly pivoted to focus on another aspect of the business that they had been developing: home delivery of LEGO play kits.

The first thing we did when the schools closed was to come up with a plan to reach families stuck at home,” she said. This primarily involved packaging “creativity-to-go kits” with one pound of cleaned used LEGO bricks from their in-shop supply along with a new LEGO mini-figure that they offered for $29 including tax and delivery.

The initial response to the kits was promising. “[It went really well],” said Laundry, noting that they promoted the kits on Facebook. “[We had an initial wave of orders] that made up for the lost revenue from cancelled parties in March.”

However, the subsequent emergency order as Gov. Baker on March 24 that shut down nonessential businesses led the Laundrys to put the brakes on the play kits.

“It raised questions for us,” she said, noting that they interpreted the emergency order as prohibiting curbside pickup of the kits by customers but left them unclear about the delivery service. “We tried to get more guidance on that but decided to phase that out at the end of March,” she said.

As the shutdown continued through April and into May, Laundry noted that revenue for the business had been zeroed out except for a small number of sales through their online store on BrickLink, a portal for buying and selling specific LEGO products. “It’s not a lot but it helps,” she said.

To get them through the shutdown, Laundry said they have applied for a $10,000 grant through the SBA’s EIDL program. The funds, which as of early May were still pending, would help cover rent for the store.
and other expenses until the business is able to resume operations on some level.

Another source of assistance for Bottomless Bricks has been Laundry’s inclusion in the inaugural business accelerator program offered by Entrepreneurship for All Berkshire County (EforAll). Last fall, Laundry participated in the first local pitch competition offered by EforAll, a nonprofit organization that promotes entrepreneurship in communities across the state (October 2019 BT&C). That led to her acceptance in the organization’s first accelerator program, which launched in early January.

The program includes 12 weeks of group and individual counseling and workshops to help aspiring entrepreneurs develop and refine their business models. Also included for each participant is access to three dedicated mentors during the 12-week program and throughout the rest of the year.

“I’ve gotten a ton of information that I’m still digesting,” Laundry said about the program, which concluded in mid-April. Laundry said she and other participants were midway through the program when the coronavirus crisis started taking shape. “We were meeting in person until mid-March, and then shifted to meeting virtually,” she said.

Laundry added that EforAll staff and mentors did a good job of keeping participants engaged following the shift to virtual counseling. “It’s been a really supportive process,” she said.

The program also helped participants deal with the disruption and uncertainty spurred by the shutdown. “It was very stressful for everyone,” Laundry said, noting that participants were at varying stages of development of their businesses. “We were getting all this information about how to make our businesses successful, and then all of a sudden no one knew what was going to happen.”

She and other participants gained insights on how to deal with that uncertainty as the program wound down. “We were all working toward our final presentations [when the shutdown order came],” said Laundry. Those presentations were to include detailed projections of their ventures’ track going forward, an exercise that became all-but-impossible amidst the pandemic’s disruption.

“We got two extra weeks and they helped us work into our presentations projections for both scenarios for full operation and a scaled-back version,” said Laundry. “That was really helpful in trying to see a path forward through this.”

Bottomless Bricks also got a modest financial boost through the accelerator program when it was selected to receive one of three $1,500 grants from EforAll. “Our grant was to help us expand the business to include robotics to appeal to older kids, and to add Duplo products that are geared toward preschool age,” said Laundry.

Any such expansion will have to wait until Bottomless Bricks is able to resume normal operations. Laundry acknowledged that it may be some time before that can happen.

“The hope is to be able to open again and have parties,” she said. “But it may take time before people feel comfortable with that.”

In the meantime, Laundry said, a resumption of delivery of their creativity-to-go kits before people feel comfortable with that.”

While the inability to open their planned new restaurant to return to their venture’s roots.

This winter Jeffrey Blaugrund and Austin Banach were preparing to open an eatery called Braise Worthy in the Crawford Square commercial block at 137 North St. in downtown Pittsfield (April 2020 BT&C).

Their goal was to serve meals for takeout or on-site dining. The strategy was to prepare meals using the form of cooking known as braising, which is based on searing meat and then slow-cooking it, partially covered in liquid.

One of their primary markets was to be members of the downtown workforce stopping in for lunch or picking up items to take home at the end of the workday.

However, before they were able to complete the renovation of the space (most recently the site of the short-lived Red Apple Butchers), those plans were upended by the COVID-19 crisis and emergency order.

