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TAKING THE LONG VIEW

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

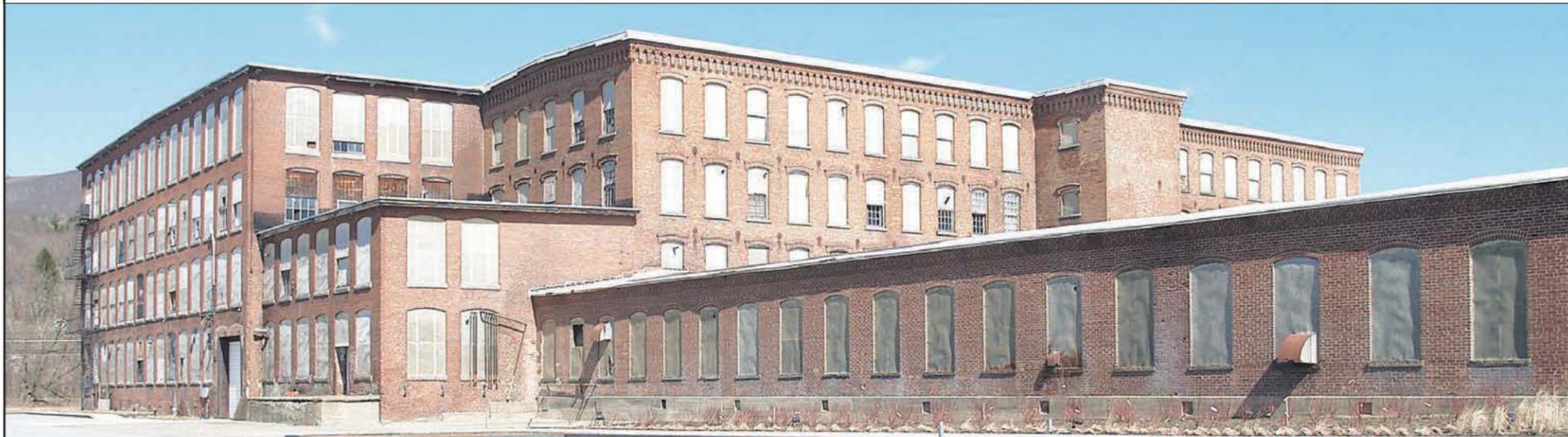
BY JOHN TOWNES

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

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

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

continued on page 17



ABOVE: Karla Rothstein and Salvatore Perry show off the panoramic views from the roof of the Greylock WORKS complex in North Adams. Their multi-year conversion of the former mill into a mix of commercial, event and residential spaces is moving forward in phases. While the COVID-19 crisis has affected some existing operations, such as the scheduling of events in the completed Weave Shed section, other aspects are moving forward. This includes preliminary work on residential units in the four-story western-most building (bottom photo) and finishing touches on a new restaurant, The Break Room, that is expected to open on a limited basis this summer.

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FRONT pages

Safety procedures become child's play at care center

BY JOHN TOWNES

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

That is one reason schools and childcare facilities were among the first activities to be closed when the novel coronavirus emerged.

However, during the emergency order not all parents have been able to stay home during the day or make alternative arrangements for their children to be cared for by family or close friends.

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

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

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

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

Among its regular services are childcare



Children at the Emergency Childcare Center operated by 18 Degrees receive age-appropriate guidance on social distancing with these box shapes taped on the floor at six-foot intervals. The center provides care for children of essential workers who have no other care options available. (Photo provided by 18 Degrees)

programs for infants to pre-school. It also offers after-school care at Conte and Morningside schools, and summer camps.

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

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

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

Sullivan said the program has the capacity to serve up to 20 children. "We've been adding spaces gradually," she said in early May. "We started at for to six children. Now we are between 11 and 15."

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

They have set up a variety of safety procedures for the childcare operations. The staff wear masks and wash their hands frequently.

They also take extra measures to keep the site clean. Sullivan noted that they changed the location from the regular carpeted daycare center to a room without carpets.

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

They also make an extra effort to balance the natural inclinations of children to mingle with the need for safety.

"It's not easy to keep kids apart, so teachers are making sure hand washing and sanitizing are built into the schedule and done when needed," said Sullivan.

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

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

"Normally, parents would bring their children inside and check in with the staff," Sullivan said. "Now, they pull up and stay in their car. Someone from the staff goes out to the car to greet the kids and check them in. They also take their temperature before bringing them into the center. We also give them a mask."

Lessons and guidance on social distancing are also given. This includes taping squares on the floor that are six feet apart to demonstrate the distance children should keep from each other.

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

"We talk to the kids and explain why we're doing these things, and how they help to keep everyone safe."

When the weather permits, the staff take the children outside.

"They can't go on the playground equipment, but we have activities that allow them

to enjoy the outdoors while social distancing," Sullivan said.

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

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

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

As examples, she cited meals provided for the children by the Pittsfield Public Schools.

"Also Mill Town Capital has been arranging for meals to be provided for the teaching staff to take home, so they can have a dinner that's ready to eat at the end of the demanding day," said Sullivan.

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

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

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

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news & notes from the region

Barrington Stage plans for limited live performances

BY JOHN TOWNES

Barrington Stage Company (BSC) has decided to follow the familiar adage “the show must go on” while also adhering to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like all Berkshire performing arts organizations, BSC was busy in March preparing for the upcoming summer season when they had to drastically change their plans with the emergence of the coronavirus crisis. Their initial action was to cancel the first production of the season, *The Great Leap*, while keeping their options open for later shows to evaluate the overall situation.

In late April, BSC announced that it would postpone all of this season’s planned Boyd-Quinson Mainstage productions until 2021, with the exception of Arthur Miller’s *The Price*, which is scheduled for Oct. 1-18. Its smaller St. Germain Theatre and Mr. Finn’s Cabaret in the nearby Sydelle and Lee Blatt Performing Arts Center on Linden Street will also be closed for the season.

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

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

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

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

She emphasized that they will only proceed if circumstances are appropriate at the time of the performances.

“We’ll only do what is safe and what federal and state guidelines allow,” she said. “We’ll be keeping close track of the overall situation. If it hasn’t improved, or if there’s a second wave, we will go by any measures that are required then.”

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

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

The productions will include a critically acclaimed off-Broadway one-person thriller, *Harry Clarke*, by David Cale, starring BSC Associate Artist Mark Dold from Aug. 5-16. On Sept. 5, the Mainstage will host a reading of *Eleanor*, a new one-woman play about the life of Eleanor Roosevelt by BSC Associate Artist Mark St. Germain, starring Tony Award-winner Harriet Harris.

The Mainstage will also host BSC’s Monday Night Concert Series, featuring jazz and cabaret singer Marilyn Maye on Aug. 24 and singer/songwriter Ann Hampton Callaway performing *The Linda Ronstadt Songbook* with Billy Stritch at the piano on Aug. 31.

Also, from Sept. 10-20, BSC is planning a return engagement of its 10x10 New Play Festival adapted for social distancing. This is an evening of 10-minute plays by 10 authors that originally played this past winter as part of Pittsfield’s annual Upstreet Arts Festival.

In addition, BSC is also planning *South Pacific: In Concert* (Aug. 21-23) at an outdoor venue in Pittsfield to be announced. BSC’s current season had originally been slated to include a full production of the classic Rod-

gers and Hammerstein musical, but that is one of the shows that has been rescheduled until next year.

This year’s show is a concert-style performance and will employ social distancing practices outside.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The theater will also be deep cleaned after every performance.

“It’s going to be different from what people are used to,” said Boyd. “But it’s clear once people get the hang of it. This is going to be the new normal until a vaccine is developed.”

Pricing for the 2020 summer season is \$35 to \$65 for the Mainstage and outdoor

venue productions and concerts. Tickets for the fall productions of the 10x10 New Play Festival and *The Price* are \$35 to \$49. Preview performance tickets for all shows are \$25 to \$35. (Single tickets can be purchased by calling 413-236-8888 or emailing boxoffice@barringtonstageco.org.)

In a normal year, BSC (barringtonstageco.org) attracts over 60,000 patrons. This year, while audiences and ticket sales will be markedly smaller, production costs will also be lower. “We just hope this season will break even,” Boyd said regarding revenue expectations for 2020. “To get to next season we’re going to have to raise a significant amount of money to make up for this year.”

In addition to *South Pacific*, other shows that have been postponed until 2021 include Richard Greenberg’s *The Assembled Parties*; *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, directed and choreographed by Camille Brown; Lauren Yee’s *The Great Leap*; Nilo Cruz’s *Anna in the Tropics*; Joseph Dougherty’s *Chester Bailey*; the world premiere musical, *A Crossing*, co-conceived by Joshua Bergasse and Mark St. Germain; and the Youth Theatre’s world premiere musical, *The Supadupa Kid*. ♦

“We knew we couldn’t do our regular season, but we decided it would be really sad if nothing is offered in Berkshire County this year. People need something to look forward to and enjoy.”



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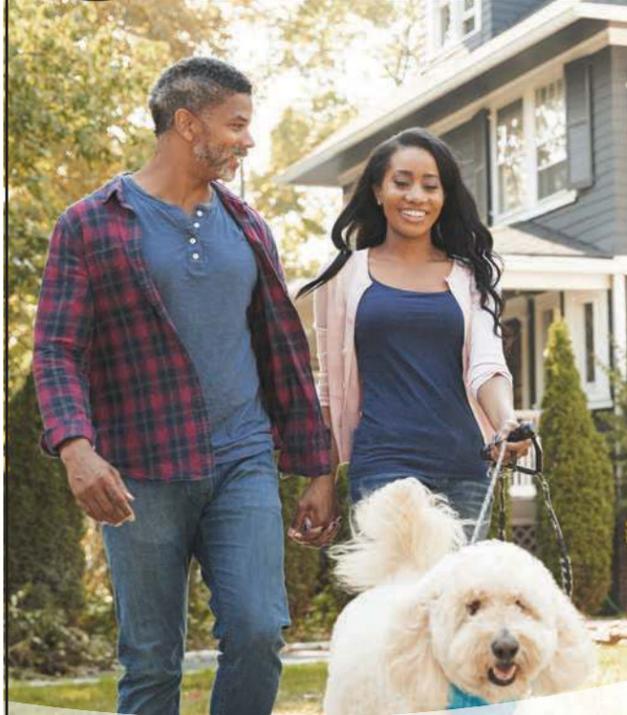
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FRONT pages

PAYCHECK PROTECTION

Challenges ahead in 'forgiveness' phase of federal program

BY BRAD JOHNSON

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

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

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

"I'm scared to death about this," said Anderson in an early May interview as round two of PPP lending was in progress.

Since its debut in early April, the PPP has



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

provided a lifeline to hundreds of Berkshire County businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and has helped them to keep thousands of employees on the payroll.

