Russell Lange (left) and Seth Johnson (right), co-founders of 388 Ventures, are joined by Tom Drauschak, the firm’s head of development, outside the Rookwood Inn on Old Stockbridge Road in Lenox, where they were working on a new porch for the building on a Sunday in early May. The same property is shown below just a few weeks later in late May featuring the new porch as well as fresh paint, paving and other improvements to prepare it for the arrival of guests this summer. The Rookwood is one of three hospitality properties in Lenox that Lange and Johnson purchased in March for a combined sales total of more than $5.5 million.

BY JOHN TOWNES

In a reflection of larger changes occurring in the Lenox hospitality market, three local inns have been purchased by a single start-up real estate investment firm based in New York, 388 Ventures.

The principal partners in 388 Ventures are Seth Johnson and Russell Lange. They acquired the inns as Lenox Collection LLC in three separate off-market transactions.

They initially purchased the Church Street Inn at 16 Church St. on March 15. Two weeks after that, the firm purchased the Birchwood Inn at 7 Hubbard St. and the Rookwood Inn at 11 Old Stockbridge Rd.

The overall portfolio encompasses 65 rooms and suites, a restaurant, bar and various public areas. The total purchase price of all three properties was over $5.5 million.

In conjunction with the acquisitions, 388 Ventures has entered into a management agreement with Life House, a New York-based, venture-backed and vertically integrated hotel brand, management and software company. Life House will manage the three Lenox inns.

continued on page 16
Front Pages

Take-home kits put useful info in job-seekers’ hands
BY BRAD JOHNSON

Job fairs can be an effective way for job-seekers to connect with employers to learn what they are looking for and what they have to offer. The pandemic altered that process by putting a halt to in-person job fairs and shifting them to the digital realm, such as a virtual job fair held by the MassHire Berkshire Career Center on April 27. This approach made it easier for some job-seekers to “attend” by eliminating the need to travel to a physical location, but presented barriers for others without ready Internet access.

And, while the return of in-person job fairs may be on the not-too-distant horizon, both formats ultimately have a pool of potential job-seekers who for one reason or another are unable to attend. In an effort to resolve these barriers, the Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield’s public library, is putting together take-home job-fair kits for individuals seeking employment and/or job-searching tips.

“We want to try to replicate the kind of materials people would bring home from a job fair,” said Alicia Hyman, outreach librarian at the Athenaeum. Those materials may include brochures or flyers provided by participating employers with information about their business or organization and about employment opportunities there. The kits may also include some of the “swag” given out at live job fairs, such as notebooks, pens, stress balls or key chains.

Hyman noted that the kits will also include a booklet of job-seeking tips provided by MassHire Berkshire Career Center, which is assisting with coordination and promotion of the project. “They have been tremendously supportive of this,” Hyman said, noting that they have helped get word out to employers about participating in the project and are even providing the reusable tote bags that will be used for the job-fair kits.

Melanie Herzig, business services representative at the Career Center, described the job-fair kits as “a great idea” and one that the Career Center was very happy to support. “Alicia reached out to me to see if we were interested in coordinating this, and I was immediately excited about it,” said Herzig.

Hyman said the idea for the kits came from an article she read in library journal about a public library in Texas that had done a version of job kits during the pandemic. “When I read that, I thought it was something that we could do here that would benefit the community,” she said.

Hyman herself is relatively new to the library, having relocated here from New York City earlier this year to begin her new position at the Athenaeum. “I’ve been here three months,” she said in a late May interview. She noted that the library’s last outreach librarian had left just before the pandemic crisis has receded. “I can see the possibility of reaching people looking for tips on job-seeking,” she said.

Hyman encouraged employers interested in participating to contact her at alicia@pittsfieldlibrary.org or 413-499-9480 ext. 202. Once the kits are compiled, Hyman said outreach to job-seekers would begin. “When we get closer to the kits being ready, MassHire will help get the word out to job-seekers about their availability,” she said, noting that they expect to start handing out the kits on June 28.

The Athenaeum will also make its patrons aware of the kits. “We will have one bag displayed in a high-visibility location in the library,” Hyman said.

While the concept arose in response to the pandemic, Hyman said she believes job-fair kits can also play a role even after the health crisis has receded. “I can see the possibility that these will still be relevant,” she said.

Herzig agreed, noting that actual job fairs can only go so far in bringing employers and job-seekers together. “I think these [job-fair kits] are a unique new way of reaching people looking for tips on job seeking,” she said.

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Couple targeting lovers of good food with Sibaritas

BY JOHN TOWNE

The desire to operate a restaurant of their own has led Megan and Ronald Gomez to purchase the former Elizabeth’s in Pittsfield from Tom and Elizabeth Ellis.

Their new cafe, Sibaritas, (413-448-8244 or sibaritascafe.com) opened in mid-June at 1264 East St. It is open 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. seven days a week.

Megan Gomez described Sibaritas as a fast-casual restaurant that serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. It features Mediterranean and Latin items, but the menu will also be eclectic. “Rather than limiting ourselves to a particular type of cuisine, our goal is to serve quality food quickly,” she said. “The name Sibaritas in Spanish means a lover of food, who appreciates well-prepared food with quality ingredients.”

Customers place their orders at the counter. There is also an option for them to order from their tables by scanning a QR code on their phones, which opens up a menu, with the food brought to the table. Food can also be ordered on a takeout basis.

Gomez said that, while Sibaritas is designed to enable people to order and eat quickly, they also emphasize personalized service. “We have a different approach to the fast-casual format,” she said. “It’s largely self-service, but we’re also attentive to the needs of customers. If we see that someone hasn’t gotten their own tableware yet, we’ll bring it to them. And we’ll take the time to introduce ourselves if customers want to talk.”

They also encourage an atmosphere where people can spend time, similar to a coffeehouse.

“We have a lot of ideas for restaurants,” said Gomez. “We have a lot of ideas for restaurants.”

Ronald and Megan Gomez have opened Sibaritas at the site of the former Elizabeth’s at 1264 East St. in Pittsfield, where they are serving eclectic fare for breakfast, lunch and dinner seven days a week.

They have a wine and beer license and added the coffee bar and erected some partial walls to visually separate that area and made other cosmetic changes.

“We did what I call ‘upcycling’ of the furniture,” she said. “We repainted the tables and chairs from their old colors to black acrylic vinyl. They’re the same furniture but we also found some books stored in a back room upstairs, which we brought downstairs.”

Sibaritas has nine tables upstairs, and another nine which will be downstairs and outside. It has a seating capacity of 49 inside and about the same number outside, with seating on the porch and to the side of the building. They are starting with a staff of four.

Gomez said that, while they are focused on Sibaritas, they also hope to open other restaurants in the future. “Once we’re established in Pittsfield, we’ll be open to new opportunities,” she said. “We have a lot of ideas for restaurants.”

At the end of each month, which question do you ask yourself?

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References available.

Dan Racine
Member of Berkshire, Lee Chamber of Commerce and the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce

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New directory project looks to raise profile of North Adams-based artists

**Initiative also includes outreach to north county businesses that offer goods, services to artists**

**BY BRAD JOHNSON**

The call is out for artists of all disciplines who live or work in North Adams to participate in a new directory being compiled by an organization dedicated to bolstering the city’s growing creative community.

And, in the weeks ahead, a similar outreach effort will be made to members of the broader northern Berkshire business community to identify those whose goods and/or services may be in line with the needs of the city’s artists.

The two-pronged initiative is being undertaken this summer by the North Adams Artist Impact Coalition (AIC), a two-year-old organization comprised of arts organizations, businesses and individual artists who are working together to make North Adams an attractive place for artists to live and work.

According to organizers, their focus is on providing resources for artists to live and thrive in the northern Berkshires and, specifically, North Adams. This is being done through such programs as regular artist meet-ups, a monthly artist newsletter and an artist census.

More recently, the scope of their activities has broadened to include more tangible assistance and resources through AIC’s receipt of a $100,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

“The funding for a lot of what we’re doing now is coming from the NEA grant,” said Molly Rideout, a member of the AIC’s marketing and fundraising manager for Assets for Artists, a department of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) in North Adams that similarly is focused on support for new and existing artists in the region. MASS MoCA also serves as fiscal agent for the AIC.

Rideout, who wrote the NEA grant proposal, said the funding is provided through the NEA’s “Our Town” program, which she described as being about “using arts to create larger systemic change within a municipality.”

The artist directory and the related business directory are aspects of AIC’s broader effort to fulfill the goals of the “Our Town” program. “Several areas were identified in terms of how to increase access to artists and increase artists’ access to resources,” Rideout said. “The directories are a way to directly support the overall initiative.”

**Well-connected consultant**

The artist and business directories are being compiled for the AIC by Michelle Daly of Daly Arts Consulting, a firm that provides a range of services on multiple levels to arts organizations, community initiatives and others (michelle-daly.com).

“The AIC had an RFP out for this [directory] project,” said Daly. “I responded to the RFP at the end of February and was awarded the contract in April.

Daly, herself a North Adams resident and artist, also brings several years of arts administration experience in the region. That includes serving as public programs director at the Mount in Lenox and director of the Berkshire Cultural Resource Center, a project of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams.

“I have my own relationship with the creative community that I am able to draw on for this project with the AIC,” she said. For the artist directory, Daly is currently engaged in outreach to artists living or working in North Adams to encourage them to participate in the directory. As part of that, she is also

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**Berkshire Health Systems Welcomes**

**James Feeney, MD, MEd, FACS**

Dr. James Feeney, a board certified and fellowship trained Trauma Surgeon, has been named Medical Director of Trauma Services for Berkshire Medical Center. Dr. Feeney comes to the Berkshires from Mid Hudson Regional Hospital of Westchester Medical Center, NY, where he served as the Director of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery.