While the inability to open their planned restaurant was a blow, Blaugrund and Banach decided to adapt by returning to a new variation of their former business model, which was selling prepared frozen meals. “We’re pivoting back to our original strengths,” said Blaugrund, explaining that the restaurant was intended to be a reboot of their original business Blaugrund and Banach established Braise Worthy in 2017. Initially they specialized in preparing and selling frozen braised meals. They had sold these online as an advance-purchase subscription service similar to a CSA (community supported agriculture) model for farms.

They then branched out with a taco truck, which sold tacos based on their braise recipes at events throughout the region. Blaugrund said the response to that was very encouraging, and prompted them to shift to the model of a take-out and restaurant.

However, he said the emphasis on staying at home that the pandemic prompted suddenly made their original business model more feasible than a restaurant at this time. “The market has shifted to eating at home,” he said. “We’re meeting that by giving customizers value and home delivery of meals.”

Blaugrund said that instead of their former subscription service, they are selling the meals individually and are focused on home delivery.

They have formed a partnership with Berkshire Organics, a service that delivers natural food products directly to consumers in Berkshire County, to handle the distribution of the meals.

Consumers order them online for delivery at braiseworthy.com. The specific items available for home delivery will rotate. The price of individual meals varies, based on the selection and size. For updated information and current selections, visit the website or Facebook page. Blaugrund said they are experimenting with the menu selection. They plan to offer meals in family size and smaller portions.

Laundry said her and other participants gained insights on how to deal with that uncertainty as the program wound down. “We were all working toward our final presentations [when the shutdown order came],” said Laundry. Those presentations were to include detailed projections of their ventures’ track going forward, an exercise that became all-but-impossible amidst the pandemic’s disruption.

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Bottomless Bricks also got a modest financial boost through the accelerator program when it was selected to receive one of three $1,500 grants from EforAll. “Our grant was to help us expand the business to include robotics to appeal to older kids, and to add Duplo products that are geared toward preschool age,” said Laundry.

Any such expansion will have to wait until Bottomless Bricks is able to resume normal operations. Laundry acknowledged that it may be some time before that can happen.

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“The hope is to be able to open again and have parties,” she said. “But it may take time before people feel comfortable with that.”

While the inability to open their planned new restaurant to return to their venture’s roots.

This winter Jeffrey Blaugrund and Austin Banach were preparing to open an eatery called Braise Worthy in the Crawford Square commercial block at 137 North St. in downtown Pittsfield (April 2020 BT&C).

Their goal was to serve meals for takeout or on-site dining. The strategy was to prepare meals using the form of cooking known as braising, which is based on searing meat and then slow-cooking it, partially covered in liquid.

One of their primary markets was to be members of the downtown workforce stopping in for lunch or picking up items to take home at the end of the workday.

However, before they were able to complete the renovation of the space (most recently the site of the short-lived Red Apple Butchers), those plans were upended by the COVID-19 crisis and emergency order.

While the inability to open their planned restaurant was a blow, Blaugrund and Banach decided to adapt by returning to a new variation of their former business model, which was selling prepared frozen meals. “We’re pivoting back to our original strengths,” said Blaugrund, explaining that the restaurant was intended to be a reboot of their original business Blaugrund and Banach established Braise Worthy in 2017. Initially they specialized in preparing and selling frozen braised meals. They had sold these online as an advance-purchase subscription service similar to a CSA (community supported agriculture) model for farms.

They then branched out with a taco truck, which sold tacos based on their braise recipes at events throughout the region. Blaugrund said the response to that was very encouraging, and prompted them to shift to the model of a take-out and restaurant.

However, he said the emphasis on stay-

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Elizabeth Kick was seeing increased interest in her classes and programs at the Dalton School of Art and Creativity when the COVID-19 crisis took shape. Rather than trying to offer virtual programs, they had suspended operations for now in order to focus on her own shift to online instruction as a teacher at Laneces cor School.

“Before the virus, I had been preparing to expand our offerings for young people,” she said. “I hired another teacher, and she came up with an incredible program that we were planning to launch.”

However, all activity was put on hold when the coronavirus pandemic emerged, followed by the state emergency order, which closed schools and prevented gatherings of 10 or more people. “I shut it down very early in this, before the emergency order,” said Kick, who is also a teacher at Laneces cor School. “I see the writing on the wall and realized what was coming.”

Kick said she did not try to offer alternatives in the initial phases of the crisis. “When public schools closed, my attention was totally focused on developing and teaching online classes for those students, and I didn’t have time for my own studio,” she said.

Kick emphasized that she is planning to reopen the Dalton School of Art and Creativity (413-329-4689 or www.daltonartschool.com) as conditions allow. In addition to activities for young people, she also plans to continue to offer classes and activities for adults.