Many of those businesses have applied for the program through the Pittsfield Cooperative Bank, where Anderson joined members

of the bank's commercial lending team to handle the wave of business customers looking to participate in the PPP.

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

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

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

Anderson said the initial crush of applications in early April reflected the unprecedented impact that the pandemic was having on local, state and national economies. "No one has ever seen anything like this," he commented.

He added, however, that demand for PPP loans was driven primarily by the "forgivable" nature of these loans when they are used for their intended purpose.

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

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That 75-percent payroll threshold includes not just wages, but also amounts paid by employers toward health insurance, retirement plans and other qualified benefits. The other 25-percent-or-less portion of PPP funds could be used toward specified business expenses such as rent, utilities, and interest on existing commercial loans.

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

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

He attributed this to the PPP's hurried launch and the unprecedented volume of lending done through the program's first weeks. "Just think about it," he said. "The SBA processed \$30 billion in loans in 2019 total, but has done \$350 billion in these past few weeks. That's more than 10 times what they did for all of last year."

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

"We're generally seeing a lessening of applications," he said. "I think we're getting to the end of the program from a demand standpoint, at least here in Berkshire County."

Next big question

Anderson pointed out, however, that the application for – and receipt and utilization of – a PPP loan is just the first stage in a process that promises to bring new waves of chaos, uncertainty and unpleasant surprises in the months ahead.

Just as Anderson's team – and those at other banks in the Berkshires and throughout the nation – were inundated by initial demand from customers for PPP loans, they are also likely to be swamped again when the two-month window for using PPP funds ends and the forgiveness-or-repayment process begins.

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

For the very first PPP loans that closed and had funds disbursed, that transition will be coming up by late June or early July. Anderson noted, however, that there currently is no guidance from the SBA or Treasury about how individual banks such as his are to handle the process of determining forgiveness on these loans.

"As of today, there is no guidance on how these are forgiven," he said. "We're all trying to figure it out."

These concerns about the lack of guidance on forgiveness are also starting to register on some of the businesses who have received PPP loans.

"Everybody knows and is concerned about the government debt forgiveness portion," Anderson said. "We are getting a lot of questions about that, and we're providing whatever feedback we can. We've been trying to advise folks to do their due diligence and make sure they use [the funds] for the intended purpose."

For some businesses, using the funds for their intended purpose is proving more dif-

ficult than they envisioned. Anderson noted that many businesses that are closed due to the statewide shutdown order have found themselves in the position of using PPP funds to pay their employees not to work.

In some cases, he pointed out, this may make sense. "The majority of business owners want to do right by their employees, and there may be a core group of employees they don't want to lose," he said.

However, in other cases, business owners are finding it difficult to get employees who had already been laid off to return to the payroll during the PPP period.

"The number one complaint we're hearing from our small business customers is that they have people not wanting to come back," said Anderson.

This is due, in large part, to a separate feature of the CARES Act that temporarily provides an additional \$600 weekly payment on top of state-disbursed unemployment benefits for most laid-off workers. This has resulted in many unemployed individuals making more while being laid off than when they were working.

Anderson noted that, by law, laid-off workers who decline an offer to return to their jobs are subject to loss of future unemployment benefits. "But some employers are not wanting to report [the employees] under these circumstances," he added. "It's creating a lot of frustration for them."

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

"Telling customers that they don't qualify for forgiveness is not something I look forward to doing," he said.

For those required to pay back the loans, there will be a six-month grace period before payments begin. They then have 18 months to pay off the loan in full.

Even if the current period of economic upheaval improves, many businesses may still find it difficult if not impossible to handle

those payments. "Economic activity is going to lag for an extended period of time," said Anderson. "What are businesses and consumers willing to do when things are opened up? There is just no way of knowing what things are going to look like in the months ahead."

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

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

In what has been a fast-moving situation since the COVID-19 crisis fully registered on local, state and national levels, Anderson said it is not surprising that efforts such as the CARES Act and PPP to respond to the crisis have been hastily drafted and clumsily enacted. "We're driving a car while building it," he said. "It's crazy."

continued on page 7



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FRONT pages

City rolls out \$1.1 million COVID recovery program

BY JOHN TOWNES

The city of Pittsfield is moving forward on the first phase of a \$1.1 million package of local and federal funding that was proposed by Mayor Linda Tyer on April 17 to support residents, small businesses, community organizations, and cultural institutions impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

"I have designed a robust economic recovery program that will help to meet some of the critical financial needs in our city brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic," said Tyer in announcing the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Program.

On April 28, the Pittsfield City Council formally approved \$789,382 in funding allocated to the city from the federal CARES Act, which will be administered through Pittsfield's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

The total \$1.1 million proposal for Tyer's COVID-19 Economic Recovery Program also includes \$110,000 from the city's Community Preservation Act funds to provide rental assistance for those economically impacted by the pandemic. Another \$200,000 will come from the city's Small Business Fund to help small businesses with cash flow.

"We're being inundated with calls for assistance."

The CDBG funds will be used to support the work of community service agencies to enable them to respond to the additional demands of the pandemic.

"The CARE Act requires that the fund be used for eligible public and social service grants to deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Justine Dodd, the city's community development program manager.

Dodd noted that those funds are allocated through the standard block grant process, which includes applications, review, and public input. She said that initial process would require at least two weeks.

Agencies that provide eligible services will apply for funds. In announcing the overall program, Tyer pledged support of new and existing services during the crisis to the Elizabeth Freeman Center, UCP of Western Massachusetts, Elder Services food programs, and ServiceNet services to the homeless.

Additional public service funds will be available through a rolling application process to help meet urgent needs as they arise.

In addition, Tyer's proposal will provide money to eligible homeowners and renters for up to three months or a maximum of \$5,000 per household to pay a mortgage, rent or utilities. That will be administered by the Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority.

Grants of up to \$10,000 are slated to be offered to Pittsfield's small businesses that are in jeopardy of significant losses and even closures. These funds will help small businesses in the city retain and rehire employees, and modify their operations to remain viable.

Grants will also be available to cultural institutions for job retention, creation, and programming.

"Cultural institutions are essential to Pittsfield's economy and to our sense of well-being. They have been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and I am proposing funds to help these creative cultural organizations reopen and re-establish their presence and programming in our city," Tyer said.

The specific details and processes for applications will be announced as the funds become available.

Dodd said that there is a clear need for this support in the city. "We're being inundated with calls for assistance," she said. "We intend to be responsive and put the funds to use as rapidly as possible." ♦

BUSINESS

Update

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Williamstown Farmers Market (WFM)** will be operating an e-commerce market for pre-ordered items. The new initiative, Williamstown Farmers Market - Essentials (WFM-E), will offer contact-free ordering and payment via its website (www.wfmessentials.org), a central pickup location, and delivery within a seven-mile radius (reserved for those who are unable to access transportation). The webstore offers items from a dozen local farms and food producers. Orders can be placed and paid for weekly from Monday to Wednesday. Pickups are on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Williamstown Elementary School. For more information, follow the WFM-E blog at williamstownfarmersmarket.org or the Williamstown Farmers Market Facebook page. (See page 22 for a story about virtual farmers markets in Pittsfield and North Adams.)

MCLA's **Berkshire Cultural Resource Center (BCRC)** is presenting a full season of virtual programming this spring and summer, with a visiting artist, a virtual senior art exhibition, portfolio reviews for local artists, a virtual Downtown Art kickoff, and more. The majority of the BCRC's virtual season is open to the public, and is designed to create art and culture experiences in a time of social distancing. Community members can view the BCRC's program listing at www.mcla.edu/BCRC. Listings will continue to be updated through the season.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) has announced the Trailblazers Keep Going Initiative, which will deploy the first tranche of the college's federal CARES Act funding allocation to directly aid students in need. Under the CARES Act, which provides nearly \$14 billion to support postsecondary education students and institutions nationally, MCLA will receive \$1.3 million in funding. Colleges and universities are required to utilize the first tranche of this funding—around \$650,000 to MCLA specifically—to assist students experiencing financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A large portion of this funding will be distributed through the MCLA Resiliency Fund, which was set up in March by the **MCLA Foundation** and has since distributed nearly \$30,000 in private money to help ease the immediate needs for more than 75 MCLA students who are struggling with financial hardships due to COVID-19. Additional dollars will be added to the Resiliency Fund in order to meet the needs of as many students experiencing economic hardship as possible. Students can apply for funding to cover rent payments, food, internet expenses, course materials such as laptops, and even the cost of a summer course to help stay on track due to the transition to remote learning (MCLA's first summer session begins May 26 and will take place remotely). In April, MCLA reimbursed resident students for partial housing, meal plan and parking costs due to COVID-19 moving the campus to remote instruction for the semester as of March 30. The total of those reimbursements was \$1.5 million. Colleges and universities are not permitted to replenish these refund expenses with CARES Act funding.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Bidwell House Museum** has announced the decision to not open for guided tours of the house in 2020. The May 5 announcement noted that staff and trustees of the Monterey historical attraction "feel that leading groups through the confined spaces of the house, even later this summer, may not be safe or comfortable for our visitors." In addition, the museum decided to cancel other upcoming public events, including the Bidwell Country Fair that was to take place on July 12. "The Bidwell House Museum will continue to monitor the situation in Berkshire County and around the world, and we will make a decision at a later date about other events and programs scheduled for August and September," the announcement noted. "If the situation allows, the museum may consider tours by appointment later in the year." In the meantime, the museum's staff is working remotely on new programming and lectures that can be experienced online at bidwellhousemuseum.org.

The **Pittsfield Council on Aging (COA)** has reactivated its Brown Bag Grocery Program, with a new delivery and distribution service. The new program, which reflects an existing partnership with the **Western Massachusetts Food Bank**, went into effect on April 24 and now provides seniors with groceries via a curbside pickup system at the Ralph J. Froio Senior Center and van delivery service. "We are delighted to restart our monthly Brown Bag program with a new and safer distribution process," said Theresa Bianchi, president of the COA. "With these new options, we are ensuring that our city's seniors have enough nutritious food for themselves and their families." Eligibility for the program is based on the food bank's criteria for seniors, income level and government benefits. Those interested in participating in the Brown Bag program should call the senior center for registration guidelines at 413-499-9346 weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. The COA still provides daily "meals-to-go" packaged lunches for those who have previously registered with **Elder Services** and **Meals on Wheels**. For more information on the meals-to-go resource, call the senior center at 413-499-9346 or Elder Services at 413-499-0524.

Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health has announced the launch of an on-demand video subscription membership and mobile app, Kripalu Connect. The service, which launched on May 6, is designed to bring the Kripalu retreat experience home during and beyond the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. "For over 40 years, Kripalu has become a second home and place of healing for all who visit," said Barbara Vacarr, CEO of Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health. "As this pandemic took hold, we knew we had to react quickly and create something revolutionary that would allow us to bring Kripalu's mission directly into the homes of anyone who may benefit from it." The service is initially available via web browser at kripalu.org, with the app to become available on iOS, Android, Apple TV, Roku and Amazon Fire this summer. New videos will be available monthly, with content that includes practices for all experience levels of yoga, Ayurveda, meditation and breathwork, and cooking and nutrition. Membership to Kripalu Connect is \$20 per month (or \$199.99 per year), with an initial week-long free trial period.

Berkshire South Regional Community Center has launched Nourishing Neighbors, a new supplemental community meal program, which is distributing 500 restaurant-prepared cold to-go meals each Wednesday from 1 to 3 p.m. through June 17. Meal recipients drive up to a non-contact distribution system in the circle of the front lot at the community center. Home-bound community members may make a reservation for delivery by emailing meals@berkshiresouth.org. Delivery will be available as long as the center has volunteer drivers to deliver. All meals will be available on a first-come, first-serve basis. The program is funded in large part by the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County, administered by **Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation** and the **Berkshire United Way**, which provides flexible resources to 501c3 organizations in the region working with communities who are disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus and the economic consequences of this outbreak (May 2020 BT&C). Community members who wish to donate to support Nourishing Neighbors should visit berkshiresouth.org. All funds raised will be used to purchase food and supplies for the program.

Big Y World Class Market (Big Y) has implemented a price freeze on more than 10,000 items, with more items expected to be added to the freeze list over time. "This is a critical time for our customers and we wanted to recognize that with more than just words of support," said Michael D'Amour, chief operating officer for Springfield-based Big Y, which has four stores in Berkshire County. "We have all been through a tough period, and there are certainly challenges ahead, but we felt it was time to do more to help." He noted that some freeze list prices may actually go down during this period, but none would go up, and Big Y's popular sales will continue. "We are going to do more," said D'Amour. "Our customers are like family to us and we want to help them and the communities we serve."

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news & notes from the region

The **Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire** (CDCSB) has been awarded \$150,000 in 2020 Community Investment Tax Credits (CITC), a Massachusetts program that offers a 50-percent state tax credit for charitable gifts of \$1,000 or more. The credits are available to individuals, nonprofit organizations, foundations and businesses. If the donor does not have a tax liability, the credit is refundable. Additionally, where applicable, donors may claim a federal charitable gift tax deduction. "At a time when providing our essential services is more important than ever, this is a remarkable opportunity to double the impact of your giving, creating affordable homes and living-wage jobs for low- and moderate-income families," said Tim Geller, executive director of the CDCSB, a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating job opportunities, promoting economic development, and building low-moderate income housing in the southern Berkshires.

Wayne Gelinis and Lea King, owners of the **Wigwam Western Summit** in North Adams, have launched the Wigwam Community Meals Program to help those in the community who may be experiencing hunger for the first time due to the COVID-19 crisis. "Our wish is to provide some relief, joy and feed the community – addressing concerns about families not having enough funds for food," said Lea King. The program provides the free to-go meals on Sundays, with more than 130 people receiving meals during the program's first month in April. The Wigwam accepts donations from those who would like to support the program. The community meals program is one aspect of the Wigwam's response to the COVID-19 crisis. Gelinis and King originally expected to open shop at the beginning of April after a long winter season off, but found it necessary to adapt to a new economic climate. The rental cabins, adjacent to the shop, were booked up for MCLA and Williams College graduations, weddings, and MASS MoCA events throughout the summer. The Wigwam has had to cancel and refund those reservations due to the pandemic. "The closure is destroying us from a financial perspective," King said. "I feel like I'm serving the community and I want to continue to do this." The store has also shifted what to sell. With the doors closed under the state emergency order, the Wigwam has been accepting online sales through its website (wigwamwesternsummit.com) and has added hard-to-find items such as hand sanitizer, toilet paper, masks and gloves to the inventory.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) has announced that its new health sciences bachelor's degree with a concentration in radiologic technology is now accepting students for the fall 2020 semester. The program has been approved through the MCLA governance process and the Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology, and students completing the degree are eligible to sit for the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT) Radiography examination. In fall 2019, MCLA became the official teach-out partner for the radiologic sciences program of Southern Vermont College (SVC) following its closure (*January 2020 BT&C*). MCLA partnered with **Berkshire Health Systems** and its North Adams Berkshire Medical Center Campus to ensure that students in the program were able to complete their degrees without interruption. MCLA now offers one of only five accredited programs in the Northeast in a field that demonstrates 100-percent job placement. MCLA will also be able to provide students in health sciences and radiologic technology programs with the most up-to-date equipment to prepare them for careers in radiology through a \$421,546 Skills Capital Grant awarded by the Baker-Polito Administration. ♦

PPP loan forgiveness continued from page 5

He added that, while there is growing awareness among legislators and business groups of the need to address these and other glitches in the PPP, exactly how they will be ironed out remains to be seen. "For the next few months it will all be about the PPP," said Anderson. "All we can do is hope for the best."

Deferred payments

Anderson noted that the pandemic has had an impact on his bank and its employees, as well as its customers.

"We were the first to close our lobby," he said, referring to measures taken to limit personal interaction between staff and customers. "We did our due diligence and took precautions."

With the lobby closed at its offices, the bank's retail staff has been rotating in two-week shifts, with half at home and half in the office. "We've done similar things with our mortgage team," Anderson said. "Everyone's been working harder to make sure everything gets done and our customers' needs are taken care of."

Anderson pointed out that what many customers have needed during this period of economic upheaval has been flexibility on their loan repayment obligations. "We've been doing payment deferrals for 90 days, on request, for our small business and residential mortgage customers," he said.

These deferrals are for both principal and interest, he added, with the deferred payments simply added to the end of the loan term. "We just thought it was the right thing to do for people who are being impacted by this," he said.

Requests for these deferrals have been numerous over the past two months. "We're seeing a significant demand," said Anderson.

He also noted that the source of requests for deferrals has shifted during this period. "Initially – and our board was surprised by this – we had a larger number of small business [requests] than residential," he said. "Business people were on it right from the start."

More recently, he said, the balance has shifted toward customers seeking residential mortgage deferrals as people have had time to assess how their own financial situations have been impacted by the pandemic.

"'Forbearance' is a word that everyone is coming to know," Anderson said regarding the banking industry term for the temporary postponement of mortgage payments.

He noted, however, that the three-month forbearance period is not something randomly determined by the bank. "Ninety days is not a number that is just chosen," he said. "When you go to 91 days, you go to nonaccrual." That's another banking industry term for when loans are no longer generating interest income for the bank and are therefore considered non-performing. That status opens the door to other measures, including the potential start of foreclosure proceedings.

Anderson pointed out that this transition from forbearance to nonaccrual does not automatically trigger such measures. However, he noted that the regulatory waters on this have been muddied by a new state law passed in April that requires banks to grant up to six months of mortgage forbearance to homeowners impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

Given the highly regulated nature of the banking industry, he said, the juxtaposition of the new state law and established banking guidelines is bound to create confusion.

"Areas of conflict will take shape from this," he said. "There's been no accounting guidance on this yet."

As with some of the unintended confusion surrounding the PPP, Anderson said he remains hopeful that clarity on mortgage deferrals and other related issues will be forthcoming.

In the meantime, he said that he and the bank's staff are looking forward to being able to greet customers in person once conditions allow the lobbies to reopen.

"Our customer base has been unbelievably patient and pleasant through all of this," he said. "I'm surprised every day." ♦



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PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON FARMERS**Crisis reinforces need for strong regional food system**

BY MARGARET MOULTON

"How are you?" "Hang in there!" "Take Care."

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

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

Berkshire Grown's mission is to keep farmers farming: we work to support and promote local food and farms as a vital part of the Berkshire community, economy and landscape. We do this by promoting public awareness of local agriculture, and by helping to make fresh, local food accessible community-wide. So much of Berkshire Grown's work in "normal" times dovetails with the needs of our community right now – on some level we are simply continuing with business as usual. For instance, our Share the Bounty program supports farmers by purchasing CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) shares during the winter season to support their purchase of seeds and supplies, and we then work with the farmers to deliver the food to local food pantries and community kitchens. In this time of



Margaret Moulton has served as executive director of Berkshire Grown since September 2018. She can be reached at margaret@berkshiregrown.org.

COVID-19, Berkshire Grown's work has taken on a heightened relevance.

In mid-March I received a call from a colleague at another nonprofit who said, "Can you help us buy produce and get it to school district 'back-pack' programs?" Overnight, five southern Berkshire nonprofits coalesced into a powerhouse of produce purchase and delivery, establishing a network across south county to distribute fresh, locally grown food to households struggling with food insecurity. Over the past eight weeks Berkshire farmers have provided local potatoes, onions, fresh greens, pasture-raised eggs, and milk. Berkshire Grown is collaborating with the summer Great Barrington Farmers Market, Community Health Program/WIC in Great Barrington, Berkshire Bounty, and Berkshire Health Systems. This collaborative effort is supported by an emergency fund put together by Berkshire United Way and the Berkshire Taconic community Foundation, by the Green Foundation, and by many individual donors to Berkshire Grown.

Just like our Share the Bounty program, this initiative supports two groups in our community: families who don't have enough food to eat, and local farmers. Many of these farmers grew crops with the intention of selling at farmers markets, to restaurants, and to wholesale distributors, but, with the onset of COVID-19, their markets dried up overnight.

Adapting, adjusting

Many farmers – in the Berkshires and across the country – have adapted quickly. To save their businesses, farmers developed home delivery systems, online sales platforms, and collaborative purchase and delivery networks. Because so many of the farmers in the Berkshires run "direct market" farms – selling directly to customers at farmers markets – they know their clients, they have their emails, and they can grab their attention on social media. While no one would say it was easy, it's impressive how quickly these small farmers whose passion is to grow crops turned 180 degrees and learned how to develop online shopping sites and home delivery networks. The world changed around them, and they responded immediately with creative solutions to get their crops to the community.

Berkshire Grown also adjusted overnight. To support the farmers' efforts, Berkshire Grown adapted our website to direct shoppers to local food and farms. We added a new "SHOP LOCAL NOW" page that provides live links to farm

stores, online purchasing and more. Our program staff now offers COVID-19 technical assistance as farmers shift their sales approach and adapt to the new guidelines, regulations, and realities of marketing and distribution – everything from setting up pre-order systems and developing on-farm pick-up safety protocols to strategizing about marketing or social media outreach. We also launched "digital" gatherings for farmers, providing a forum to discuss how to deal with the issues related to COVID-19, as well as simply to provide a space to catch up and connect.