**Medical School:** Dartmouth Medical School

**Board Certification:** General Surgery & Surgical Critical Care

**Fellowship Trained:** Trauma/Critical Care, R. Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center, Baltimore, MD

Berkshire Medical Center provides state-of-the-art surgical care and is the area’s Trauma Center.
We’ll be looking to highlight local businesses offering services to artists that some artists may not be aware of. This could include anything from hardware stores or others that carry products and supplies that artists may need, to professionals such as accountants or lawyers who can help artists with matters related to their areas of specialty. It could also include property owners or managers who have studio space available for lease to artists. “That is one of the things artists are looking for the most,” Daly noted. Unlike the artist profiles, which will be resident in the AIC’s directory as well and the broader Creative Ground database, the business directory will only be resident on the AIC’s website (artistimpactcoalition.org). Rideout noted that the directory project was envisioned from the start as including both the artist and business components. “We want to plant the seeds with businesses that this can help them to reach an important market and audience,” she said. “It’s an untapped consumer base,” added Daly, noting that many artists are open to local alternatives to online shopping for goods they need— even if the cost is not always the lowest. “They tend to be very community oriented and appreciate the value of keeping dollars local.” Daly said she will begin outreach to area businesses in mid-July and will continue through August. Businesses interested in participating in the directory can contact her at michelle@michelle-daly.com.

Daly and Rideout both acknowledged that the geographic specificity for the directories may seem overly self-limiting at first glance. “We’re creating this North Adams-specific directory because that fits with the AIC’s area of focus,” Daly said. “But artists from other areas should also do their own profiles on Creative Ground to enjoy the same benefits and exposure on a regional basis.” Rideout added that, in addition to being the AIC’s area of focus, limiting the artist directory to North Adams is also in line with stipulations of the NEA grant. “The Our Town grant calls for this local specificity in the projects,” she said. “We’re not trying to split hairs any more than we need to.”
**BUSINESS UPDATE**

**Berkshire Community College (BCC)** has added a Food and Beverage Management Certificate to its hospitality program. In full swing for the Spring 2022 semester, the Certificate is a one-year, 28-credit program that prepares students for careers in the food and beverage industry. The program is designed to provide students with a basic understanding of the operation of food and beverage services, personnel and supervision principles, as well as the skills and knowledge of the industry, along with cost controls. The new program is designed for recent high school graduates seeking a vocational program that will prepare them for work immediately after just one year of training, as well as individuals who work in the food and beverage industry who wish to increase their skills. With this addition, BCC’s Hospitality & Culinary program will now offer three unique certificate programs: Hospitality, Lodging Management, and Culinary Management. The three programs combined can earn an associate degree in the newly consolidated Hospitality and Tourism concentrations.

**Downtown Pittsfield Inc. (DPI) has partnered with the Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT) to promote the Greening the Gateway Cities Program (GGCP) as it enters its fifth year of operation. DPI has hired two Downtown Pittsfield Tree Ambassadors who will work closely with local businesses, downtown residents, and businesses downtown to plant and care for trees planted on downtown streets and tree areas. They will also install “Tree Care” signs near trees throughout downtown to help educate people about trees and to encourage their care.**

**Shaker Museum has been awarded a two-year grant from the Pyramid Foundation to support a new exhibition titled “The Utopian Ideal: Youth and Change.” The grant is for the inaugural permanent collection, an exhibition that explores the Shaker Community – which will be presented at the launch of the museum’s new facility in downtown North Adams in 2022. Curated by Maggie Taft, the exhibition will offer a kaleidoscopic view of the Shakers and their religious faith and provide insights into the culture and practices of the community. It will explore Shaker Beliefs, Shaker Life, Shaker Community, we will be able to share the beautiful and inspiring stories of the Shakers with a new generation of ‘first-time visitors,’ said Shaker Museum Executive Director Lacy Leavitt. “This is a unique opportunity to share the story of a religious community that has had such a profound impact on the cultural and environmental consciousness of the region.” The Utopian Ideal: Youth and Change is a project of the Shaker Museum and the Pyramid Foundation grant, and will be the first exhibition to be held at the museum’s new facility in downtown North Adams.**

**The Rotary Club of Pittsfield presented its annual Rotary Student Scholarships, Gene Case Memorial Scholarship, Jenks Scholarship, and Spoon Scholarship to UMass Amherst students. The winner of the 2021 Jenks Scholarship was Devanita Prasad, a senior majoring in Marketing at UMass Amherst. The recipient of the 2021 Spoon Scholarship was Denezio Louis Jean and Genie Jean Louis, twins attending Pittsfield High School.**

**On June 29 from 9 to 10 a.m., 1 Berkshire way, Pittsfield, will host a conversation hosted by Dave and Colleen Little of Spoon inside the Williams Bookstore on Spring Street. This is a special opportunity to engage in conversation with other entrepreneurs and hear about the process of launching Spoon and Little to launch Spoon (January 2021 BICC). The free event is made possible through the support of Berkshire Community College. Space is limited and registration is required. To register, go to the events calendar at berkshire.com.**

**Lee Bank Foundation awarded a total of $5,000 to Berkshire County organizations to support arts organizations in the foundation’s first 2021 round of grants. The grants totaling $5,000 include $3,000 to Berkshire Arts Council, $1,000 to Design Berkshire, and $1,000 to Berkshire Natural Resource Council, Community Support Arts, Artistic Birth, Greening and Roots Rising. Arts Access Grants of $1,500 each were awarded to the Mahaive Performing Arts Center, Norman Rockwell Museum, WAM Theater and Berkshire Theatre Group. It “was great to see proposals from such a wide array of performing arts organizations in the Berkshires,” said Lee Bank Foundation member Jenni Gomez. “We look forward to seeing how their arts programming will support their mission and benefit our community.” Lee Bank Foundation also expressed support for its first funding round. Application forms and information on future rounds of funding can be found at Lee Bank’s website (www.lerbank.com).**

**For the month of July, First Fridays Artwalk will present the first Artwalk of 2021, which will take place from 5 to 8 p.m. on Friday, July 2 in downtown Pittsfield. The event is free and open to the public. First Fridays Artwalk is, and will continue to be this year the PookFetcher app, which can be downloaded to your phone to find art and related events in the area.**

**Greylock Federal Credit Union has published its first ever Community Impact Report in conjunction with its 2020 Annual Report. As a non-profit financial cooperative, the report is dedicated to the community, regardless of where they come from, or how much income they earn, for the support and care of our neighbors. Greylock Foundation, which is the credit union’s philanthropic arm, has over the past 20 years invested over $17 million in the Berkshire community through over 3,000 grants.**

**The Berkshire County Community Diaper Project has launched this spring on MCLA’s curriculum software. The grant will support the diversification of the pantry’s offerings, including the addition of fresh produce and non-food items, such as personal hygiene products. The grant will also support the pantry’s longtime goals. The pantry will also launch a Gift Card Program which served 46 MCLA students, several of whom applied multiple times to the program. For those interested in donating to the MCLA Food Pantry, please visit the MCLA website (www.mcla.edu) to learn about ways you can contribute to this important effort. A survey was conducted to provide BFAIR data gathering and analysis, and organize their producing programs in a nonprofit setting to add social justice issues, environmental conserva-**
The Berkshires Community College (BCC) recently completed a series of five online training sessions called Foundations of Opioid Addiction and Recovery, designed for healthcare and social services professionals working in southern Berkshire County. The training program was made possible with a $11 million Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant awarded to Rural Recovery Resources, a project created by the South Berkshire Opioid Consortium (SBOC). The SBOC consists of four funded partners: BCC, The Brien Center, Fairview Hospital, and the Railroad Street Youth Project. BCC will conduct training sessions twice a year for the next three years. “With this grant funding and our ability to collaborate with Berkshire Community College, we will be able to make great strides in tackling misinformation and stigma head on,” said Rural Recovery Resources Project Manager Gary Pratt. “This curriculum will improve the lives of those affected by substance use, reduce compassion fatigue in the workforce, and help us move toward more equitable treatment. The HRSA grant and the resources it provides will save lives.” The BCC training curriculum focuses on increasing knowledge and awareness of substance use disorders, reducing stigma, and helping to provide better screening, assessment, and referral services in southern Berkshire County. Elena Nuciforo, BCC’s director of workforce development, noted that in addition to creating curriculum for healthcare and social services professionals, BCC and Rural Recovery Resources are working together to train frontline healthcare providers. “We strongly believe that maintaining an effective healthcare workforce is not only about acquiring medical and nursing care skills, but also about creating an understanding of community health and learning about local resources,” Nuciforo said. For more information about BCC’s Foundations of Opioid Addiction and Recovery training sessions, contact Elena Nuciforo at enuciforo@ berkshire.edu.

Hancock Shaker Village has partnered with restaurant entrepreneurs Ellen Waggett and Christopher Landy to open Bimi’s Cafe at the living history museum in Pittsfield. Led by chef Joshua Kelly, Bimi’s Cafe is owned and operated by the television production and lighting designer husband-and-wife team of Landy and Waggett, whose shared passion for delicious food, authentic recipe development, and living history experience, and exceptional service brought them to Hancock Shaker Village. Bimi’s Cafe is open daily from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., with additional hours on evenings when there are concerts and other public events scheduled at the historic site. Shaker Village is not required to enjoy the cafe.

The Retired Senior Volunteer Program of Berkshire County (RSVP) has launched Wheels for Wellness, a free ride service for county residents of all ages who need transportation to wellness-related activities, including medical and social services appointments, fitness classes, therapy, as well as transport to vaccine sites. The new service builds upon RSVP’s existing van service, which specifically serves Pittsfield. “Over the years, we have learned that there is a countywide gap in transportation, not just for elders, but for others as well,” said RSVP Director Jeff Roucoulet. “In our Pittsfield program, at first we only brought seniors to medical appointments, but we now know that this is just a fraction of what’s needed for good health.