“The opportunities that we would have closed, parents appreciated it, and we were beginning to get repeat business.”

These included Saturday and Sunday morning activity classes and vacation art camps, along with seasonal outdoor oriented art-and-nature camps in the summer.

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“Things were going well,” said Brian Blaugrund, who is also a teacher at Laneces cor School. “We exceeded our own expectations both in terms of patrons and revenue.” Miksic continued. “But early on we also spent more money than we expected.”

They made some adjustments to correct that imbalance toward the end of the year. “In December we were starting to dial it in and head into what we expected to be our slow season in January, February and March,” he said. That process included focusing more on regional acts that could be booked at comparatively lower costs.

“We had a really profitable month in January by really cutting to the bone as much as possible,” Miksic said. “We rolled into February, deciding we were going to ramp it up a bit, and we had a great month – our best one so far – which was amazing.”

In addition to the fine-tuning of bookings, which were being handled by Jennifer Crowell, HiLo was also seeing success with the expansion of food service at the venue through an arrangement with Matt Tatro, owner of Tres Ninos Taqueria a few blocks away.

“Matt set up a satellite for Tres Ninos here, and that was starting to work as well,” said Miksic. “Overall, the trend line was really promising. We were heading in the right direction.”

That trend line soon headed into a brick wall in the form of the coronavirus crisis. “We had two shows in March and that’s pretty much it,” said Miksic with an ironic laugh. “I noted that the decision to close HiLo was made well ahead of the state emergency order. “We shut down after the first weekend in March,” he said. “As we were getting into this thing, we had a staff meeting and asked: ‘Are we willing to stay open?’ It was a group decision by everybody.”

That proactive decision led to layoffs for the small team of full-and part-time employees. “We did the layoffs early, which allowed them to apply early for unemployment benefits,” said Miksic, noting that this helped avoid the crush of claims that followed the March 24 state shutdown order. Miksic said they were also proactive in applying for federal assistance through the SBA’s EIDL loan program and the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), through Adams Community Bank.

He noted that they will be using the EIDL funds to reopen HiLo when that becomes possible. The PPP funds (which were still pending in early May) would be used to bring the staff back on payroll. “We want to bring the guys back on and work some more on the building while we’re waiting to reopen,” he said.

Miksic noted that he and Mahoney, who are partners in Very Good Property Management, also received PPP funds for that business. They, along with Orion Howard, are partners in Very Good Properties, a separate real estate investment business that owns the 55 Union St. building that houses HiLo. (Howard, a semi-retired oncologist, is also owner of Bright Ideas Brewing at the MASS MoCA campus in North Adams.)

“It helps a lot that we own the building,” said Miksic, noting that it eliminates the con...
“People are looking for some little glimmer of hope and happiness. Doing something of-the-moment by sitting down and enjoying them live fits right in with that.”

As owners of the building occupied by HiLo, partners Glenn Mahoney, Orion Howard and Brian Miksic are in a better position to remain patient until conditions allow a return of performers and audiences to the live music venues they opened last September. “We’re guessing things will open up in stages,” says Miksic. “It will take time before people feel comfortable going out. That will be the wild card.”

The performances can be streamed live or viewed later. Many people have been requesting donations from virtual audience members. “We really like these artists, and this is a way we can generate some income during the hiatus. It also give a helping hand to the performers, who have the option of viewing them on Facebook,” he said.

This serves as a way for HiLo to keep connected with its audience during the hiatus. “We’ve been hosting some regional acts and streaming them on Facebook,” he said.

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Once they are allowed to reopen, Miksic said they will have to figure out how to handle bookings and ticket sales in the new environment. “We’ll have to do it on a show-by-show basis and just feel our way through the next stages of this,” he said, noting that it may not be possible or desirable—to sell to full capacity, but that enough tickets will need to be sold to cover costs. “It will be interesting to see how that balances work,” he said.

As businesses around the state prepare for whatever level of business they will be able to do in the stages to come, Miksic said he and his partners are fully confident that HiLo will again be part of the mix. “We’re glad we’re in a position that we will be able to reopen,” he said.
Despite the lingering uncertainty, the 20-year-old entrepreneur remains upbeat about the future prospects for her business. “We’ll figure it out,” she said. “Between me and Anna and my parents, we have good ideas and are going to do what we can to make this work.”

Raposo concluded with a tongue-in-cheek jab at her own lack of vision in not preparing for the disruption: “I had done a lot of scenarios in my business plan, but not a pandemic,” she said with a good-natured laugh. “I can’t believe I missed it.”