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

True cost of food

So, what will we see when we encounter each other on the other side of this crisis? If local farmers have saved the day in our region, what does this reveal about our food security in the future? What does it tell us about what we need to do to protect our farmland as a place to grow food for future generations? What have we learned about our food supply chain in the Berkshires, in Massachusetts, in the nation?

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

We need to understand what it means to pasture hens on an ever-changing field of grass, to feed them healthy grains and give them access to

fresh air every day of their lives. We need to design a food system that factors in the real costs associated with planting a field with crops to eat, keeping it weeded and protected from pests, and harvesting and selling that fresh, nutrient-dense food, all without the aid of pesticides or chemical fertilizers. What does it cost to buy or rent arable land that can feed thousands of community members if you also have to pay for child care, health care, student loans, and pay a living wage to your farmworkers?

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

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

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

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

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ON THE *record*

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

Optimism is in short supply today, as people struggle to come to grips with the long-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the extent that life has changed as the novel coronavirus settles in.

That has also prompted confusion and discord as society grapples with the most appropriate way to “reopen the country.” There are many differing opinions about how soon and to what extent we should be able to leave our homes and re-enter the workplace.

One local optimist is David Moresi, who operates a diversified slate of businesses in North Adams under the umbrella of Moresi & Associates. In that position, he is involved in several sectors that have been affected by the pandemic.

Moresi has always been bullish – and outspoken – about North Adams and its prospects. Despite the recent upheavals, his belief in the city remains strong.

A native of North Adams, he studied at Union College in Schenectady, N.Y., graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1997. He returned to the Berkshires and in 2000 established Moresi & Associates.

He grew that into a multifaceted enterprise that includes real estate, investment and development, property management, construction and electrical services. He is also involved in the food service sector as co-owner of Grazie Italian Ristorante and Tres Ninos Taqueria in downtown North Adams, and owner of the Norad Cafe at the Norad Mill complex in the city.

Among his development projects, he converted a former industrial mill on Route 2 in North Adams into a large mixed-use commercial center named Norad Mill, with 52 businesses as tenants (November 2019 BT&C). He is also currently developing several projects with market-rate rental housing in the city center (March 2020 BT&C).

Moresi resides in Williamstown with his wife Amy (who owns and operates Adams Plumbing & Heating) and their two daughters.

In mid-April, Moresi reached out to *BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE* to express his view that, despite the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is room for optimism in looking at the region’s prospects for new economic opportunity. “What is happening right now should not be looked at with fear and uncertainty for the future ahead but rather opportunity and unlimited potential,” he wrote. “I would love to talk to you at *BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE* about this and feel that we need to start now to rally residents and get excited about what lies ahead.”

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

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



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

– David Moresi

BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE: How are your businesses handling the COVID-19 situation and the overall shut-down of activity under the state emergency order?

DAVID MORESI: We’re doing well, all things considered.

Our individual businesses had a huge demand before all this happened. It’s changed, but we’re still keeping busy.

When things started to go down, I made sure nobody would be laid off and we’ve managed to keep all of our employees working.

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

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

But I also really worry about all the businesses that are struggling right now, and the workers who have been laid off. It’s heartbreaking.

I’m also angry at how this all has been handled.

BT&C: Why are you so confident about your own businesses at this difficult time?

MORESI: Part of it is a result of what I experienced in the recession of 2008. That was devastating. My business was really hurt by that, and I was scared to death.

After that, I told myself I was never going to be in that position again. So I took steps to make sure the business was resilient and could handle whatever might come along.

Also, shortly before the pandemic, I had done a restructuring of the business.

Last summer I alluded to our staff about a potential downturn in the economy that could be coming. I made some changes in our operations to prepare for that possibility.

This situation with COVID-19 has been more extreme than I had previously envisioned, but we were ready.

When it all slowed down, we also applied for and received about \$250,000 through the Paycheck Protection Program for our construction, property management, and electrical businesses and the Norad Cafe. Those funds covered eight weeks of payroll and enabled us to retain our staff and even hire two new positions.

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

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

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

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

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

BT&C: You also have housing developments in the works, including the conversion of the Wall-Streeter mill at 28 Union St. for 10 market-rate residential rental units plus commercial space. There is also the planned conversion of the former Johnson Elementary School building on Williams and School streets into 20 units. How have those been impacted?

MORESI: The Wall-Streeter project is moving forward, and we’re still planning to open that in August. Housing construction is allowed under the state emergency order.

When this first happened, I was a little nervous because we had an agreement with Williams Collage to lease them five of the units for their faculty and staff. I knew they were having a difficult time with the effects of the virus and closing of the campus. But they contacted me recently and still want those units.

The Johnson Elementary School building was in the preliminary development phase. But now I’m fast-tracking that because I see a strong demand for that type of housing.

BT&C: Many in the real estate business are worried about the impact of the coronavirus and shutdown, both in the short term and its possible long-term effects on the economy and housing market. As someone who both operates a real estate agency and is developing housing, what is your view of that?

MORESI: Housing lights my eyes up.

I was already enthusiastic about that before the virus. Demand was strong. And, in North Adams, I was especially enthusiastic about market-rate rental housing.

People from other areas are finding North Adams. There has been an increasing number of professionals moving to this area, which creates a market for more housing for them.

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

What’s happened with COVID is a last straw for many people in the big cities. They want to get out and move to places like the Berkshires. Also, with the new emphasis on remote working, they realize they can live here and still do their jobs.

At our real estate agency we’re already seeing that. We’ve been getting calls from people in the city who are looking to move here.

BT&C: Are you concerned that might lead to gentrification, with local residents pushed out by high housing and rental prices?

MORESI: I don’t see that as a problem. Just the opposite. We’ve always had a glut of affordable housing in North Adams. If anyone doubts that, I’ll be happy to take them around and show them how much lower-cost housing there is. That’s not going to change.

I think we should look at a different concept of affordable housing. We should look at what is affordable for a different income level. The people who are moving here from large urban areas are coming from places where housing is truly unaffordable. For a family in New York, a nice apartment for \$1,000 a month is a bargain compared to what they are used to.

New people will provide a market for local businesses, and many will be creating new businesses and opportunities here. That will benefit everyone and stimulate revitalization.

BT&C: Restaurants have been hurt badly in this crisis. You operate the Norad Cafe in the mill and are a partner in Grazie, an Italian restaurant at 28 Marshall St., and Tres Ninos Taqueria at 20 Marshall St. How are your restaurants handling this?

continued on next page

ON THE *record*

continued from previous page

MORESI: It's not great, but they're doing okay.

Grazie had to adapt from being a full-service restaurant to being limited to take-out service with a smaller menu. But it's doing a good take-out business and is holding its own.

Tres Ninos Taqueria was already based on a take-out model, so it was adapted for this.

There isn't a lot of traffic in the mill, so business at the Norad Cafe is not what it should be. But it's doing a fair amount. The supermarkets cut back on some of their deli meat offerings, and we've had some people coming into our deli for that.

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

MORESI: This situation has exposed some real vulnerabilities in the overall economy.

One thing that has blown my mind is how on the edge 90 percent of businesses seem to have been operating. This has suddenly hit so many businesses hard.

It's not just small mom-and-pop businesses. It's also true for big business. Look at how major corporations are suddenly struggling to survive.

Everything is so interrelated that there can be a real domino effect if this goes too far.

BT&C: *What are you angry about?*

MORESI: I'm angry at what this has done to so many people and businesses. For many, everything has been taken away from them, through no fault of their own.



David Moresi believes there will be a strong demand for market-rate housing in North Adams, which he is looking to meet with projects such as the current redevelopment of the Wall-Streeter building at 28 Union St. into 10 rental apartments on the upper two floors and ground-level commercial space.

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

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

We have to come out of our shells. More people are harmed by being out of work.

If the emergency orders continue being extended out, many businesses won't be able to sustain this much longer.

I'm confident that my business will sustain. But I see a lot of bad things happening for other businesses if this continues.

BT&C: *However, the coronavirus and the disease it causes are real and very serious from a public health perspective, Medical experts and many others are concerned that, if we ease up too soon, the consequences will be a dangerous increase in the spread of COVID-19. Do you disagree with that?*

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

We must find a balance. Caution is the key word.

We have to protect the elderly and those whose immune systems are compromised. And we can't rush into anything. We need to continue with measures to protect ourselves and others from the virus.

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

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

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

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

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

In the northern Berkshires, the virus emerged earlier than most areas. We had to deal with it early on.

I've witnessed the COVID emergency response here, and everyone involved in that deserves a lot of credit. They've been on top of this. The Northern Berkshire COVID-19 Operations Center is doing an excellent job.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Start-up ventures thrust into uncharted territory by COVID crisis

BY BRAD JOHNSON & JOHN TOWNES

The process of starting a new business can be exhilarating, exhausting and expensive – with entrepreneurs tapping every bit of their time, energy and financial resources to get their ventures off the ground.

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

But who plans for a pandemic?

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

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

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

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

BOTTOMLESS BRICKS

57 Park St., Adams

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

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

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

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

“We started to see signs during the week leading up to the school shutdown,” said Laundry, referring to Gov. Charlie Baker’s action to close schools statewide on March



Shane and Erin Laundry, along with their son Liam, turned their own enjoyment of LEGO toys into a family-friendly play and party center in Adams. Their business model has been upended by the COVID-19 crisis.

13. “It looked like a freight train barreling down on us.”

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

With the school closings, Laundry quickly

pivoted to focus on another aspect of the business that they had been developing: home delivery of LEGO play kits.

“The first thing we did when the schools closed was to come up with a plan to reach families stuck at home,” she said. This primarily involved packaging “creativity-to-go kits” with one pound of cleaned used LEGO bricks from their in-shop supply along with

a new LEGO mini-figure that they offered for \$20 including tax and delivery.

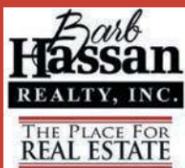
The initial response to the kits was promising. “It went really well,” said Laundry, noting that they promoted the kits on Facebook. “We had an initial wave [of orders] that made up for the lost revenue from cancelled parties in March.”

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

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

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

To get them through the shutdown, Laundry said they have applied for a \$10,000 grant through the SBA’s EIDL program. The funds, which as of early May were still pending, would help cover rent for the store



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spotlight on new business ventures

and other expenses until the business is able to resume operations on some level.

Another source of assistance for Bottomless Bricks has been Laundry's inclusion in the inaugural business accelerator program offered by Entrepreneurship for All Berkshire County (EforAll). Last fall Laundry participated in the first local pitch competition offered by EforAll, a nonprofit organization that promotes entrepreneurship in communities

across the state (*October 2019 BT&C*). That led to her acceptance in the organization's first accelerator program, which launched in early January.