With Wheels for Wellness, we’ve ‘dropped the age requirement and included non-medical health-related transit for all passengers to better assist with the county’s needs. ‘Rides are available between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding major holidays. To schedule an appointment, call the Wheels for Wellness hotline at 413-395-0109 weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Riders must be fully ambulatory and able to get themselves in and out of the vehicle without assistance. The program is a partnership between RSVP and Berkshire Community Action Council, Berkshire Fall Health Collaborative, Community Health Programs, Berkshire Interfaith Organizing and Berkshire Health Systems.”
MOLAR Employ-
ment and HealthCare
Services has announced the
promotion of Celeste
Roeder to manager of
the company’s Pittsfield
office. She has been
promoted to the position
of accounting specialist.
She had most recently
served as payroll and
accounts receivable as-
sistant. Prior to joining
the company she worked
at Kripalu Center for Yoga
and Health. DiNicola has
been promoted to the position
of administrative assistant and
will provide support to staff for both the Employ-
ment and HealthCare di-
sions. She will be responsible for pre-screening
and initial communications with new applicants,
recruiting and selecting new hire, and on-site.
DiNicola previously worked as an HR manager for Premium Waters/Ice River
Springs in Pittsfield, Mass. She has been promoted to the position
of business development officer. The promotion is effective July 1.

Berkshire Grown
The Good Grown Team is pleased to announce
the joining of Abby Powers, director of retail lending and
Peter Mirante as vice
president of retail lending.
Trybus brings nearly 12 years of
mortgage banking experience and previously served as a
vice president of retail lending at Greylock Federal Credit Union. She is a graduate of the University of Virginia and a member of the Berkshire Compact Work-
timeforce/Committee. Mirante has been with the company for
several years, most recently with the company’s in-house
mortgage banking team.

Berkshire Community College
BCC has announced several recent promotions.
David Boutillon, financial aid manager
at BCC has been promoted to the posi-
tion of business development officer.
Sharon P. Weeks, assistant director of student
affairs at BCC has been promoted to the position
of director of student affairs.

Berkshire Health Systems
Ellioth has been
promoted to the position
of director of retail lending.

Pittsfield Veterinary Hospital
has welcomed Dr. Andrea Rusilowicz
as the newest veterinarian on the team. Rusilowicz
grew up in Connecticut and was exposed to a veterinary world at an
early age through her veterinarian parents.
She completed her vet-
ery degree at the University of Vermont and completed her Doctorate of Vet-
ery Medicine at Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine and was
scheduled to graduate from St. George’s University in Grenada, where her family is based.

Berkshire Family and Individual Resources
Abby Powers has been named the director of the Pittsfield United Way.

Abby Powers

Abby Powers

Abby Powers

Abby Powers

Abby Powers

Abby Powers

Abby Powers

Abby Powers
JULY 2021  BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE

Wylie Goodman, MRP, has joined the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission as economic development senior planner. Goodman will be responsible for the Economic Development Program working with Program Manager Angelique Brennan to support the Shared Economic Development Program plan and work on regional economic recovery efforts.

Elizabeth Nielsen has joined the board of directors of Lever, a North Adams-based nonprofit organization focused on fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Berkshires. Nielsen has experience as a teacher, in a range of volunteer work and as a non-profit CEO. She holds a Williams College alumna and part-time resident of the Berkshires, she serves as pastor of Congregational Church at the First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach, Fla.

Southwestern Vermont Health Care (SVHC) has announced Jason Morrissy, attorney, as its legal counsel. In addition to acting as counsel to SVHC, Morrissy will continue operating his private law practice in Bennington. The late Tom Jacobs had served as SVHC’s general counsel until his death in 2020. Morrissy has owned his own law practice in Bennington since 2012. He started practicing law in Bennington in 2004 as an associate with the firms Cohen, Sturdevant & Kelly, LLP, where he later became a partner.

Berkshire Money Management (BMM) has welcomed Holly Simeone and Jared Reinstein to the company’s growing family. Simeone is a client care specialist and will work at the helm of the BMM satellite office at 322 Main St. in Great Barrington, which opened in February. Prior to joining BMM, Simeone was a dual employee for Lee Bank and October North, where she attended to client services, managing trusts and estates, and private banking for wealth management clients. She holds a bachelor’s degree in customer experience and holds the Certified Estate and Trust Specialist designation from the Institute of Business and Finance. Reinstein joins the advisor team as a financial advisor. A Certified Financial Planner and CFP®, Reinstein brings more than 20 years of experience in the insurance industry, will focus primarily on clients in the BMM satellite office. He has a background in related sectors by delivering innovative solutions through the agency’s ToteGuard risk assessment program. Reinstein joined his father’s independent insurance firm, a midwestern mutual insurance company, and then transitioned to working for that company as an independent agent in western New York specializing in commercial lines. His most recent position was vice president of claims at a commercial insurance company. Reinstein served as associate vice president for one of the largest alliances of independent agents in the U.S. He held the Certified Insurance Counselor (CIC) and Construction Risk Insurance Counselor (CRIC) designations.

Berkeley Community College’s (BCC) chief development officer, Kelly Osorio, has been promoted to executive vice president of the college. Osorio began her financial aid career at the College of the Holy Cross in Albany, N.Y., and was most recently director of financial aid at East Stroudsburg University in Pennsylvania. One of Osorio’s first accomplishments at BCC was creating a series of short videos to help new students navigate the financial aid process. She also recently launched the FAFSA Thursdays series, a program led by financial aid staff who assist students with completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Jared Reinstein

Berkshire County Energy Center (LaFi) has appointed former Massachusetts State Senate President Stan Rosenberg as a member of its newly formed organization’s board of directors. Dus is a senior case worker at Berkshire Immigrant Community Centers (BIC). A former member of Governor Charlie Baker’s cabinet before 2017, moving to the United States from Ireland. She has worked with refugees with a certificate of commendation and $1,000 honorarium from the Garden Club of America. As director of Mass Audubon’s NBC’s Network, which is slated to open this summer. Prior to joining LaFi, which is scheduled to open this summer. Prior to joining LaFi, Dus worked with displaced people and children at risk.

Tuttle Insurance Agency has welcomed Don Eaton as an account executive. Eaton is a native of Pittsfield, the oldest of five children. Eaton brings over 20 years of experience in the insurance industry, will focus primarily on clients in the John E. Repola Jr., a member of the Massachusetts Bar Association, where he ran a foreign exchange and rates product analyst for leveraged lending. Most recently, he served as a senior credit analyst, Investment Management as a senior credit analyst, Lauro brings 10-plus years of wide-ranging industry experience, working for Fiduciary Management and Research as a credit research associate. Longfellow Investment Management as a senior credit analyst, and State Street Bank as vice president, credit analyst for leveraging lendings. Most recently, he held a title of vice president of emerging markets, where he ran a foreign exchange and rates product specializing in the Latin American region of be

Don Eaton

Lauro

Matthew Lauro has joined the Pittsfield Co-operative Bank as vice president, commercial banking, where he will be responsible for managing and growing the commercial business unit. Lauro brings 10-plus years of wide-ranging industry experience, working for Fiduciary Management and Research as a credit research associate. Longfellow Investment Management as a senior credit analyst, and State Street Bank as vice president, credit analyst for leveraging lendings. Most recently, he held a title of vice president of emerging markets, where he ran a foreign exchange and rates product specializing in the Latin American region of be

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Risk Insurance Counselor (CRIC) designations.
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Leigh Davis has been appointed vice chair of the Great Barrington Select Board. Davis’s elevation to the vice chairmanship reflects the level of leadership and service she has brought to the Selectboard since her election two years ago. A native of Washington D.C., Davis is the development director of Construct, a nonprofit provider of affordable housing and supportive services in the southern Berkshires. Prior to this role, Davis was director of development of Eagle Hill Development LLC, director of marketing of New England Home, which she joined in 2014 as executive director of the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center. She volunteers her time with The People’s Pantry and serves on the board of trustees of the Berkshire Community Foundation. Davis is a board member of Youth Council chair; Ingegni III vice president; Sheridan vice president; Barrington, Lee, North Adams, Pittsfield. Brown is president and CEO of the Capital District YMCA in Albany, N.Y., where he has worked for 28 years to create better opportunities for all through community programs and services. As member of the NBT Bank Capital Region Advisory Board, Brown also served on the Siena College Board of Trustees.

Berkshire County Energy Center (LaFi) has appointed former Massachusetts State Senate President Stan Rosenberg as a member of its newly formed organization’s board of directors. Dus is a senior case worker at Berkshire Immigrant Community Centers (BIC). A former member of Governor Charlie Baker’s cabinet before 2017, moving to the United States from Ireland. She has worked with refugees with a certificate of commendation and $1,000 honorarium from the Garden Club of America. As director of Mass Audubon’s NBC’s Network, which is slated to open this summer. Prior to joining LaFi, which is scheduled to open this summer. Prior to joining LaFi, Dus worked with displaced people and children at risk.

Tuttle Insurance Agency has welcomed Don Eaton as an account executive. Eaton is a native of Pittsfield, the oldest of five children. Eaton brings over 20 years of experience in the insurance industry, will focus primarily on clients in the John E. Repola Jr., a member of the Massachusetts Bar Association, where he ran a foreign exchange and rates product analyst for leveraged lending. Most recently, he served as a senior credit analyst, Investment Management as a senior credit analyst, Lauro brings 10-plus years of wide-ranging industry experience, working for Fiduciary Management and Research as a credit research associate. Longfellow Investment Management as a senior credit analyst, and State Street Bank as vice president, credit analyst for leveraging lendings. Most recently, he held a title of vice president of emerging markets, where he ran a foreign exchange and rates product specializing in the Latin American region of be

Mathew Lauro

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Overall economic recovery will require more patience

BY JONATHAN BUTLER
It’s hard to believe that was just over a year ago that we contributed a piece for BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE encouraging economic institutions to “keep fighting” (May 2020 BT&C). In that article, we detailed much of what was happening in the local economy while we were all stuck in a “semi-permanent state of the unknown, essentially waiting to see what will happen.”