THE FOUNDRY 2 Harris St., West Stockbridge

In its first year in operation as an arts and performance center in West Stockbridge, The Foundry surpassed the expectations of its founder and owner, Amy Brentano.

“We had a stellar first year in terms of my own modest goals,” said Brentano. “The Foundry was very vibrant, and we hosted many programs and activities here. We were also hopping throughout the winter, and events consistently sold out then. We were booked with events through the coming summer.”

But then the COVID-19 crisis and state emergency order emerged, which suddenly brought the curtain down on this momentum. The Foundry is now in the limbo of an enforced intermission of unknown duration and long-term impact.

Last year, Brentano purchased the 3,600-square-foot building at 2 Harris St. in the center of West Stockbridge and converted it into a regional center for cultural programs, live entertainment, and other community gatherings (June 2019 BT&C). The Foundry (thefoundryw.com and Facebook page The Foundry) hosts live theatrical performances, concerts, open mikes, readings, discussions, educational workshops, art exhibits and other activities in a “black-box” theater and other gallery spaces.

It has also been a stimulus for revitalization in West Stockbridge. In addition to local audiences, it draws attendees from throughout the Berkshires and adjacent regions.

Brentano operates The Foundry as a for-profit business thatboth sponsors programs and makes the facility available for rentals and other arrangements with producers and community groups. She also relies on additional earned income, such as on-site beverage sales and event rentals.

Early in the coronavirus crisis, Brentano closed The Foundry and has cancelled all activities through May, “We’ve kept the schedule tentatively in place for June, July and August,” said Brentano. “But everything will depend on the situation. I’m very hopeful when we’ll reopen, or what we’ll be able to do.”

Brentano also doles out uses of the site to the weekly outdoor West Stockbridge Farmers Market. She also said she expects to do that this summer, but that will also be subject to current circumstances and how they affect operation of the farmers market.

Brentano said she intends to keep The Foundry alive through the current crisis and recovery. She emphasized, however, that she is in the same position as other small businesses with limited resources.

“I am determined to get through this summer, and I am also looking forward to autumn,” she said. “But I can’t predict anything. I can adapt for now but I can’t carry it indefinitely. I have to start generating revenue again, and I have duties to support.”

She said the sudden shift from success-based growth planning to struggling to survive has been very frustrating.

“April was supposed to be LGBT Awareness Month, and we had some great programs lined up,” she said. “We also had an exciting seasonal schedule coming up, including local, national and international performers. Not being able to do all that is very disappointing.”

The shutdown has also impacted Brentano as a businessperson. She said she had been preparing to implement a revised business plan based on the first year’s positive trends.

“For example, the people who work here have been independent contractors,” she said. “I was about to change that by creating staff positions as full employees. But that’s been put on hold.”

While her mission is similar to other cultural organizations and community-based venues, The Foundry’s status as a business has closed off some forms of support.

“It’s a unique position, because I haven’t been able to turn to grants or other sources of funding that are available to nonprofit organizations,” she said.

Instead, she has applied for government emergency funds for businesses, including a small business loan. She also has been negotiating some form of loan modification on her mortgage.

Unlike other cultural organizations and businesses, Brentano has not attempted to develop alternative programs, such as online video performances or other virtual activities.

“I don’t want to put my energies online,” she said. “I think there’s already a glut of that. To me an online performance or video is not a substitute for the experience of human beings coming together through live performance, and the interactions and sense of community that results.”

She added that The Foundry’s basic purpose is contradictory to current necessities imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“My vision for The Foundry is the opposite of social distancing and staying at home,” she said.

She noted that she is very appreciative of the support shown by the community before and during the crisis.

Despite the current problems, Brentano is philosophical about her dilemma.

“I am being affected by this, just like everyone else,” she said. “I feel guilty if I start feeling sorry for myself. I realize my problems are insignificant compared to the more severe impacts this is having on many other people, organizations and businesses. So, instead I try to focus on the future and preparing plans A, B and C.”

Amy Brentano says The Foundry’s first year of operation exceeded her goals. The arts and performance center in West Stockbridge is now in limbo as the COVID-19 crisis continues to play out.
In July 2015 they purchased the 240,000-square-foot industrial facility and nine-acre site from the Cariddi family for $749,000. Since then they have been redeveloping the site to create a complex with a mix of commercial, event and residential space known collectively as Greylock WORKS. The couple said they were attracted to the mill for several reasons. They are architects and developers whose full-service, design, development and construction firm, Latent Productions, has undertaken numerous new and redevelopment projects in New York and elsewhere.