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

"I've gotten a ton of information that I'm still digesting," Laundry said about the program, which concluded in mid-April.

Laundry said she and other participants were midway through the program when the coronavirus crisis started taking shape. "We were meeting in person until mid-March, and then shifted to meeting virtually," she said.

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

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

She and other participants gained insights on how to deal with that uncertainty as the program wound down. "We were all working toward our final presentations [when the shutdown order came]," said Laundry.

Those presentations were to include detailed projections of their ventures' track going forward, an exercise that became all-but-impossible amidst the pandemic's disruption. "We got two extra weeks and they helped

us work into our presentations projections for both scenarios for full operation and a scaled-back version," said Laundry. "That was really helpful in trying to see a path forward through this."

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

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

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

In the meantime, Laundry said, a resumption of delivery of their creativity-to-go kits in early May is helping to cover their rent for the shop. "We consulted with a number of people and determined that doing contactless delivery was okay at this time," she said.

Like others affected by the shutdown, Laundry described a feeling of time seeming to stand still.

"This has been the longest month-and-a-half ever," she said. "But we're trying to stay optimistic and keep our expenses low."

BRAISE WORTHY
137 North St., Pittsfield

The COVID-19 pandemic and statewide shutdown of non-essential businesses shutdown has caused the partners in one planned new restaurant to return to their venture's roots.

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

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

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

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

While the inability to open their planned restaurant was a blow, Blaugrund and Banach decided to adapt by returning to a new variation of their former business model, which was selling prepared frozen meals.

"We're pivoting back to our original strengths," said Blaugrund, explaining that the restaurant was intended to be a reboot of their original business.

Blaugrund and Banach established Braise Worthy in 2017. Initially they specialized in

preparing and selling frozen braised meals. They had sold these online as an advance-purchase subscription service similar to a CSA (community supported agriculture) model for farms.

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

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

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

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

Consumers order them online for delivery at braiseworthy.com.

The specific items available for home delivery will rotate. The price of individual meals varies, based on the selection and size. For updated information and current selections, visit the website or Facebook page.

Blaugrund said they are experimenting with the menu selection. They plan to offer meals in family size and smaller portions.

continued on next page



Austin Banach and Jeffrey Blaugrund were in the process of renovating space in downtown Pittsfield for their new eatery when the state shutdown order came. They have responded by returning to an earlier model for their business that is better suited to pandemic-related restrictions.

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GETTING started

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They create meals based on various national and global cuisines, using the braise style. Their staple selection of frozen dinners has included such items as Texas Pot Roast, Beef Lyonnaise, Beef Satsivi, Chicken Chaat Masala, and vegetarian items such as Kabocha Squash Curry.

Blaugrund said they use quality ingredients and source from farmers who are committed to humane, hormone-free and environmentally responsible practices.

Braise Worthy will continue to be based in the Crawford Square location. The 1,770-square-foot space already contained a commercial kitchen, which they were converting for their own purposes when the COVID-19 emergency arose. They will prepare the meals there.

Their Crawford Square space is already capable of being used as a restaurant and take-out with minor adjustments.

Blaugrund said they may open it on that basis in the future, but they are focusing exclusively on developing the home-delivery business model for now.

"You have to be adaptable in business," he said. "We may open a restaurant here down the line, but it will depend on how home delivery goes and the larger circumstances."

DALTON SCHOOL OF ART 63 Flansburg Ave., Dalton

For Elizabeth Kick, who launched the Dalton School of Art and Creativity in February 2019, the COVID-19 crisis immediately stopped the momentum her new business had been building (*July 2019 BT&C*).

It also drastically altered her business plan, which is based on workshops, classes, open studios, and other art-and-craft-related activities for young people and adults. The school is based at the Stationery Factory complex in Dalton.

"Before the pandemic hit, the business was growing," said Kick. "The area that

was the most popular was our activities for young people from pre-K and up. That side of the business was thriving. The kids loved it, parents appreciated it, and we were beginning to get repeat business."

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

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

However, all activity was put on hold when the coronavirus pandemic emerged, followed by the state emergency order, which closed schools and prevented gatherings of 10 or more people.

"I shut it down very early in this, before the emergency order," said Kick, who is also a teacher at Lanesboro Elementary School. "I saw the writing on the wall and realized what was coming."

Kick said she did not try to offer alternatives in the initial phases of the crisis.

"When public schools closed, my attention was totally focused on developing and teaching online classes for those students, and I didn't have time for my own studio," she said.

Kick emphasized that she is planning to reopen the Dalton School of Art and Creativity (413-329-4689 or www.daltonartschool.com) as conditions allow. In addition to activities



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

for young people, she also plans to continue to offer classes and activities for adults.

She could not predict when or how, which she said will depend on the guidelines and overall circumstances as they develop. "I don't know what it will look like when we reopen," she said. "We may have to re-invent the way we do things, at least for a while. I'm looking at that now."

Kick said she would likely use the ideas and experience she gained when her public-school teaching job transitioned from classroom to online learning.

"It will probably be some combination of prerecorded video lessons and interactive group classes on Zoom," she said. "The interactive aspect of group activity is important on a social and emotional level."

She added that she will begin offering in-person activities, and the outside camps, when the limitations and dangers related to the virus finally ease. "We'll open up completely when it becomes safe," she said.

Kick expressed confidence that her market will be there when the school resumes.

"I've talked to many parents, and they've been very understanding and supportive," she said. "They're still interested in signing up their kids when the time is right."

HiLo 55 Union St., North Adams

For the operators of HiLo, a new performance venue in downtown North Adams, the first three months of 2020 brought both highs and lows.

The highs came in the form of unexpectedly profitable months in January and February, as they made adjustments to bookings and other aspects of operations for the 200-seat live music venue and nightclub.

The lows came shortly thereafter, when the COVID-19 pandemic pulled the plug on their operations.

"Things were going well," said Brian Miksic, who was the driving force behind the launch of HiLo last September with his business partners Glenn Mahoney and Orion Howard (*July 2020 BT&C*). "A lot of it was figuring out how to do things."

Miksic said their basic goal for HiLo was to provide a missing element in the northern Berkshire cultural and entertainment scene by booking a mix of national and regional acts suited to an intimate performance venue. With live entertainment scheduled several nights each week, HiLo was envisioned as becoming a destination that could draw music lovers both locally and from surrounding regions.

"We exceeded our own expectations both in terms of patrons and revenue," Miksic continued. "But early on we also spent more money than we expected."

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

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

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

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

That trend line soon headed into a brick wall in the form of the coronavirus crisis. "We had two shows in March and that's pretty much it," said Miksic with an ironic laugh.

He noted that the decision to close HiLo was made well ahead of the state emergency order. "We shut down after the first weekend in March," he said. "As we were getting into this thing, we had a staff meeting and asked: 'Are we willing to stay open?' It was a group decision by everybody."

That proactive decision led to layoffs for the small team of full-and part-time employees. "We did the layoffs early, which allowed them to apply early for unemployment benefits," said Miksic, noting that this helped avoid the crush of jobless claims that followed the March 24 state shutdown order.

Miksic said they were also proactive in applying for federal assistance through the SBA's EIDL loan program and the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), through Adams Community Bank.

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

Miksic noted that he and Mahoney, who are partners in Very Good Property Management, also received PPP funds for that business.

They, along with Orion Howard, are partners in Very Good Properties, a separate real estate investment business that owns the 55 Union St. building that houses HiLo. (Howard, a semi-retired oncologist, is also owner of Bright Ideas Brewing at the MASS MoCA campus in North Adams.)

"It helps a lot that we own the building," said Miksic, noting that it eliminates the con-

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spotlight on new business ventures



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

cern about keeping up with rent, something that many small businesses are contending with during the shutdown.

While the doors have been closed at HiLo since early March, Miksic said they have continued to bring live music to a virtual audience on an occasional basis. "We've been hosting some regional acts and streaming them on Facebook," he said.

This serves as a way for HiLo to keep connected with its audience during the hiatus. It also give a helping hand to the performers, who have the option of requesting donations from virtual audience members. "We really like these artists, and this is a way we can maybe generate some support for them," Miksic said, noting that they also have lost income from cancelled performances during this period. "I think it's a big part of the puzzle that people aren't thinking about."

The performances can be streamed live or viewed later. Many people have been joining for the live performance, according to Miksic. "People are looking for some little glimmer of hope and happiness," he said. "Doing something of-the-moment by sitting down and enjoying them live fits right in with that."

Exactly when audiences will be able to sit

down for a live concert at HiLo remains unknown at this point. With the state emergency order currently set to expire on May 18, any resumption of business activity will be done in phases and with new precautions in place.

That will be especially true of venues like HiLo, where having a good crowd on hand is part of the enjoyment of live music.

"We're guessing things will open up in stages," Miksic said. "It will take time before people feel confident about going out. That will be the wild card." Once they are allowed to consider reopening, Miksic said they will have to figure out how to handle bookings and ticket sales in the new environment.

"We'll have to do it on a show-by-show basis and just feel our way through the next stages of this," he said, noting that it may not be possible – or desirable – to sell to full capacity, but that enough tickets will need to be sold to cover costs. "It will be interesting to see how that balance works."

As businesses around the state prepare for whatever level of business they will be able to do in the stages to come, Miksic said he and his partners are fully confident that HiLo will again will be part of the mix. "We're glad we're in a position that we will be able to reopen," he said.

LOST LAMB PATISSERIE
31 Main St., Stockbridge

Claire Raposo had just celebrated her 20th birthday on March 9 when the first ominous signs of trouble caught her attention.

"The day after my birthday, I read an article [about the coronavirus crisis] and thought, 'Oh, wow, this is really bad,'" said the proprietor of the Lost Lamb Patisserie and Snackerie at 31 Main St. in downtown Stockbridge.

Raposo, a Paris-trained pastry chef, had just opened Lost Lamb in late November (December 2019 BT&C) and was personally thrilled with the response to the cafe, which serves a variety of pastries, sandwiches, coffee and other light fare.

"Things were going really, really well, especially for the off-season," she said. "We had a cute little team going, and we were turning into a real bakery."

Despite the smooth launch, Raposo decided to take proactive measures once the seriousness of the pandemic became clear. "We wanted to get it figured out early," she said, noting that the tight confines of her shop and its kitchen made it difficult to avoid proximity to customers. "So we decided to start doing contactless by taking phone orders."

That step, taken a week or so before the March 24 shutdown, proved to be popular with customers but unsustainable for the business.

"It turned out that phone orders were really inconvenient," Raposo said, noting that the time it took to place the relatively small orders for pastries, sandwiches and coffee, and manually enter credit card information on the cafe's single phone line made the process inefficient at best. "But we got a good system going, and it worked for a while."