At the time, we were still very much in the midst of the pandemic lockdown; only able to speculate as to how much hardship our community and local economy might ultimately endure.

The lockdown eventually transitioned to “reopening” the economy, a complicated series of incremental changes in guidelines that allowed for more activity and commerce. Unfortunately, the understandably cautious public health and safety guidelines galvanized some activities altogether, disproportionately impacting some parts of the commonwealth more than others. For others, the loss of the performing arts was significant. Tanglewood, Jacob’s Pillow and our countless performing arts venues were just a few of our casualties.

Many of us working in the business and economic development world hoped for the best but were underwhelmed by the previous experience to fall back on, it was impossible to estimate the impact of losing such catalyst economic institutions. As we arrived in summer of 2020, though, something remarkable happened: people and our economy? Early signs indicate much cause for optimism.

As the pandemic by working together and caring about our community, and that’s how we’ll recover— and ultimately thrive—in the years to come.

Summer 2021 will provide our region with needed boost

We came through the worst of the pandemic by working together and caring about our community, and that’s how we’ll recover—and ultimately thrive—in the years to come.

Jonathan Butler is president and CEO of Berkshire Community Foundation. The board

What does all of this mean? For those of us living and working in the Berkshires, it is, in most cases, a welcome return to the reality of life we’ve come to know and love.

For businesses, it’s a long-overdue shot of adrenaline to help kickstart their recovery from the pandemic.

Continuing challenges

It does not, however, come without continuing challenges.

For the businesses that fought through the pandemic, hating has become a critical challenge. A confluence of factors—amplified unemployment benefits, recovery from mass layoffs, continued reluctance to be in public spaces or indoor working conditions for fear of COVID-19 itself—have left nearly all business sectors in a workforce crisis. It is forcing many employers to rethink their staffing models, ultimately compromising their experience for their patrons and guests.

The economic pressure of the pandemic also forced many local businesses to close their doors. It will take time for us to fully recover from those losses, but we are already seeing a high concentration of new business owners and entrepreneurs entering our market, in many instances stepping right into the footsteps, going businesses lost. While this is a very positive development in the grand scheme, it will take time for these new businesses to gain their footing.

A year ago the resounding message that we had to share was not only to keep fighting, but for all of us to support our local businesses and organizations in this time of greatest need.

But it’s exactly because of our rural landscape that smaller businesses (who are also our neighbors, volunteers and board members) step up to support nonprofits. Together, we are able to support a large and vibrant sector.

There are 1,160 nonprofits in Berkshire County, giving us one of the highest per capita levels in the commonwealth. Nonprofits here employ one in four workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, ranking 27th in the nation for highest rates of nonprofit employment.

An important economic engine, our nonprofit sector is certainly worthy of development and support, but perhaps even more so for its competitive. Every nonprofit feels like they’re fitting up the same people for support.

And every business is strategically asked to provide a full-time staff person just to manage requests for support.

Responding to crisis

During COVID, however, the fund-raising landscape changed drastically. Many jumped in with donations, and businesses mobilized in a wide variety of ways to provide immediate relief to organizations, especially those on the front lines of pandemic response.

Business leaders recognized an opportunity to do just that—lead. And they leveraged their company assets—marketing and manpower—to help their neighbors.

We came through the worst of the pandemic and caring about our community, and that’s how we’ll recover—and ultimately thrive—in the years to come.

berkshire business community shows support for nonprofits

BY LIANA TOSCANINI

We don’t have a lot of big corporations in Berkshire County by any stretch, exactly because of our rural landscape that smaller businesses (who are also our neighbors, volunteers and board members) step up to support nonprofits. Together, we are able to support a large and vibrant sector.

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Berkshire Theatre Company continued on page 12

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RESPONSE AND RECOVERY
Agency evolves, adapts to better address region’s COVID challenge

BY LAURA BRENNAN

We’ve all grown weary of quite a few phrases over the last year or so – social distancing, PPE, and Zoom etiquette, just to name a few – but a pandemic platitude that will be particularly good to see fade away is “pivot.” In practice, this is to turn or twist on one’s heel, only to return to the original position. If we are to emerge better than we were before, we should instead be focused on evolving, recognizing that as we adapt we improve. This has been the case for Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC).

How would we have described ourselves 15 months ago? Deliberate and methodical definitely come to mind. These approaches have always served us well, and will continue to do so going forward. So will the newfound agility that came into play during our wide-ranging response to COVID-19 in our region.

From the outset, Executive Director Tom Matuszko urged BRPC staff to reach out to partners, find ways to collaborate, and make ourselves available to support the Berkshire community. This meant repurposing USDA funds to help area farmers markets comply with COVID restrictions and communicate new regulations with their customers. It meant being nimble enough to loan our staff to Berkshire United Way as they coordinated emergency food programs. And it meant leaning on long-standing relationships but forging others quickly.

The Public Health program at BRPC has worked closely with the state’s Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council for many years and had plans in place for emergency dispensing sites and other pandemic measures. This advance work prepared us to spring into action, coordinating with the health system within hours of the first Berkshire County case being diagnosed. In early March of 2020, local boards of health were trained on quarantine and isolation procedures, and by late March, the Berkshire Public Health Alliance (managed by BRPC) was providing public health nursing, including contact tracing and quarantine enforcement, to 21 municipalities.

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Support for nonprofits continued from page 10

far as to produce their own polycarbonate face shields for front-line healthcare workers. Other employees joined in to collect food for the local food pantry, and assemble 350 Thanksgiving meals for the local senior center.

Wheeler & Taylor is a member of GoodWorks Financial Group, a network of common-ownership insurance, real estate and financial firms. Teaming up with another member, Wheeler & Taylor also donated to the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts to provide thousands of meals. Rote summed up these efforts simply, stating: “In this time of unprecedented need, our communities need unprecedented support, and we’re glad to do our part.”

Match as match can

At the Pittsfield campus of Guardian Life Insurance Company of America (originally Berkshire Life Insurance Company before a merger in 2001), giving was stepped up considerably in three areas: corporate grant allocations, charitable foundation gifts, and individual employee giving.

With a long history of philanthropy, Guardian prides itself on employee giving with company matches. By recording the hours they volunteer, Guardian employees can earn individual grants for their nonprofits. When presented with an opportunity to contribute to the COVID relief fund administered by Berkshire United Way and Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, employees banded together to raise $65,000 which was then matched to provide over $100,000 for pandemic relief.

Heartfelt efforts

Nichole Dupont, community development director at Berkshire Money Management, coordinates much of the Dalton-based company’s philanthropy program, which not only includes cash donations but also the giving of time and “our hearts without hesitation.”

From delivering tens of thousands of masks and PPE all over the county, distributing literal tons of food, and making pandemic survival bags for local businesses, to offering free, weekly outdoor movies and yoga classes to the community to ease the isolation of the pandemic, Berkshire Money Management staff were, as Dupont puts it, “always looking for the next effort in which we would roll up our sleeves and try to make things better in any way we could.”

Those efforts extended to support for local Berkshire businesses as well, most notably in the decision by CEO Allen Harris to give a $10,000 bonus to each one of its 11 employees with the condition they spend it locally.

Throwing nonprofits a lifeline

Berkshire banking institutions did double duty processing PPP loans and mobilizing their giving mechanisms to help nonprofits survive. Berkshire Bank Foundation accessed $1 million of its endowment to provide additional support to organizations on the front lines working with communities disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus. Additionally, the foundation removed restrictions for its giving as well, so much so that they recently created a charitable foundation to further formalize their promise of community reinvestment (April 2021 BT&C).

Recognizing opportunity in crisis

The COVID crisis provided businesses an opportunity to act like nonprofits – stepping in to fill community needs not met by the government or free market.

Now that they’ve gotten a taste for third-sector work, perhaps this higher level of engagement will become the “new normal.” Or, perhaps in a small community, there really isn’t too much difference between business folks and nonprofit folks at the end of the day. We may not sport many large corporations in Berkshire County, but the businesses that live here have large hearts.
BRPC evolves and adapts continued from page 11

Coordinated on a weekly basis and with weekly situation updates to the local boards of health and deployment of several hundred thousand dollars of emergency funding from DPH for supplies, public health nursing staffs, emergency management, and coaching to health inspectors on the ever-changing regulations, and a public information campaign which included billboards, bus ads, and other signage. There’s simply no other way to put it: these efforts saved lives. The public health boards in Berkshire County are heroes.

Business and nonprofit support

We’ve also had the honor of assisting individual businesses and nonprofits during the pandemic. This represents an expansion from our traditional core focus on municipalities, and one that has made a measurable difference.

In early summer of 2020, BRPC began administering grant programs to help small businesses cover expenses. The first was the Small Business Recovery Fund, provided by the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office, which provided reimbursements up to $3,000 for fixed costs that could not be avoided despite an inability of the business to operate at full capacity. The program distributed a total of $45,000 and impacted about 15 businesses.