“We have a track record of working in areas where there is potential,” said Perry. “In a sense we are in the profession of uncovering untapped potential. That’s what we saw in this facility.”

He added that they also saw it in the context of the region.

“Mills like this are cathedrals of industry,” he said. “We were intrigued by the concept of utilizing the site in the context of the northern Berkshires’ contemporary culture and education.”

While Greylock WORKS houses a variety of activities, it has a thematic context of the region’s food production and culture, described “a fusion of agritourism and craft production” on its website (greylockworks.com).

Greylock WORKS is another element of the emergence of that section of the Route 2 Corridor between Williamstown and North Adams as a new center of activity. The nearby Norad Mill has become a local center of commerce and community life (November 2019 BT&C, and developer whose full-service, design, development and construction firm, Latent Productions, has undertaken numerous new and redevelopment projects in New York and elsewhere.

“The mill is cumulatively large, but it is structured as different components,” she said. “Rather than one large project, we see it as six projects that we are undertaking in stages. We’re completing individual sections at a time and then moving on to the next. We expected it would be a 10-year project to complete.”

They said that they have completed one-third of the overall project, including cleanup, environmental remediation and landscaping of the property, and renovating and putting into use about 25 percent of the interior spaces. They noted that the sections they have already completed are occupied or have commitments from tenants. It currently has about 15 businesses as tenants.

Latent Productions is providing the equity funding for the project. This has been augmented by about 15 grants or matching grants and other incentives from various agencies and sources.

**Industrial remnants**

The facility was originally a cotton-spinning mill, known as Greylock Mill, built during the growth and heyday of the textile industry in North Adams in the 19th century. In 1870, the initial wooden structures were replaced with the granite and brick main mill building. Over the subsequent 60 years, the mill complex expanded to include the four-story Spinning Building to the West, one-story Weave Sheds to the east, and Carding and Picker Rooms to the south.

Following the demise of textile operations in the 20th century, the mill complex has housed a variety of operations, including an aluminum anodizing plant.

An initial priority for Perry and Rothstein following their purchase was cleaning up and remediating the site. (The Cariddis, who had owned the property since the 1970s, had also conducted remediation work.)

As a step towards that, Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey approved the project for a Brownfields Covenant Not to Sue, a designation which provides liability protection to developers and municipalities intending to redevelop and clean up contaminated properties.

It was awarded a $200,000 brownfield grant from the Environmental Protection Agency through the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, which funded the remediation of a contaminated underground flume that had been part of a hydroelectric power system. That also included related conversion of a one-acre parcel across Route 2 into a park.

The remediation has also included the removal of storage tanks, asbestos and other steps.

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Work is in progress on The Break Room, a new restaurant at Greylock WORKS that will be operated by prominent local chef Brian Alberg. The eatery is expected to open on a limited basis by early summer.

Food hub

The concept of Greylock WORKS as a center for food production and culture has several aspects focused on value-added and artisanal food and beverages for the region. “When we were doing our initial research, we looked at what we could do here that would complement the existing assets of the region,” said Perry. “The area we felt had the potential was the food sector.”

Greylock WORKS has a variety of users including an architect, a landscape designer, and a green cleaning supply business, among others. Some of these have designated offices along either side of a central section of the co-working space that includes two conference rooms and a small space for private phone conversations.

That “phone booth” feature is targeted toward other individuals who sign up to use an open shared section of the co-working space which features desks, tables, kitchen facilities and other furnishings.

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In late April, Alberg noted that the restau-
rant operated only once a week and likely not at all by sometime in June. At that point, assuming licenses and regulatory approval are in hand, the Brisk Room could begin to offer food on a to-go basis.

He also noted that, once the state begins relaxing restrictions due to the coronavirus, the Brisk Room may utilize the adjacent event space at Greylock WORKS for tables and seating that are more spread out than pos-
sible inside the restaurant itself. He said he hopes the patrons would feel more comfortable with on-site dining while still abiding to social distancing protocols.

In addition to hosting events, the Greylock WORKS also presents events, workshops and other programs related to food and agriculture. “We host activities to bring makers and farmers together to share their passions and bring their products to the public,” said Rothstein.

For three years they have held an annual holiday market on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. “We had 50 vendors the first year, and it has grown ever since,” said Rothstein. Other events have included an Heirloom Summer Festival held last year.

Residential component

Originally, Perry and Rothstein had planned to develop a hotel in the main western section of the mill, as well as some residential units. However, because of the number of other hotel-related businesses in the area, they shifted that to an exclusive focus on residential condominium units.