That system relied, in part, on a very small patch of wireless reception on the sidewalk just outside the door to Lost Lamb in what is

an otherwise dead zone in downtown Stockbridge. "We were really lucky to have a small area of reception," Raposo said, adding that they put up signs instructing customers on what to do if they can't get reception.

However, concerns about customers clustering around the Lost Lamb's entrance led Raposo to rethink this phone-order operation. "It was a very weird moment," she said. "People knew how serious it was but were not taking precautions."

She was also concerned about keeping her own staff safe. "We were trying to figure out how to do things and how to stay safe working together in a very small kitchen," Raposo said.

These concerns led to her decision to temporarily close Lost Lamb at the end of March and come up with ideas for tweaking the business model to fit the new coronavirus conditions.

"We wanted to figure out how to do what we do and continue to be really delightful," she said.

That led to a plan to shift to online orders – not for the cafe's regular menu but for a new line of specialty boxes filled with groceries and other staples that people might need while staying safe at home.

"We set up our online store that's geared toward families stuck at home," Raposo said. "We're just trying to make it easier for people to avoid going out to the store."

On May 4, Lost Lamb debuted its new service offering a Grocery Box and Baking Box for free delivery (within a 10-mile radius) or curbside pickup.

Priced at \$50 to \$52, the boxes contain a selection of food items and other staples. The Grocery Box includes such items as milk, butter, eggs, cheese, nuts, mixed greens, coffee and baguette. The Baking Box includes flour, butter, brown and white sugar, and other items families might need for home-baking projects.

continued on next page



Claire Raposo had enjoyed a very promising first few months at The Lost Lamb when the COVID-19 crisis arose. She opted to close her patisserie in April and in early May reopened with a new service providing specialty boxes filled with groceries and other staples for delivery or curbside pickup. "I had done a lot scenarios in my business plan, but not a pandemic," she says. "I can't believe I missed it!"

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GETTING started

spotlight on new business ventures

continued from previous page

Raposo noted that the Baking Box was inspired in part by the pandemic-induced scarcity of flour and other staple items at many grocery stores. "It suddenly became a thing that you can't find flour anywhere," she said.

In addition to the pre-packaged selection for these boxes, there are add-on options for other items. These include extra baguettes or croissants, yeast and flour, as well as four rolls of toilet paper. Customers can also include a Lost Lamb mug for an additional \$15 (see full details along with ordering instructions at thelostlambpatisserie.com).

With the statewide shutdown currently set to expire on May 18, Raposo said it may take some time before she will be able to resume normal operations. That depends not just on the okay from the state but on her own comfort level in opening the doors to the public while exposure to the virus remains a real possibility. "Having people coming to the door opens up massive sanitation issues," she said.

Raposo added that she and the shop's manager, Anna Aron, will be working in the coming weeks to figure out what it will take to safely operate Lost Lamb going forward. "We're trying to prioritize what needs to be done," she said.

She noted that the specialty boxes may continue to be offered even after regular cafe operations resume. "If it becomes popular, we'll definitely keep doing those," she said, adding that other box options could be added to appeal to other target markets such as second-home owners.

Raposo said that the opening of Lost Lamb last winter was timed to allow her to get comfortable with the patisserie's operations during the slower season and make adjustments ahead of the busy summer season.

With much of the region's summer cultural offerings either in limbo or already cancelled, and with unnecessary travel likely to be discouraged for some time to come, the level of bustle in downtown Stockbridge will be markedly lower than prior seasons.

"So many people get through the winter knowing that Memorial Day will eventually get here," said Raposo. "And now no one knows what summer will look like."

Despite the lingering uncertainty, the 20-year-old entrepreneur remains upbeat about the future prospects for her business. "We'll figure it out," she said. "Between me and Anna and my parents, we have good ideas and are going to do what we can to make this work."

Raposo concluded with a tongue-in-cheek jab at her own lack of vision in not preparing for the disruption this sort of health crisis might cause. "I had done a lot scenarios in my business plan, but not a pandemic," she said with a good-natured laugh. "I can't believe I missed it!" ♦

THE FOUNDRY 2 Harris St., West Stockbridge

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

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

But then the COVID-19 crisis and state emergency order emerged, which suddenly brought the curtain down on this momentum.

The Foundry is now in the limbo of an enforced intermission of unknown duration and long-term impact.

Last year, Brentano purchased the 3,600-square-foot building at 2 Harris St. in the center of West Stockbridge and converted it into a regional



Amy Brentano says The Foundry's first year of operation exceeded her goals. The arts and performance center in West Stockbridge is now in limbo as the COVID-19 crisis continues to play out.

center for cultural programs, live entertainment, and other community gatherings (June 2019 BT&C).

The Foundry (thefoundryws.com and Facebook page The Foundry) hosts live theatrical performances, concerts, open mikes, readings, discussions, educational workshops, art exhibits and other activities in a "black-box" theater and other gallery spaces.

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

Brentano operates The Foundry as a for-profit business that both sponsors programs and makes the facility available for rentals and other arrangements

"I feel guilty if I start feeling sorry for myself. I realize my problems are insignificant compared to the more severe impacts this is having on many other people, organizations and businesses."

with producers and community groups. She also relies on additional earned income, such as on-site beverage sales during events.

Early in the coronavirus crisis, Brentano closed The Foundry and has cancelled all activities through May. "We've left the schedule tentatively in place for June, July and August," said Brentano. "But everything will depend on the situation. I'm not sure when we'll reopen, or what we'll be able to do."

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

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

"I'm determined to get through this summer, and I'm also looking forward to autumn," she said. "But I can't predict anything. I can adapt for now but I can't carry it indefinitely. I have to start generating revenue again, and I have daughters to support."

She said the sudden shift from success-

based growth planning to struggling to survive has been very frustrating.

"April was supposed to be LGBT Awareness Month, and we had some great programs lined up for that," she said. "We also had an exciting seasonal schedule coming up,

including local, national and international performers. Not being able to do all that is very disappointing."

The shutdown has also impacted Brentano as a businessperson. She said she had been preparing to implement a revised business plan

based on the first year's positive trends. "For example, the people who work here have been independent contractors," she said. "I was about to change that by creating staff positions as full employees. But that's been put on hold."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My vision for The Foundry is the opposite of social distancing and staying at home," he said.

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

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

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

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COVERstory

Greylock WORKS

continued from page 1

In July 2015 they purchased the 240,000-square-foot industrial facility and nine-acre site from the Cariddi family for \$749,000.

Since then they have been redeveloping the site to create a complex with a mix of commercial, event and residential space known collectively as Greylock WORKS.

The couple said they were attracted to the mill for several reasons. They are architects and developers whose full-service, design, development and construction firm, Latent Productions, has undertaken numerous new and redevelopment projects in New York and elsewhere.

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

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

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

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

Greylock WORKS is another element of the emergence of that section of the Route 2 Corridor between Williamstown and North Adams as a new center of activity. The nearby Norad Mill has become a local center of commerce and community life (November 2019 BT&C), as well as the TOURISTS resort inn (October 2019 BT&C).

The scale of Greylock WORKS is significantly larger than Latent Productions’



The structure known as the Weave Shed at the eastern end of the complex has been converted into a 26,000-square-foot event space that has hosted a wide range of activities over the past three years.

previous projects, which have included a 25-unit affordable housing development in Brooklyn, the conversion of an existing brownstone/studio building into condominiums, and single-family home construction and renovations.

Additional challenges were presented by the age of the structures, and the fact that it was a brownfield property as a result of its past industrial activities which required environmental remediation.

“As a legacy property with potential issues, it was a risk taking it on,” said Perry.

Nevertheless, after pursuing their due diligence they made the decision to proceed.

Rothstein said they did not consider the size an obstacle.

“The mill is cumulatively large, but it is structured as different components,” she said. “Rather than one large project, we see it as six projects that we are undertaking in stages.”

“Rather than one large project, we see it as six projects that we are undertaking in stages. We’re completing individual sections at a time and then moving on to the next.”

We’re completing individual sections at a time and then moving on to the next. We expected it would be a 10-year project to complete.”

They said that they have completed one-third of the overall project, including cleanup, environmental remediation and landscaping of the property, and renovating and putting into use about 25 percent of the interior spaces.

They noted that the sections they have already completed are occupied or have commitments from tenants. It currently has about 15 businesses as tenants.

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

Industrial remnants

The facility was originally a cotton-spinning mill, known as Greylock Mill, built during the growth and heyday of the textile industry in North Adams in the 19th century.

In 1870, the initial wooden structures were replaced with the granite and brick main mill building. Over the subsequent 60 years, the mill complex expanded to include the four-story Spinning Building to the West, one-story Weave Sheds to the east, and Carding and Picker Rooms to the south.

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

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

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

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

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

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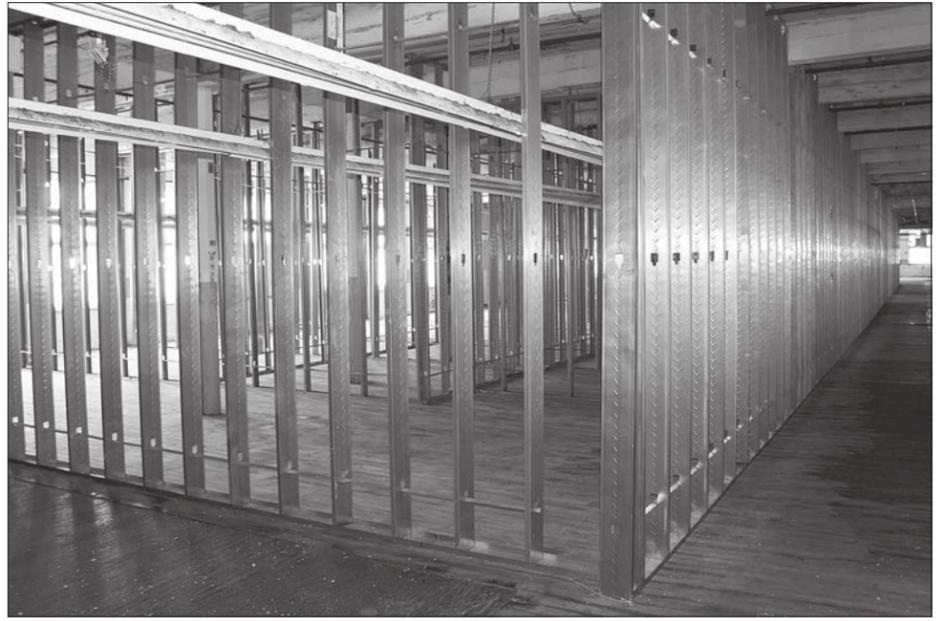


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COVERstory



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



Framing is in place for some of the residential condominiums that are planned for the four-story westernmost building in the Greylock WORKS complex. The project has received city approval for up to 50 units.

continued from previous page

They also received \$3.9 million in two infrastructure grants from MassWorks and the city for external improvements including a parking lot and landscaping.