Through these modest beginnings we witnessed the tremendous impact even a small influx of capital could have for these organizations, and we used the program as a model for another investment by the commonwealth. State Sen. Adam Hinds secured an earmark of $250,000 which established the COVID-19 Adaptation Fund for Berkshire County. The Adaptation Fund supported both-profit and nonprofit organizations with grants of up to $12,000, reimbursing rent payments, payroll, accounts payable, or documented lost sales. Preference was given to applications from BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) owned businesses, a population disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Nearly 40 applicants benefited from this program, and the Adaptation Fund also awarded two $15,000 grants to nonprofits offering technical assistance to residents impacted by pandemic conditions. In their own words, the recipients offered their heartfelt thanks to Senator Hinds in a digital presentation (http://bit.ly/BIRadaptationfund).

Although the Small Business Recovery and Adaptation Funds are closed, BRPC continues to help manage two much larger programs in partnership with the lead communities of Adams and Lenox.

The Microenterprise Assistance Program in the northern and southern Berkshires utilizes Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to support low-to-moderate income business owners with grants of up to $25,000. Applications are still open, and our Community Development & Housing Program staff are available to help applicants through the process. Microenterprises (five or fewer employees, including the owner) make up a large portion of businesses in Berkshire County, and this type of support can be the difference between remaining in business and being forced to close permanently. Together with similar programs in Pittsfield and North Adams, every community in Berkshire County is being rebuilt. By improving the user experience on Berkshire Benchmarks, we hope more community organizations will gain new insights into our region’s conditions and progress.

Nothing described above was on our calendar before March of 2020, but that’s not to say we didn’t plan for it. The work of our past prepared us to act when the time came. Lessons learned will become a part of our preparation for the future, and we’re reminded that, no matter how much we anticipate, a willingness to adapt may be the most important planning tool of all.

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Property getting major overhaul, new identity as TwinHouse Inn

BY JOHN TOWNES

Susan Gibbs purchased the former Sprague mansion and estate on Undermountain Road in Lenox three years ago and extensively renovated it with the goal of living on the property and converting it into an inn. Since then, her plan has not changed – but the location has.

In February, Gibbs purchased the former Berkshire Cottage known as the Summer White House at 17 Main St. in the town center from Frank and Mary Newton for $601,000. The sale was brokered by John McLean of Berkshire Real Estate Associates.

She is currently renovating the property with plans to open it within a year as the TwinHouse Inn, a combination inn and residence.

She plans to place the Sprague estate on the market, and eventually move into the Summer White House.

“I love the Sprague home on Undermountain Road,” explained Gibbs, a corporate art curator who moved here from Atlanta in 2019. “But it’s too large for one person. My goal had been to live in one section and share the rest with the public as an inn.”

However, along the way she had to change course.

“The local codes would have required extensive changes to convert it into an inn, which I didn’t want to do,” she continued. “It’s too beautiful and stately, and those changes would alter it in ways that I didn’t feel would be right for it.”

Gibbs said she was familiar with the Summer White House and knew it was on the market but had not looked into it initially.

“Then, one day, I drove by and saw that all the lights were on,” she recalled. “I thought it might be an Open House, and I stopped to take a look at it. It wasn’t an Open House, but the Newtons gave me a tour anyway, and I was immediately attracted to it. Also, since it was already zoned for a bed and breakfast, I could follow my original plan there. I subsequently made an offer, and it was accepted.”

Located near the central rotary in Lenox, the three-story, 6,000 square-foot Summer White House was built in the Queen Anne style of architecture in the early 1880s by Electra Eddy. It was subsequently purchased by John Schermerhorn (a cousin of Edith Wharton) in 1885. It gained its name because President Chester Arthur was an early visitor there.

The Newtons had operated it as a bed and breakfast since the 1990s. It had been on the market for about six years.

Gibbs believes that most people who had looked at the property in the past were dissuaded by the extent of restoration work and updating it needed. This was not a concern for her, she said, noting that she has renovated 14 historic properties over 30 years.

Art and restoration

Gibbs is the principal of TwinHouse Art Advisory, an art consulting and collection management firm that serves private and corporate clients, including Delta Airlines. She now operates that business from Lenox.

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Taylor Gibeau
Adams Community Bank
2021 Youth Champion
Gibbs said she had been familiar with Lenox when she lived in Massachusetts to attend graduate school at Harvard, and later when she worked for Strathmore Paper and lived in Longmeadow.

“Toften visited Lenox and used to bring my son every year to see James Taylor at Tanglewood,” she said. “When I was deciding what to do with the next phase of my life, I decided Lenox was where I wanted to be.”

She noted that the project incorporates several aspects of her experience. In addition to her other restoration projects, she has previous experience in the hospitality industry as a concierge at the Ritz Carlton. Gibbs also plans to utilize her art expertise at the inn. “It will be based on a theme of fine art, with a juxtaposition of classical and contemporary works there,” she said.

“The house is cozy with many beautiful features, including parquet floors and wonderful windows and fireplaces,” she said. “My plan is to do a total restoration that brings the house back to what it was in its prime, while making necessary repairs and updates.”

That will include replacement of the HVAC, electrical, and plumbing systems, bathrooms, kitchen, roof repairs, and structural elements.

“It’s structurally sound, but there has been some settling over the years,” said Gibbs, who is serving as her own general contractor.

Gibbs said she plans to reside in a separate living area on the building’s third floor, and rent out the five bedrooms on the lower two floors.

“I’ll continue to live in my present home until the work is completed and I find the right buyer for that property,” she said. “It will be bittersweet selling the Sprague property, which I put three years of work into. But I’m ready to move when the time comes.”

Town at “tipping point”

The Summer White House is among a sizeable cluster of hospitality establishments in Lenox that have changed hands in the first few months of 2021 (see related story on page 1). Gibbs attributed the increased level of interest in these properties to a combination of factors.

“Lenox has long been a cultural epicenter in the Berkshires with the presence of Tanglewood and other nearby attractions,” she said. “I believe it’s now on a tipping point to a new level.”

In part, she added, generational factors have changed, Gibbs noted. “The proliferation of lifestyle media like the Food Network and publications that promote concepts like ‘country chic’ have opened up people’s horizons,” she said. “They’re not as interested in a cozy old home. Instead they want to stay at places that are comfortable while offering an experience and amenities that are also contemporary, sophisticated and bright.”

While the appeal of rural life appeals to the current guest market, their tastes and preferences have changed, Gibbs noted. “They’re not as interested in a cozy old home. Instead they want to stay at places that are comfortable while offering an experience and amenities that are also contemporary, sophisticated and bright.”

While the COVID pandemic has been very difficult for the hospitality industry, Gibbs believes that situation will improve, especially for smaller establishments. “Since the pandemic, many people prefer something smaller and more private rather than staying in a hotel with 225 rooms,” she said.

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In the past couple of years, a number of inns and hotels have changed hands in Lenox, including the purchase of the Gateways Inn on Walker Street by Mill Town Capital in July 2020.

In early 2021, the Cornell Inn at 203 Main St. was purchased by Kurt Inderbitzen for $1.9 million. He has undertaken extensive renovation of the property and plans to relaunch the inn for the summer season.

The Apple Tree Inn, at 10 Richmond Mountain Rd. was sold by Sharon Walker for $2.4 million to Aries Living, a company owned by James and Max Khagan. Based in New York, the company operates several resort hotels in the Miami area.

And in February, Susan Gibbs purchased the former Berkshire Cottage known as the Summer White House at 17 Main St. in the town center for $601,000 (see related story on page 14).

The strong interest and high values of these and other properties reflect both the recent and expected growth of Lenox as a destination for upscale visitors. It also is a sign of transitions and consolidation in the hospitality market overall, with independent inns and small hotels increasingly being acquired by regional and national owners with strategies to make their operations more efficient through technology and to increase their appeal to new generations of guests.

Although the three Lenox inns are the first acquisitions for 388 Ventures, the company’s partners have a background in related fields. Lange had previously worked in investment banking and in real estate acquisitions, including with the Starwood Capital Group and Citi. Johnson had also worked for Citi, as well as the TPG real estate investment firm.

“We decided to take our combined experience to start something new,” said Lange. Their goal is to acquire regional leisure destinations across the United States, with an emphasis on hospitality assets in lifestyle boutique products in the upscale and luxury segment.

“We chose Lenox for our first acquisitions because we’re both from New England,” said Lange. 388 Ventures is a company founded by marketing and investment professionals who are passionate about the Berkshire Hills and the many opportunities it presents for growth and innovation in the hospitality industry.

The Birchwood Inn, a property with 12 guest rooms, was purchased by 388 Ventures for $1.26 million.
Lange said that the management agreement with Life House will also enable the inns to benefit from that company’s expertise and resources. Life House, which both owns and has management agreements for hotels, will manage the day-to-day operations, reservation system, marketing and other facets of the business. Lange noted that the COVID-19 pandemic caused some initial concern, but they are looking beyond that.

Concerns that they initially had about operating at reduced capacity due to the pandemic have been eased with the lifting of the state’s COVID restrictions on May 29, allowing all businesses to again operate at full capacity.

Operational efficiency
Lange said they chose to purchase three inns almost simultaneously as the most effective business strategy.

“Having three inns makes the most sense for the operations side,” he said. “It’s a challenge to operate a single location with a small number of rooms. Operating on a larger scale allows for sharing of supplies, purchasing of supplies, and combining expenses and revenues in a more efficient way.”

He said their overall strategy is to upgrade and modernize attractive properties.

“The goal is to keep the original qualities while updating them to appeal to new generations of tourists,” he said.

Lange noted that all three inns are within walking distance of Lenox center, or they might prefer one of the others because of their settings.

Historic properties
The largest property in 388 Ventures’ Lenox portfolio is the Church Street Inn (formerly the Village Inn), which has been a prominent part of central Lenox since 1711 when farmer John Whitlock opened his house to paying guests. It has been significantly enlarged over the years, and today is a 31-room inn that includes a restaurant and pub.