“We believe there is a very active and diverse market for housing here, and the range of units here is potentially wide,” said Perry. “There will be about 50 units from the city, and we have done preliminary planning and preparation for loft-style units. Some initial framing for the units has been done on one floor.

However, additional work on that aspect of the project may also be influenced by how quickly coronavirus restrictions are lifted, although construction work on exist-
ing residential projects is allowed under current guidelines. Perry noted that, prior to the widespread coronavirus impact, they had already engaged in work on the residential units on the back burner for a few months.

“We’re focused on the commercial side for now,” he said. “When that is completed, we’ll shift our attention to the residential side.”

He said they could not estimate the over-
all cost of the development, because it will depend on the individual phases, including aspects that are still in process.

While there is still a long way to go before Greylock Works is completed, Perry and Rothstein said they are very satisfied with their progress so far.

“We take a lot of pride in our work, and an adaptive re-use like this is one of the most sustainable things you can do in our profession,” said Perry. “It’s very satisfying to transform an underutilized and overgrown site and transform it into a good neighborhood and source of community optimism and pride.

When we were first doing the initial cleanup of the property, people often pulled in to thank us for doing this. That’s very affirming.”

Although the complications and uncertain-
ties that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic have affected progress on various aspects of Greylock WORKS, Perry noted that the situation has also brought the project much closer to home for them.

“We have actually relocated to the site,” he said. “We also moved our daughter and Rothstein’s 17-year-old daughter, Skye Rothstein, to take up residence in the Engine House section of the complex that normally serves as a children’s space, more intimate event space.

He said they decided to leave their New York home for the Berkshires in early March, well in advance of the pandemic’s spread into that city and other parts of the region.

“Getting working from home has been quite a challenge for us and our clients,” Perry said. “But we’re able to stay engaged, and we’re seeing some good results in terms of revenue and new projects in the Berkshires.”

In addition to work related to Licensed Productions, this includes Karla Rothstein teaching her graduate class in architectural design at Columbia University, and Skye’s studies at Bard High School Early College.

“It’s become a different kind of commute for us,” Perry said. “We’re all where we need to be in about 30 seconds.”

Distillery first to set up shop in commercial complex

BY JOHN TOWNEs

The first tenant that set up shop at the Greylock WORKS complex is a business that moved from the Rocky Mountain foothills to Colorado to the Berkshire Hills. The Distillery at Greylock WORKS makes specialty rum and gin. It sells several varieties of each under the brand names Ski Bum Rum and Forager Gin. It also produces whiskey, although due to the length of the aging process, that is not yet ready for sale.

Originally named Ski Bum Rum, the busi-
ness was launched by owner Ryan Riley in 2015 in Colorado, where he grew up. He moved to Massachusetts in 2018, when his wife, Emily Vasilianus, was hired as an English professor at Williams College. He located the business in Greylock Works in 2019, and opened last October.

“When we moved here I was looking for a place that was suitable for a distillery,” Riley said. “I found [Greylock WORKS] and looked up the portfolio of the architects. I was very impressed by their previous projects. And I think they’ve done a wonderful job of keeping the beautiful aspects of this old mill and combining it with new elements.”

In addition to his distillery equipment, Riley operates a small cocktail bar. He had to close temporarily due to the restrictions related to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

“It’s been a couple months since we’ve opened our doors,” Riley said. “While there is no on-site seating, they have been able to taste and get a feel for the products, and we’re able to sell retail in that fashion. It’s the perfect mix of on-site and to go.”

Riley has an encyclopedic knowledge of varieties of each under the brand names Ski Bum Rum and Forager Gin. It sells several

The income for The Distillery at Greylock WORKS (OTC:4ON2) has come from a com-
merce that takes years to age, and will not be avail-
able for quite some time. It’s a very special gin.

Pandemic’s impact

The income for The Distillery at Greylock WORKS (OTC:4ON2) has come from a com-

The products’ names have differing ori-

gins. “Growing up in Colorado, skiing has always been an important part of my life, so Ski Bum Rum was a natural name,” said Ri-
ley, who was a member of the U.S. Ski Team. The name Forager Gin is based on proc-
curement methods. He explained that they go out into the woods to collect berries, twigs, wildflowers and other botanicals for flavoring ingredients. “With gin, localization is an increasingly important characteristic,” he said. “By gathering botanicals from this region, it gives the gin the qualities of what grows in the Berkshires.”

He noted that he makes the specific variet-
ies of gin in small batches based on season.