The city awarded the project a tax incentive package that provides a reduction in tax rates on increased value for 10 years, contingent on them meeting benchmarks for the development.

It also has received grants totaling \$173,900 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to support facilities and business development assistance to the food production aspects of the complex.

Exterior construction has been handled by Maxymillian Construction of Pittsfield and Burke Construction Group of Adams. An affiliated construction subsidiary of Latent Productions is doing the interior work, using area subcontractors.

Unique event space

One of the notable features of the mill is a long structure on its east end known as the Weave Shed, with a line of windows along Route 2 and a saw-tooth roof with additional rows of skylights. That has been an initial focus of the redevelopment.

"Basically, we've been working our way from east to west," said Rothstein.

They stripped down the interior of that section, and removed and restored the original flooring, as well as replacing windows, skylights and upgrading other structural elements, infrastructure and amenities.

A 26,000-square-foot event space was created which was inaugurated in 2016 with a New Year's Eve dinner and dance party called "Unlock." Since then it has become an active site for events of many kinds.

These have included events sponsored



Katherine Hand and Matt Brogan operate Berkshire Cider Project at Greylock WORKS, where they have just bottled their first batch of dry sparkling hard cider. (Photo provided by Berkshire Cider Project)

by Latent Productions, and collaborations with MASS MoCA and other businesses and community organizations. It has also hosted election debates, charitable benefits, pitch contests and other functions.

They also book private parties, weddings and other events. "That's been going very well," said Rothstein. "We're almost fully booked until the fall and are already signing up weddings for next year."

Some of those bookings in the near term, however, are subject to cancellation or postponement due to the coronavirus pandemic and related restrictions on group events currently in place to slow the spread of the virus.

This section of Greylock WORKS also contains a commercial kitchen that has been primarily designated for use by caterers hired for events hosted in the Weave Shed.

A co-working space has also been created in another section of the Weave Shed, which is available for businesses and professionals on

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

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

Food hub

The concept of Greylock WORKS as a center for food production and culture has several aspects focused on value-added and artisanal food and beverages of the region.

"When we were doing our initial research, we looked at what we could do here that would complement the existing assets of the region," said Perry. "The area we felt had the most room to grow was the realm of food."

Their goal is to house and showcase food-related businesses that use sustainable sourcing of raw ingredients from regional agriculture, and broaden public awareness of the benefits of a healthy local food system.

It is designed to provide food producers and wholesalers with affordable facilities, coordinated distribution logistics, and access to a network for marketing and financing. They are collaborating with area economic development agencies and programs to pro-

vide consulting services and other resources to occupants.

This section of Greylock WORKS has various spaces designated for food and beverage production enterprises, with glass frontage along an internal central corridor. It is oriented to businesses such as beverage producers, cheese makers, butchers, coffee companies, bakeries and chocolatiers.

Among their initial tenants is Ski Bum Rum, a distillery owned by Ryan Riley and his wife, Emily Vasiliauskas, that makes artisanal rums and related products. The distillery was founded in Colorado in 2015 and moved to Greylock WORKS in 2019 (see story on opposite page).

Another is Berkshire Cider Project LLC, which will produce hard cider. It is another transplant that is owned by Matt Brogan and Katherine Hand and was started in Brooklyn. The cidery is working with local orchards to create a premium craft cider, which they expect to begin offering this spring.

In a late April interview, Hand noted that she and Brogan, who are residents of Washington, D.C., would be returning to the cidery in early May to bottle the first batch of their dry sparkling hard cider. This would be available for sale by June.

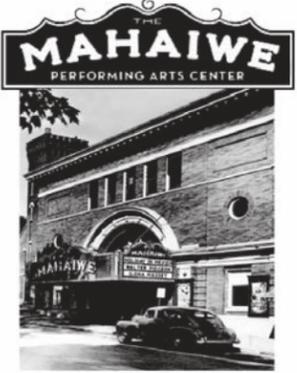
She added, however, that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it necessary for them to recalibrate some aspects of business plan. For example, one of the target markets for their hard cider is weddings and other large events. Those types of functions are likely to be slow to resume even as some restrictions on business activity and gatherings are eased in the months ahead.

"Our time line [for introducing the products] has not changed too much, but our approach to distribution has," Hand said, adding that they may initially focus on direct-to-consumer sales at the cidery and wholesale to liquor stores and other sales outlets.

Along with these and other food-related businesses, Greylock WORKS will also soon have an on-site dining venture as an anchor tenant.

The Break Room, a full-service restaurant, will be operated by Brian Alberg, a chef who is prominent as a proponent of regional cuisine in the Berkshires. He is also vice president of culinary development with Main Street Hospitality Group, which operates the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge and numerous other restaurants and inns in the Berkshires.

Work on converting a section of mill space into The Break Room is currently moving forward, although the original time line for opening this summer may be affected by ongoing coronavirus considerations.



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In late April, Alberg noted that the restaurant is on track to be finished and operational by sometime in June. At that point, assuming licences and regulatory approval are in hand, the Break Room could begin to offer food on a to-go basis.

He also noted that, once the state begins relaxing restrictions on on-site dining, the Break Room may utilize the adjacent event space at Greylock WORKS for tables and seating that are more spread out than pos-

sible inside the restaurant itself. This, he said, would allow customers to feel more comfortable with on-site dining while still adhering to social distancing protocols.

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

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

Residential component

Originally, Perry and Rothstein had planned to develop a hotel in the main western section of the mill, as well as some residential

units. However, because of the number of other existing or planned hospitality facilities in the area, they shifted that to an exclusive focus on residential condominium units.

"We believe there is a versatile and diverse market for housing here, and the range of units here is potentially wide," said Perry.

They already have approval for about 50 units from the city, and have done preliminary planning and preparation for loft-style units. Some initial framing for the units has been done on one floor.

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

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

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

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

"We take a lot of pride in our work, and an adaptive re-use like this is one of the most sustainable things you can do in our profession," said Perry. "It's very satisfying to transform an underutilized and overgrown site and transform it into a good neighbor and source of community optimism and pride. When we were first doing the initial cleanup of the property, people often pulled in to thank us for doing this. That's very affirming."

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

"We have actually relocated to the site," he said, noting that he and Rothstein and their 17-year-old daughter, Skye Rothstein, have taken up residence in the Engine House section of the complex that normally serves as smaller, more intimate event space.

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

"This project has become a higher priority for us, and being here allows us to make it a focus of our attention," he said, noting that they have been able to manage their New York business and professional responsibilities from their North Adams base. "We're doing things remotely for what has to be done."

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

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

Distillery first to set up shop in commercial complex

BY JOHN TOWNES

The first tenant that set up shop at the Greylock WORKS complex is a business that moved from the Rocky Mountain foothills in Colorado to the Berkshire hills.

The Distillery at Greylock WORKS makes specialty rum and gin. It sells several varieties of each under the brand names Ski Bum Rum and Forager Gin. It also produces whiskey, although due to the length of the aging process, that is not yet ready for sale.

Originally named Ski Bum Rum, the business was launched by owner Ryan Riley in 2015 in Colorado, where he grew up. He moved to Massachusetts in 2018, when his wife, Emily Vasiliauskas, was hired as an English professor at Williams College.

He located the business in Greylock Works in 2019, and opened last October.

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

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

"When it's open, people can see the distillery and sample our products there," said Riley. "We have an extensive cocktail list, and everything that goes into them is made here."

Riley has an encyclopedic knowledge of the world of beverages and was trained at prominent distilleries. His products have received a Gold Medal at the Denver International Spirit Competition.

The distillery is basically a one-person business at this point, although his wife, who also has distillery experience, works there on a part-time basis.

Riley combines traditional and contemporary methods and equipment. "I put modern twists on the old techniques and recipes," he said.

For example, to create rum, he uses a handmade copper pot still from Spain based on a historic design. Riley said this type of still is rare today, because it is not computer automated and utilizes complex processes that require more attention and knowledge to operate.

"I also ferment the rum at cold temperatures to preserve the flavor of the sugar cane and other ingredients," he said. "That's a traditional technique but it's usually associated with other products such as beer. I'm not sure if anyone else uses it for rum."

Riley is continuously developing new varieties. Currently he has Silver, Spiced and Coconut rums, and five gins.

The rums are sold year-round, although some are more seasonally oriented. "For example, with the spiced rum, I deliberately used a mix of ingredients that smells and tastes like Christmas," he said. "Others are more summer-like. But they all can be enjoyed throughout the year."



Ryan Riley says the Greylock WORKS complex became an ideal site for his distillery when he and his wife moved from Colorado to the Berkshires in 2018. The COVID-19 situation has interrupted some aspects of his business, such as the on-site cocktail bar, but he has adapted by offering new options to customers.

The products' names have differing origins. "Growing up in Colorado, skiing has always been an important part of my life, so Ski Bum Rum was a natural name," said Riley, who was a member of the U.S. Ski Team.

The name Forager Gin is based on procurement methods. He explained that they go out into the woods to collect berries, twigs, wildflowers and other botanicals for flavoring ingredients. "With gin, localization is an increasingly important characteristic," he said. "By gathering botanicals from this region, it's gives the gin the qualities of what grows in the Berkshires."

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

"Gin can be produced rapidly," he said. "So I'll produce a variety in very small quantities using ingredients that are currently in season. When that's sold out, it's gone, and it's replaced by another with ingredients based on the next season."

He is also producing whiskey. However that takes years to age, and will not be available for some time still.

Pandemic's impact

The income for The Distillery at Greylock WORKS (970-401-2271 or <https://riley1803.wixsite.com/skibumrum> or Facebook page SkiBumRumDistillery) has come from a combination of direct sales of bottles and cocktails at Greylock Works and wholesale and retail sales of bottles at liquor stores and bars.

"Because we produce in small quantities, the number of outlets is limited," he said (a list of outlets is available on the website).

As with most businesses, Riley's distillery has been significantly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, including the restrictions on customers visiting the distillery and cocktail bar.

"It's difficult because so many of our sales come from on-site customers at the distillery," he said. "But, fortunately, we still have our wholesale business. During the shutdown, I'm focusing on that, and on designing new labels and doing other things with the business."

It has also caused him to create another source of income, a create-your-own-cocktail package. Each package includes two bottles of rum and recipes and all of the ingredients to make 24 cocktails, including Old Fashioned or Classic Daiquiris. The packages cost \$65 which works out to a little over \$2 per cocktail.

"I figured that with people having to stay in, and not being able to go to bars or restaurants, this would enable them to make cocktails and enjoy them at home," he said. "Depending on how long this lasts, or if there is sufficient demand, my plan is to offer different packages per month."