In 2019, it was purchased for $850,000 by two Colorado-based couples, Chris and Dawn Frevert and Chris and Jane Serafin. They invested heavily in renovations to the property, with plans to operate on a larger scale. However, they then had to struggle with the COVID pandemic, and agreed to sell it when they were approached by 388 Ventures. The purchase price was $2.6 million.

Lange said that 388 Ventures plans to reopen the restaurant and inn, although at the time of the interview they had not yet determined the concept for the spaces.

The Birchwood Inn, with 12 rooms, is a large stately house with a spacious lawn, located on the hill that descends into central Lenox from the north. It was purchased by 388 Ventures from Tom Johnson and Debbie Lancaster for $1.26 million.

The Birchwood was among the earliest residential properties in Lenox. The core of the house was built in 1766 by Israel Dewey, a founding member of Lenox’s Continental Congress Committee. It hosted the first town meeting in Lenox and was later converted into a tavern and inn.

The 20-room Rookwood Inn was purchased by 388 Ventures from Amy Lindner-Lesser for $1.63 million. That property is located just south of Lenox center. It was originally opened in 1825 as the Williams Tavern, and was popular with judges and lawyers when Lenox was the site of the County Courthouse.

The partners initiated the offers to purchase the inns separately after researching the market and approaching the owners of properties they found desirable and compatible with their overall goals.
continued from previous page

It also has a tentative agreement to manage a new hotel slated to be developed through an expansion and upgrade of the existing Day Inn on Pittsfield Road in Lenox. That project recently received approval from town officials, clearing the way for completion of the property’s purchase by Oklahoma-based Ross Group Development LLC.

Based in New York, Life House was founded in 2017 by entrepreneur Rami Zeidan, whose background had been in luxury and boutique hotels. The company initially developed proprietary software and systems to heavily utilize technology at all levels of hotel operations. It then branched out to owning properties or entering into management partnerships.

Bryan Dunn, head of growth at Life House, said his company has entered the Lenox market as part of an overall expansion in New England.

"With a growing list of unique independent hotels under management in top New England destinations from Nantucket to Martha’s Vineyard, Lenox was a natural target for the continued expansion of our portfolio," said Dunn in a release announcing the agreement with 388 Ventures. "We are thrilled to partner with 388 Ventures on this strategy and look forward to exploring opportunities to expand together throughout the Berkshires and beyond."

According to Lange, they have made preliminary improvements to the properties, such as a new porch and exterior paint at the Rookwood Inn, and will operate under their existing identities this tourist season. Then they will undertake further renovation and relaunch the inns next spring.

He added that at some point they will have shared branding as the Lenox Collection.

"They’ll keep their own current names, with one exception," he said. "Two of them have ‘wood’ in their names. We’ll probably change one of them to something else to avoid confusion."

With its purchase for $2.6 million, the Village Inn has been given a new identity as the Church Street Inn.

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Both upstairs apartments are rented. One commercial space is vacant and the other is home to The Grille, a local go-to bar in business for 40+ years that was closed due to COVID mandates.

The owner is now retiring and ready to sell. The Grille business is not included in the list price but is available for sale.

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**This summer everything’s out in the open for Shakespeare & Company**

BY JOHN TOWNES

Reflecting the current transitional status from the worst of the COVID pandemic to some degree of normalcy, this summer the show will go on at Shakespeare & Company—outdoors.

The theatrical performance, education and training organization is planning a season of six live productions from July through October. All summer performances will be outdoors until September, when Shakespeare & Company plans to reopen the Tina Packer Playhouse and return to indoor productions.

This has been made possible largely because of the completion of a new 543-seat outdoor venue, The New Spruce Theater, on the organization’s 33-acre campus at 70 Kimball St. in Lenox.

Other productions will be staged at the existing Roman Garden Theater, a 280-seat outdoor venue.

“Everything this summer will be outdoors,” said Allyn Burrows, the organization’s artistic director.

Last year, Shakespeare & Company (shakespeare.org) cancelled its live performances with the exception of online productions and outdoor drive-in movies in collaboration with the Berkshire International Film Festival. They also held a few outdoor staged readings in the fall.

This year, the pandemic is easing as vaccinations have become widely available. However, like other theatrical organizations, Shakespeare & Company had to find a way to balance plans to reopen this summer, while accounting for the continued uncertainty and changes in the status of the virus.

“When we were planning this season, we didn’t know what the situation with COVID would be or how our audiences would feel about going to a performance,” said Burrows. “We also did not know what the national COVID guidelines or state requirements would be.”

He said they came up with a strategy that would both allow for performances, while also addressing the continuing presence of COVID.

Initially, Burrows said, Shakespeare & Company had planned to limit seating to 50 percent of the capacity of the outdoor venue, to enable social distancing of six feet between seats, and to require masks.

That strategy was revised in response to an announcement by Gov. Charlie Baker on May 17 that most COVID restrictions on gatherings would be lifted or eased as of May 29 (rather than a previous target date of Aug. 1). They will continue to focus on outdoor performances this summer, with the re-opening of the Tina Packard planned for September. However, they have increased their seating capacity somewhat.

“Instead of the original six feet of social distancing between seats, we’ll have three feet,” Burrows explained. “As a result, rather than the original 50 percent of capacity, we’ll go to 65 percent.”

He added that masks will still be required when seated in performing areas, due to Actors’ Equity requirements. That requirement may be amended if the actor’s union changes those guidelines.

Patrons will be asked to follow a “COVID-19 Code of Conduct” that has been
drawn up by a Berkshire-based consortium of cultural organizations, regarding voluntary social distancing and other safety measures while attending performances (www.shakespeare.org/covid-19-public-safety).

The organization will also continue to follow protocols for cleaning and sanitation related to COVID.

**Terraced amphitheater**

Shakespeare & Company was founded in 1978 by Tina Packer. It was originally located at The Mount (the historic home of Edith Wharton) in Lenox before purchasing its present site in 2000. In addition to its live performances, Shakespeare & Company sponsors training programs for professional actors. It also offers educational programs in area schools, among other activities.

The New Spruce Theater is a terraced amphitheater that was completed in mid-June. It will host its first production with the July 9 premier of Shakespeare’s tragedy, King Lear, starring well-known television, film and stage actor Christopher Lloyd. (Preview performances begin July 2.)

The new facility is located near the center of the campus.

“We took down several old decrepit buildings to open up the space,” Burrows noted. The name reflects the setting, where a line of tall old spruce trees serves as a backdrop to the stage. “It’s a majestic space but is also intimate,” said Burrows.

The stage area is 900 square feet. This faces a U-shaped structure made of crushed stone, with tiered platforms with high-quality camp chairs placed on them.

“It’s similar to a Greek amphitheater,” said Burrows. “The rear row is 24 feet back from the front row. Each level of seats is slightly higher than the row before it, to allow for good visibility in all seats.”

The schedule this summer will be divided between the two outdoor stages. The New Spruce Theater will be the site of King Lear in July and August.

The Roman Garden Theater will present Becoming Othello: A Black Girl’s Journey, an autobiographical multimedia theatrical production by Debra Ann Byrd which will run from July 16-25. This will be followed by Art, a play by Yasmina Reza from July 30 to Aug. 22, and Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure, a workshop production from Sept. 1-5.

All productions at both venues will take place during the afternoon and early evening under natural lighting.

The performance schedule is being staggered between productions at the New Spruce Theater, which start at 5:30 p.m. (5 p.m. in August) and those at the Roman Garden Theater, which will start at 2 p.m.

Burrows noted that all outdoor performances are dependent on cooperative weather, as there are no plans to move indoors in the event of rain. He added that performances have not been scheduled for Sundays, which gives them an open day each week to reschedule any cancelled performances.

The Tina Packer Playhouse will reopen with I, a dark comedy by Debbie Tucker Green from Sept. 10 to Oct. 3, followed by The Chairs by Eugene Ionesco, Oct. 8-31.

**Progress on partnering**

Shortly before the pandemic, Shakespeare & Company had launched an initiative to recruit one or more partners to share its campus with compatible uses.

“Those kind of endeavors are naturally slow going,” he said, “But we’ve been in conversation with potential partners. We haven’t made any agreements yet, but we’re encouraged on where things are on that.”

Overall, Shakespeare & Company, which usually has a full-time year-round staff of 28 and a staff of 100 in the summer, weathered the pandemic as well as could be expected, said Burrows.

“We initially had to put staff on furlough, but we brought them back in the fall,” he said. “In general, we kept our head down, preserved our resources and pushed through. Our online productions and drive-in movies were very successful. And, fortunately, our supporters really came through with donations.”

**The New Spruce Theater gives Shakespeare & Company a second – and larger – outdoor theater for staging its performances this summer. Following preview performances of Shakespeare’s King Lear in early July, the new theater will mark its formal debut with the play’s July 9 opening. (Shakespeare & Company photo)**
Monterey museum keeps connected with series of historical essays

BY JOHN TOWNES

Like other museums, the Bidwell House in the southern Berkshire town of Monterey had to find innovative ways to adapt its operations and remain relevant during the closures and restricted capacity of in-person activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last spring, the board and staff of the museum decided not to open the main house for the 2020 season, and cancelled most events, including its popular Bidwell Country Fair that usually takes place in July.

Among other strategies, the organization launched an ambitious and in-depth series of free weekly articles and essays on the region’s history called Bidwell Lore. It has been sending these out as email newsletters to subscribers and others, and posting them for the public on its website (www.bidwellhouse museum.org) and Facebook Page (Bidwell House Museum).

“The Bidwell Lore series has been really successful, and we’ve gotten tremendous feedback about it,” said Heather Kowalski, executive director of the Bidwell House.

Now, with the removal of most restrictions, the museum plans to reopen the historic house for tours on a controlled basis beginning July 17 and to offer other activities at the site and online.