“Gin can be produced rapidly,” he said. “So I’ll produce a variety in very small quantities using ingredients that are currently in season.

When that’s sold out, it’s gone, and it’s replaced with ingredients based on the next season.”

He is also producing whiskey. However that takes years to age, and will not be avail-
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Berkshire County real estate transfers

3-North Rd.
Buyer: Nicholas Holliday
Seller: Frederic Swartz +
Price: $1,890,000
Date: 3/31/20
Lender: HUD 203(k)
Mortgage: $1,890,000

66 Jerome Dr.
Buyer: Gabriella Sciannella
Seller: Robert Aronil
Price: $877,000
Date: 3/5/20

Savoy

548 Long Rd.
Buyer: Philip Thompson
Seller: Sarah Young +
Price: $144,000
Date: 3/14/20
Lender: Webster Bank
Mortgage: $144,000
Price: $144,000

Sheffield

290 Bear Wse Rd.
Buyer: Lisa Prand
Seller: Remnel Schneider
Price: $300,000
Date: 3/13/20
Lender: Webster Bank
Mortgage: $300,000
Price: $300,000

West Stockbridge

17 Griswold Rd.
Buyer: Julie Ahearn +
Seller: David Ahearn
Price: $690,000
Date: 3/13/20
Lender: Adams Community
Mortgage: $690,000
Price: $690,000

Williamstown

69 Battery Hill Rd.
Buyer: Janet Holmgren
Seller: Susan Yates-Mulder
Price: $625,000
Date: 3/18/20
Lender: NA
Mortgage: $625,000
Price: $625,000

Windsor

Berkshire Trail
Buyer: Norman Adam
Seller: Berkshire依
Price: $93,000
Date: 3/4/20
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Farmers markets shift to virtual format to keep food accessible

BY JOHN TOWNE

In addition to providing fresh, healthy food to consumers and a sales outlet for local producers, farmers markets are also gathering spots for the community, where people mingle and socialize while shopping.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily curtailed the social aspect of life, including public gatherings and safe, leisurely shopping trips.

However, numerous initiatives are under-way to continue to enable the region’s farmers and producers to sell their food to consumers. Among these efforts, farmers markets in Berkshire County’s two cities, Pittsfield and North Adams, have transitioned to a virtual online format for sales and delivery.

While they do not include the experience of pinching the produce, talking with farmers, or chatting with neighbors, these markets are providing a needed venue for the sale of local food.

They also offer a variation of the food subsides, for low-income customers that are normally available at farmers markets through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program.

Legally, because food is considered an essential service, farmers markets are not prohibited by the state’s emergency order from operating as public gatherings.

However, when the coronavirus crisis emerged, the separate operators of the North Adams Farmers Market and the Downtown Pittsfield Farmers Market each decided to cancel their in-person weekly markets and shift to the online model during the current crisis.

“Our weekly markets are a vital community service, but many of the people who come to them are in vulnerable populations,” said Suey Helme, director of tourism and community events with the City of North Adams, which operates the North Adams Farmers Market. “So we decided to do it as an online mobile farmers market as a substitute for now.”

The operators of the Downtown Pittsfield Farmers Market also decided to replace their weekly market that normally takes place Saturday mornings at The Common park on First Street during the growing season, and indoors in winter.

The Pittsfield and North Adams virtual markets have variations and specific differences, but they both have similar basic purposes and procedures.

Each market has set up its own online store. They have arranged with farmers and other vendors to sell their products on that platform.

Payments from customers are transferred to the vendor.

The stores sell fresh produce, meat, dairy products, baked goods, herbs, condiments, and other products that would be normally sold at the markets.

The available selections from participating vendors are listed online, and customers choose what items to put into their cart. Vendors from the market will pack and deliver the orders on Saturdays.

Each market also provides subsidized discounts to make the food affordable for residents who receive SNAP food assistance.

However, the EBT cards used to pay for government benefits cannot legally be processed online under current regulations in Massachusetts. Because the virtual markets are oriented primarily to online sales for safety and efficiency, the source of funding and the process of providing discounts for eligible customers has changed at each market.

Both markets have received special funding from other sources to cover the cost of discounts and other expenses. A major source has been grants from the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund, a collaborative community fund that was organized by Berkshire United Way and the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation (May 2020 BT&C).

Essentially, eligible customers type in a code to designate their order for a discount, which is calculated into their bill.

Virtual farmers markets require a great deal of work and coordination, including organizing the logistics of food pick-ups and delivery, handling the processing, and many other administrative and physical tasks.

The organizers of both markets rely heavily on volunteers.