However, the museum decided again not to hold its annual country fair this year.

“It’s very popular, but with the uncertainties around the pandemic it would have been too difficult to plan and organize it in time,” Kowalski said.

As an alternative, they are planning to hold a Market Day later this summer, with live reenactments of life in the 18th and 19th centuries.

“We’re going to do worthwhile activities this year, although not as many as usual,” said Kowalski. “We hope to return to a full slate of programming next year.”

Nevertheless, despite the closure of the house to the public, the Bidwell House Museum property has been a popular destination during the pandemic.

The museum owns 192 acres which include terraced flower, vegetable and herb gardens. A majority of the property is comprised of woodlands, with four miles of trails and footpaths with historical landmarks along the way.

Before COVID, our grounds were always open to the public, and members of the community would regularly come for walks and hikes,” said Kowalski, who has served as executive director since 2017. “During the pandemic, although the house was closed, we decided to continue to keep the property open, with guidelines for social distancing. It’s an important community resource. We also placed more emphasis on outdoor informational displays and maps for self-guided tours.”

She added that visitors to the site actually increased during the pandemic.

“The number of outdoor visitors skyrocketed,” she said. “In part, I think that people wanted to get out of their houses and go to a natural setting that is safe and enjoyable. Between that and transition- ing to online programs, we remained busy.”

In a related response to the pandemic in the spring of 2020, former Bidwell intern Joe Makuc worked with gardener Ruth Green, intern Charlie Annecharico and other volunteers to expand the heritage vegetable garden to grow additional food for those in need in the Berkshires. About 85 pounds of produce were donated to the Great Barrington People’s Pantry and to Monterey’s Pantry Pickup.

Museum’s origins

The Bidwell House was built around 1760 by the Reverend Adonijah Bidwell, the first minister of Housatonic Township No. 1, which was the original designation of today’s Monterey and Tyringham. The Bidwell House was the site of the first meeting house, located at the crossroads of the Great Trail (the Boston-Albany Post Road) and Royal Hemlock Road.

The house and property stayed in the Bidwell family through three generations of Bidwell descendants, the last being the late Miss Ruth Bidwell-Coulter.

In 1960, the house was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Makuc who had bought the house in 1960, restored it to its original appearance, and furnished it to its 1784 death inventory as a guide.

The museum opened in 1990 due to the initiatives of Jack Hargis and David Brush, who had the house in 1960, restored it to its original appearance, and furnished it with 18th and early 19th century decorative arts, using Rev. Bidwell’s 1784 death inventory as a guide.

The museum is operated by an independent nonprofit organization, with a board, two staff members - Kowalski and administrator Erin Hunt – and a network of volunteers. The organization has a membership of about 150 paid supporters.

In addition to pre-sentering information about the Bidwell family and early history of the area, the museum is intended to preserve and depict the ways of life of early Berkshire residents and communities.

In recent years, it has also placed an increased emphasis on the history and heritage of the region’s indigenous Native American population, especially the branches of the Mohican Nation who lived or had hunting grounds here for 7,000 years. This has included displays and special exhibits, as well as trails and sites on the property of significance.

This is being done in coordination with a larger initiative to create a Native American Heritage Trail, in a partnership that includes the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area and a federally recognized Indian Nation called the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, based on a reservation in northern Wisconsin.

Sustained connection

Kowalski said being a relatively small organization has had advantages during the pandemic.

“We lost some income from tours and other activities,” she said. “But we didn’t have to deal with large-scale layoffs like some organizations did. And our members have been very supportive and continued to renew their memberships and provide help...
It recounts how in 1734, a Christian mis-
subsequent displacement from the region.
and establishment of missions, and their
relationships with white settlers and the
area's history. The initial posts, for example,
posts focusing on different aspects of the
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We've used their research and writings,
Kowalski. "I'm the editor of it and work with
and writing about the region's history," said
Stockbridge Police Chief Richard Wilcox,
writer. Two major contributors are former
April 2020.
helped it weather a year-long shutdown during the pandemic. In April 2020 she came up with the concept for Bidwell Lore, a series of weekly articles on the region's
history, as a way to stay connected with members and the community at large while the museum was closed to the public. (Photos courtesy of the Bidwell House)

Heather Kowalski, who has served as executive director of the Bidwell House since 2017, says the museum's modest size and strong support from its members
helped it weather a year-long shutdown during the pandemic. In April 2020 she came up with the concept for Bidwell Lore, a series of weekly articles on the region's
history, as a way to stay connected with members and the community at large while the museum was closed to the public. (Photos courtesy of the Bidwell House)
in other ways to keep us going. We also
received some funding from the [federal]
PPP programs."

Although they had to cancel in-person
events that generate income, they were able
to hold an online auction and a concert and
online lectures to raise funds.
The Bidwell Lore series was launched in
April 2020.  Kowalski serves as the editor and staff
writer. Two major contributors are former
Stockbridge Police Chief Richard Wilcox,
who is active in local history initiatives, and
Rob Hoops, chairman of Foresight Land
Services and president of the Bidwell House
Museum's board.

“They have both done extensive research
and writing about the region’s history,” said
Kowalski. “I’m in the editor of it and work with
them. We’ve used their research and writings,
as well as creating updated and new content.”
She noted that the overall series has been
organized thematically, with subsets of the
posts focusing on different aspects of the
area’s history. The initial posts, for example,
were centered on the Bidwell family and their role
in the area’s history.

Another series covered the early history
of the indigenous population, their relationships with white settlers and the
and establishment of missions, and their
subsequent displacement from the region.
It recounts how in 1734, a Christian mis-
sionary named John Sergeant came to live
with the Mohicans in their village of Wa-
ahlukuk, now part of Great Barrington. In 1738, the Mohicans gave him permission to
start a mission in the village, which became
Stockbridge. The Mohicans, as well as and
other Native people who relocated there
became known as the Stockbridge Indians,
and they became part of the fabric of the larger community.

However, under pressure of white
settlement, they moved to New York state.
Again due to displacement, they
moved to Wisconsin where they finally were al-
lowed to establish a permanent reservation.
The Stockbridge-Munsee are a federally
recognized Indian Nation and a vibrant
community based in Wisconsin. However,
they continue to consider this area a spiritual
home and they maintain a strong connec-
tion to it today.

A more recent series explores the early
days of Township One, and original plans
to establish a “City on the Hill.”

“The story of the Bidwell property seems like
a very rural site that is somewhat out of the
way,” said Kowalski. “But originally this
was planned to be the center of community
and commercial activity for Township One.”
She explained that geographic and other
factors prevented that, and as a result, the
area was eventually separated into the towns of Tyringham and Monterey, which had their own town
centers.

The current series of Bidwell Lore
articles is recounting that aspect of its history.
New and previous issues of Bidwell Lore
are available on the museum’s website and
Facebook page.

Pandemic-driven improvements
Despite the obvious challenges and dif-
ficulties of operating during the pandemic, Kowalski said it push the organization
into making improvements in its operations and programs.

“We looked for silver linings,” said
Kowalski. “It forced us into actions such as
expanding online and figuring out the best
way to make use of volunteers.”

It also has led to new practices, including
how the house is open to the public.

“Before, a lot of people would just drop in
to take tours of the house,” she explained.
“In some ways that was fine. However, it made
it more difficult to organize the tours and
volunteer schedules, and it would fluctuate
between having too many people and a very
small number.”

In planning this year’s reopening, they
set up a different policy to adapt to the still-
existing conditions regarding COVID. While
some walk-in visitors will still be accepted,
the emphasis is on appointment-only tours
which people will book in advance. The
house will be open on Mondays, Thursdays,
Fridays and Saturdays.

“Although we designed that for social
distancing, we will probably do it on a per-
manent basis,” Kowalski said. “It allows us
to structure the tour schedule to be more
efficient. We will also be able to predict and
control the number of people in the tours
to provide a better experience for visitors.
They have also made other changes that
will likely become permanent.

Kowalski explained that previously they
held a regular lecture series at a local church.
During the pandemic they transitioned to
online lectures and presentations. This also
required a change in venue because the church
did not have sufficient access to the Internet.

“We presented them on Zoom from here,” she said. “It actually worked out well because
more people could attend from anywhere.
For example, we heard from a number of
descendants of the Bidwell family who live
elsewhere, and they were thrilled to be able
to attend the programs remotely.”

She said they expect to continue to hold
lectures at the museum with small in-person
audiences that are also accessible online.

Kowalski said they are still planning and
developing their event schedule, including
guided hikes, lectures and other activities.
Updates will be available on their Facebook
group and website.

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Hello Friends,
Welcome to Bidwell Lore! This week we are going to jump right into the story of
Adinah Bidwell. Do you know the story of Akhtukuk, now part of Great Barrington?
In 1734, a Christian missionary named John Sergeant came to live with the Mohicans in
their village of Waahlukuk, now part of Great Barrington. In 1738, the Mohicans gave
him permission to start a mission in the village, which became Stockbridge. The
Mohicans, as well as and other Native people who relocated there
became known as the Stockbridge Indians, and they became part of the fabric of the
larger community.
However, under pressure of white settlement, they moved to New York state.
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Monterey, which had their own town
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Next Issue: August 2021 • Ad Deadline: July 16 • Print Date: July 22
## Berkshire Trade & Commerce

**July 2021**

**Property Transfers**

### Berkshire County real estate transfers

- **DALTON**
  - Date: 4/17/21
  - Seller: Alice F. H. of the Town of Dalton
  - Buyer: Bradford A. Wheeler
  - Address: 357 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/17/21

### GREAT BARRINGTON

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/15/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Cynthia D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/15/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/16/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Carolyn D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/16/21

### HANCOCK

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/17/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Cynthia D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/17/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/18/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Carolyn D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/18/21

### TULLAMORE

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/19/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Cynthia D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/19/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/20/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Carolyn D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/20/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/21/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Cynthia D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/21/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/22/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Carolyn D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/22/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/23/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Cynthia D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/23/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/24/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Carolyn D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/24/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/25/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Cynthia D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/25/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/26/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Carolyn D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/26/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/27/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Cynthia D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/27/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/28/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Carolyn D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/28/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/29/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Cynthia D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/29/21

- **Hampshire**
  - Date: 4/30/21
  - Seller: Rodman J. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Buyer: Carolyn D. of the Town of Great Barrington
  - Address: 281 North Street
  - Price: $320,000
  - Date of Sale: 4/30/21

### BERKSHIRE MONEY MANAGEMENT

We are thanking the stars, one by one. We love you, Berkshire County!
225 Bailey Rd.

Price: $361,000

Seller: Michael Stamm +

Date: 4/16/21

Buyer: Berkshire Properties

Date: 4/30/21

Price: $160,000

Seller: Ryan McCormick +

Date: 4/12/21

Buyer: Andrew Carss-

121 Fox Run

Lender: US Bank NA

Price: $850,000

Seller: Obrien Marguerite Est +

Date: 4/21/21

Buyer: Michael Elrod +

Date: 4/27/21

Seller: Karen Wollowick

Buyer: Arthur Buchman +

Date: 4/28/21

Seller: Joyce Digrigoli

Lender: Quicken Loan

Mortgage: $1,000,000

Date: 4/28/21

Mortgage: $556,000

Buyer: Susan & Douglas

894 Cross Road to Canaan

Lender: Wells Fargo

Price: $629,000

Seller: Danna Wichman

Mortgage: $175,757

Date: 4/9/21

Buyer: Julia Maeve-Phykitt

201 Mallery Rd.

Lender: Key Bank

Price: $197,500

Buyer: Kimetha Calhoun +

185 Benedict Rd.

Lender: Adams Community

Price: $136,800

Seller: Rita Kaplan RET +

Date: 4/5/21

Buyer: Martin Brunk +

Hupi Woods Cir.

Lender: Adams Community

Price: $150,000

Seller: Jay Mcdermott

84 3rd St.

Lender: Seller

Price: $155,000

Seller: Francoise McCoy

157 Churchill St.

Lender: Berkshire Bank

Price: $150,000

Seller: Robert Peloquin Jr +

Buyer: Tony Henriquez

82 Jubilee Ter.

Lender: Adams Community

Price: $85,000

Seller: Paula Lewis +

385 Notch Rd.

Lender: Adams Community

Price: $142,000

Seller: Deborah Gallese +

Date: 4/30/21

Buyer: Joshua Serre

Date: 4/2/21

Price: $135,000

Seller: R Naomi Remen LT +

Buyer: Martin Brunk +

Hupi Woods Cir.

Lender: Adams Community

Price: $150,000

Seller: Jay Mcdermott

84 3rd St.

Lender: Seller

Price: $155,000

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Seller: Deborah Gallese +

Date: 4/30/21

Buyer: Joshua Serre

Date: 4/2/21

Price: $135,000

Seller: R Naomi Remen LT +

Buyer: Martin Brunk +

Hupi Woods Cir.

Lender: Adams Community

Price: $150,000

Seller: Jay Mcdermott

84 3rd St.

Lender: Seller

Price: $155,000

Seller: Francoise McCoy

157 Churchill St.

Lender: Berkshire Bank

Price: $150,000

Seller: Robert Peloquin Jr +

Buyer: Tony Henriquez

82 Jubilee Ter.

Lender: Adams Community

Price: $85,000

Seller: Paula Lewis +

385 Notch Rd.

Lender: Adams Community

Price: $142,000

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Lender: Berkshire Bank

Price: $150,000

Seller: Robert Peloquin Jr +

Buyer: Tony Henriquez

82 Jubilee Ter.
Buyer: Roberta Banroom
Seller: Mitchell Lamont
Price: $158,000
Block LLC
Date: 4/2/21

137 Stearn Ave.
Buyer: Michael Gazdik +
Seller: Mark Podemski
Montage: $72,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 4/16/21

20 Walker Ave.
Buyer: Andre Wicks-Pink
Seller: Godfrey Properties
Price: $190,000
Montage: $45,000
Date: 4/2/21

Lender: City Federal

22 Wilburton St.
Buyer: Campos Real Estate LLC
Seller: B&J schools
Date: 4/8/21

Price: $34,000

Buyer: Freeman Berkshire
Seller: Langbaum-Hunter +
Price: $445,000

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Completion of $17.8 million project also marks leadership change at Berkshire Housing

BY JOHN TOWNES

The upcoming completion and occupancy of the long-awaited redevelopment of the former Photec mill complex in Williamstown also marks the final major project for Elton Ogden, former director of the Berkshire Housing Development Corp. (BHDC) and Berkshire Housing Services Inc. (BHSI).

The residential rental project, named 330 Cole Apartments for its street address on Cole Avenue, includes three new townhouse buildings with 19 units, and 22 units in the renovated existing mill structure. The complex is oriented to providing affordable housing for those who earn less than 60 percent of median local incomes. The new apartments are slated to be ready for occupancy by late August or early September.

Ogden, who has served as president and CEO of BHDC and BHSI since 2006, retired from those positions and was succeeded on April 26 by Eileen Peltier.

"This project will be part of Elton's legacy," said Peltier. "It's a great example of what an organization like BHDC can do, by taking on a complex and challenging project to create much-needed affordable housing for the community."

BHDC is a private nonprofit organization that serves all of Berkshire County. Founded in 1971, it has focused on creating affordable housing, providing housing services and programs, and helping communities access and administer community development projects.

"We were interested in the Photec site for many reasons," said Ogden. "Affordable housing has been identified as a critical need in Williamstown for many years, There are a substantial number of families in the town that can't afford to live there."

Photec Imaging Systems, the final occupant, Photec Imaging Systems, is slated to be ready for occupancy by late August or early September.

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Ogden noted that the 330 Cole development project was possible to move forward when a financing package was finally arranged for the $17.8 million development project. "It's very challenging to put the financing in place for a project like this," he said.

Major funding sources included $9 million in federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits. Another $4.1 million came from the state’s Department of Housing and Community Development. MountainOne Bank provided a $2.6 million reduced-interest mortgage. The project also received various other smaller loans and grants, including $200,000 that the town contributed from the Williamstown Community Preservation Fund.

The funding package covers the $13.3 million cost of construction, $960,000 for architectural and engineering services, $250,000 for capitalized reserves and $3.2 million in other general development costs.

Prior experience in town

Ogden noted that the 330 Cole development project was made possible because of another nearby project, Highland Woods, a 40-unit affordable housing development for seniors at 140 Church St. that was completed in 2016.

The complex, which abuts the Hoosic River, was designed to handle any potential flooding issues. The complex includes six one-bedroom, 23 two-bedroom and 12 three-bedroom units averaging 740, 865 and 1,085 square feet respectively.

Of those, 13 units are designated for people earning less than 30 percent of median local incomes. The remaining 57 units are based on size of units. The two-bedroom units are based on size of units. The two-bedroom units are designated for people earning less than 60 percent of median local incomes.

All of the units are earmarked for residents earning less than 60 percent of median local incomes.

Rents are based on federal guidelines and are based on size of units. The two-bedroom units are designated for people earning less than 60 percent of median local incomes.
units range from $1,150 to $1,300 monthly, and three-bedrooms are approximately $1,400.

Ogden said there has been strong demand, and the number of applicants has exceeded the units available. The initial tenants will be selected by lottery. The deadline for applications for the lottery has passed, but applications are being accepted on an ongoing basis for future openings that occur.

**Planned transition**

The 330 Cole project is just one of many that Ogden has overseen during his tenure at BHDC. BHDC oversees 25 properties with over 800 units comprised of rental communities, condominiums and commercial properties.

Ogden joined BHDC in 1986 and remained on the staff until 2002 when he left the organization. He returned in 2006 as the successor to former CEO Peter Lafayette, who left to take a position as executive director of the Berkshire Bank Foundation. Ogden said that he is staying on at BHDC after several months to assist with the transition.

"After that I’m not sure what I’ll do next," he said. "All I know is that I plan to take some time off to relax." Ogden said he began preparing to retire from his position several years ago.

"I’ve been doing this for about two decades, and working six or seven days a week," he said. "I loved the job but knew it was time to look ahead, and I started talking with the board to develop a transition plan." Apart from his own feeling that it was time to move on, Ogden also recognized that a transition at the top could also benefit BHDC. "We’ve had stability as an organization, but I believe a change in leadership is good to bring in new ideas and re-energize an organization," he said.

He added that the original plan had been for the transition to occur in 2020, but it was postponed until this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ogden said that he is staying on at BHDC for several months to assist with the transition.

"I'm interested in ways to support residents beyond providing four walls and a roof," she said, "but it’s also important to connect with community partners to provide a range of services." Another priority is finding ways for the organization to increase efficiency of its operations.

"People in organizations like BHDC are passionate about what they do, and work very hard," Peltier said. "But it’s also important to maintain a work-life balance. I believe that if we can operate as efficiently as possible, it allows people to have more personal time to achieve that balance."
The Pittsfield Cooperative Bank is ready to give the Berkshires a $50M boost

If you need a loan, the Pittsfield Cooperative Bank has $50 million to lend. Whether you're looking to refinance or buy your first home, or expand, start, or solidify your business in the wake of the pandemic, a loan is just a quick conversation and some paperwork away.

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Vice President | Commercial Banking
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Commercial Loan Administrative Officer
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Congratulations, Joel!

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Joel C. Scussel
Vice President | Commercial Lending
effective July 26.

We thank Joel for his dedication.