Volunteer-driven effort

The North Adams Farmers Market is usually held Saturdays during the growing season in the St. Anthony Municipal Parking Lot. From November through May it is held indoors at 85 Main St. on the first Saturday of the month.

The market now operates from an online store (northadamsfarmersmarket.square.site). Updated information on the status of products and sales, and other news is available on its Facebook page (North Adams Farmers Market).

It currently has sales agreements with some 12 vendors for the online store, compared to about 22 for the regular market.

The market accepts online orders beginning Monday at 7 p.m. through Wednesday, or until the market reaches its quota for orders.

It also accepts in-person orders Mondays from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Berkshire Food Project and Wednesdays at the Northern Berkshire Interfaith Action Initiative Al Nelsen Friendship Center from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The North Adams market only delivers to northern Berkshire County. However, it also offers in-person pick up on Saturdays at A-O-K Berkshire Barbeque at the MASS MoCA campus.

In lieu of the official SNAP discount, the market uses emergency funding to provide matching discounts, a $10,000 COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund grant.

It covers half of the total purchase up to $30 per week to EBT customers. If someone orders $25 of food, they will pay $12.50. If a person spends $60, they are reimbursed for $30.

The program is based at HiLo, a nightspot that is currently closed because of the pandemic-related stay at home orders (page 14). HiLo is donating use of the site.

Currently the market has a limit of 100 orders per week.

“We’re extremely busy,” said Helme. “There’s a very high demand. Right now, 100 orders is what we can realistically handle, but we’re working to expand that.”

Helme oversees the North Adams market and is one of the managers for the city’s COVID-19 response. She works with a market manager and a core of five volunteers, with a larger pool of volunteers who handle deliveries and other tasks.

She said that they are not certain how long the farmers market will continue to be oriented to online sales.

“We only see this as a stopgap until we can open the physical market again,” she said. “That will depend on when it becomes safe to do so.”

Transition delayed

Before the COVID-19 emergency, this was already slated to be a transitional year for the Downtown Pittsfield Farmers Market.

Last year, the market’s management was taken over by Roots Rising, a nonprofit focused on food security and youth development organization. Roots Rising runs a program that provides Pittsfield students with seasonal jobs to work at area farms and food pantries. They also participate in programs to foster empowerment, personal responsibility and culinary and financial literacy.

Roots Rising had created a model in which the management and operations of the farmers market would be handled by a crew of young people, as one of the organization’s work opportunities.

“However, we’ve had to postpone that for the time being and focus on organizing and running the Virtual Farmers Market,” said Jamie Samowitz, co-director of Roots Rising along with Jessica Vecchia.

Its online store is accessible through www.rootsrising.org/virtualfarmersmarket with updates available on the Facebook pages Roots Rising and Pittsfield Farmers Market.
The Pittsfield market received a $25,000 grant from the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for its food subsidies and other expenses. In addition, the Berkshire Agricultural Ventures Resiliency Fund is supporting a full-time program coordinator for the virtual market. It also received contributions and support from the Harvard Pilgrim Health Plan Foundation and other sources.

It received an in-kind boost from Barrington Stage Company, which allows the program to use its 5,000-square-foot production-support facility for storage, packing and other operations.

The market also received a federal Paycheck Protection Program loan.

The Pittsfield market currently provides a credit of up to $30 for buyers on limited incomes. Rather than SNAP recipients only, the discount is also available for anyone who is experiencing economic hardship due to the present situation.

The credit is based on the honor system. It’s up to the individual to determine whether they truly need the discount.

Samowitz said this is an extension of the role that SNAP and other programs at the farmers market serve at other times. In its first five weeks, it had provided food assistance to about 400 households.

“The Food Justice programs at the farmers market are vital at any time, because otherwise the price of quality food is out of reach for many people,” said Samowitz. “Right now, during this crisis, that’s especially important because so many people have lost their jobs or are living at a reduced income.”

Pittsfield’s virtual market delivers on Saturdays throughout Berkshire County (with a $5 fee to cover expenses for customers who are not seniors or are not receiving the discount). It does not offer customer pick-up.

“We’ve been flooded with orders,” Samowitz said. “One week we had to close online sales after 15 minutes.”

In its first five weeks, the online market had made $27,600 in gross sales, which went to the participating vendors.

Samowitz said that they have been steadily increasing their capacity.

“We expect to do it for at least 33 weeks,” she said. “We haven’t decided if the regular outdoor market will open at some point this summer. But we do plan to offer the virtual market in the fall, instead of having an indoor market.”

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