He said they can be ordered by calling or emailing skibumrumdistillery@gmail.com.

While the public is not allowed inside, packages or individual bottles can be ordered for outside pick-up. "We do it in a very socially distanced way, with a table outside that I leave it on," said Riley. ♦

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REAL estate

The following real Estate transactions are provided by Banker & Tradesman Real Estate Data Publishing. Only properties valued at \$75,000 or higher are included.

ADAMS

7 Woods Dr.
Buyer: John Duval
Seller: Stanley A Jr & MT
Gajda NT +
Price: \$149,900
Mortgage: \$132,900
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/31/20

ALFORD

7 East Rd.
Buyer: Holly Henderson-Fisher
Seller: Faye Prewitt
Price: \$374,500
Mortgage: \$355,775
Lender: Mtg Networks
Date: 3/19/20

BECKET

651 King Richard Dr.
Buyer: Anthony Wesolowski
Seller: Karen Lysik
Price: \$130,000
Date: 3/17/20

329 Little John Dr.
Buyer: M&T Bank
Seller: Sarah Lapointe +
Price: \$104,000
Date: 3/9/20

39 Long Bow Lane Cir.
Buyer: Derek Brine +
Seller: Leslie Asher +
Price: \$340,000
Mortgage: \$340,000
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 3/30/20

CHESHIRE

74 Prospect St.
Buyer: Jonathan Cahill
Seller: Earl Cahill Jr +
Price: \$187,000
Mortgage: \$188,888
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 3/13/20

750-760 S State Rd.
Buyer: Timeless Collections LLC
Seller: Sling LLC
Price: \$394,900
Mortgage: \$379,900
Lender: Sling LLC
Date: 3/3/20

CLARKSBURG

870 Daniels Rd.
Buyer: John Brack +
Seller: Jeffrey Zocchi
Price: \$244,000
Mortgage: \$244,000
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/12/20

695 Middle Rd.
Buyer: George Beckwith
Seller: Beverly Daniels +
Price: \$125,000
Mortgage: \$125,000
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/17/20

592 N Houghton St.
Buyer: Scott Bona ++
Seller: Thomas Maselli +
Price: \$145,000
Mortgage: \$143,434
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/3/20

541 West Rd.
Buyer: Jonathan Pierce
Seller: Thomas Kondel
Price: \$100,000
Date: 3/5/20

DALTON

50 Carson Ave.
Buyer: Taylor Ciepela +
Seller: James Leclair +
Price: \$171,500
Mortgage: \$165,776
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 3/3/20

389 High St.
Buyer: Jessica Winn
Seller: Kayla Lavalley
Price: \$151,000
Mortgage: \$135,900
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/20/20

251 Main St.

Buyer: BQ Property Hldg LLC
Seller: Charles St John
Price: \$210,000
Mortgage: \$168,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/6/20

49 Orchard St.
Buyer: Laurie Chivers
Seller: Dennis Masengo +
Price: \$254,900
Mortgage: \$150,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/19/20

78 South St.
Buyer: Caitlin Porter
Seller: Robert Karch +
Price: \$177,500
Mortgage: \$174,284
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 3/20/20

44 Stockbridge Ave.
Buyer: Joseph Dudek
Seller: Daisy Dudek
Price: \$130,000
Mortgage: \$104,000
Lender: Wells Fargo
Date: 3/9/20

EGREMONT

5 Bott Hill Rd.
Buyer: Steven Stein +
Seller: Karen Brounstein +
Price: \$450,000
Date: 3/13/20

GREAT BARRINGTON

7 Comstock Ln.
Buyer: Monique Belair +
Seller: Ronald Obrien +
Price: \$335,000
Mortgage: \$328,932
Lender: Allied Mtg
Date: 3/4/20

9 Hart St.
Buyer: Marc Pollack
Seller: Karen Woolis
Price: \$154,500
Mortgage: \$139,050
Lender: Total Mtg Svcs
Date: 3/16/20

10 Meadow St.
Buyer: Meadow Street Holdings
Seller: Jonathon Williams +
Price: \$195,000
Mortgage: \$146,250
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 3/23/20

49 Pearl St.
Buyer: Steven Bankert +
Seller: Merz Ann Est +
Price: \$300,000
Mortgage: \$270,000
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 3/13/20

6 Ramsdell Rd.
Buyer: Hillcrest Educational
Seller: Jose Huertas +
Price: \$330,000
Mortgage: \$264,000
Lender: Berkshire Bank
Date: 3/31/20

34 Bridge St. U:302
Buyer: Ellen Murphy
Seller: Powerhouse Square 1 LLC
Price: \$355,000
Date: 3/24/30

HINSDALE

Peru Rd.
Buyer: Thomas Dion +
Seller: Robert FT +
Price: \$135,000
Date: 3/5/20

LANESBORO

125 Bailey Rd.
Buyer: Douglas Smith Jr
Seller: Joseph Sinopoli Jr
Price: \$290,000
Mortgage: \$290,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/13/20

70 Bull Hill Rd.
Buyer: Joseph Pigott
Seller: Cynthia Brouker
Price: \$190,000
Mortgage: \$170,050
Lender: Trustco Bank
Date: 3/5/20

35 N Main St.
Buyer: Liberty Market Properties
Seller: Nancy Gomes +
Price: \$475,000
Mortgage: \$215,200

Lender: Nancy Gomes
Date: 3/11/20

12 Park Dr.
Buyer: John Willey +
Seller: US Bank NA Tr
Price: \$210,000
Mortgage: \$245,700
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/13/20

LEE

Forest St.
Buyer: Thomas Touponce +
Seller: Frederick Speyrer 3rd
Price: \$95,000
Date: 3/20/20

21 Greylock St.
Buyer: William Stalker +
Seller: Rebecca Touponce
Price: \$227,500
Mortgage: \$232,732
Lender: Mtg Research
Date: 3/6/20

165 Housatonic St.
Buyer: Garden Management Inc
Seller: Gangama Inc
Price: \$655,000
Date: 3/23/20

45 Pinnacle Way
Buyer: Ann Afflerbach-Berman +
Seller: Adam Hersch
Price: \$125,000
Date: 3/6/20

845 Pleasant St.
Buyer: Green Theory Cultivation
Seller: Old Crow Realty Corp
Price: \$150,000
Date: 3/11/20

925 Pleasant St.
Buyer: Justin Soules +
Seller: Thomas Touponce +
Price: \$385,000
Mortgage: \$269,500
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 3/13/20

401 Stockbridge Rd.
Buyer: James Wickham +
Seller: Gutmann Joanne Est +
Price: \$87,750
Mortgage: \$43,875
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/16/20

190 Summer St.
Buyer: Jacob Ojala +
Seller: Washburn Mary Est +
Price: \$281,000
Mortgage: \$140,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/31/20

LENOX

5 Cliffwood St.
Buyer: Michael Palmer +
Seller: Kelley Vickery
Price: \$1,160,000
Mortgage: \$928,000
Lender: Bk of America
Date: 3/30/20

141 East St.
Buyer: Robert Powers
Seller: Almic NT +
Price: \$230,000
Date: 3/20/20

Muirfield Dr.
Buyer: Richard Poeton +
Seller: Abby Cooper +
Price: \$565,000
Date: 3/31/20

22 Coldbrooke S U:A
Buyer: Garry Beaty +
Seller: Joan Comeau
Price: \$600,000
Date: 3/19/20

165 Kemble St. U:5
Buyer: Donna Bernstein
Seller: Wendy Ellen Scripps RET +
Price: \$2,195,000
Date: 3/17/20

55 Pittsfield Rd. U:1
Buyer: TL 745D Inc
Seller: Lenox Commons Holdings
Price: \$1,035,000
Mortgage: \$665,000
Lender: Seller
Date: 3/23/20

2 Rolling Hills U:11
Buyer: H L&R Slater Sherman RET
Seller: Rose Trigoboff IRT +
Price: \$174,500
Date: 3/25/20

6 Rolling Hills U:12
Buyer: Elizabeth Weibrecht

Seller: Amy Sternlieb
Price: \$156,900
Date: 3/16/20

MONTEREY

22 Dowd Rd.
Buyer: Dominique Lapin
Seller: Stephen Nesis +
Price: \$295,000
Mortgage: \$236,000
Lender: Citizens Bank
Date: 3/16/20

NEW MARLBORO

627 Hayes Hill Rd.
Buyer: Richard Eldon-Grimm
Seller: James Platt +
Price: \$590,000
Date: 3/27/20

120 Hillside Ave.
Buyer: David Hoffman +
Seller: Amy Hoffman +
Price: \$192,500
Mortgage: \$173,050
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/16/20

218 Knight Rd.
Buyer: Roundtails NT +
Seller: Joel Rosen +
Price: \$550,000
Mortgage: \$385,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/13/20

NORTH ADAMS

22 A St.
Buyer: Charles Chandler +
Seller: Town Crest Property Group
Price: \$203,000
Mortgage: \$93,000
Lender: USAA Fed SB
Date: 3/16/20

139 Ashland St.
Buyer: Se E Oh
Seller: Red Marker NT +
Price: \$180,000
Mortgage: \$50,000
Lender: Red Marker NT
Date: 3/19/20

86 Barth St.
Buyer: Thomas Warren +
Seller: Eric Denette
Price: \$151,250
Mortgage: \$121,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/13/20

296 Church St.
Buyer: Peter Cooke +
Seller: Peter Caron
Price: \$116,000
Mortgage: \$92,800
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/9/20

710 Church St.
Buyer: Ellies Holdings LLC
Seller: Ralph Morgan Jr +
Price: \$101,000
Mortgage: \$90,000
Lender: Fat Cats LLC
Date: 3/26/20

13-15 Eagle St.
Buyer: Modestino Conte +
Seller: Whitney Suters +
Price: \$114,500
Date: 3/31/20

360 Eagle St.
Buyer: Christian Chenail
Seller: RSB Properties LLC
Price: \$85,000
Mortgage: \$112,450
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/24/20

279 Franklin St.
Buyer: Damiel Groves
Seller: Michael F & BA Dowling RET +
Price: \$146,500
Mortgage: \$117,200
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/6/20

68 Gallup St.
Buyer: Jenna St Pierre +
Seller: Sean Connor
Price: \$91,000
Mortgage: \$59,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/26/20

3 Gregory Ave.
Buyer: Wells Fargo Bank
Seller: Robert Morgan Jr +
Price: \$85,016
Date: 3/16/20

49 Maple St.
Buyer: Albert Lewis Jr T +
Seller: Charles Schlesinger +
Price: \$186,700
Date: 3/18/20

176 Meadow St.
Buyer: Gareth Williams +
Seller: John Bedard +
Price: \$217,500
Date: 3/19/20

36 Porter St.
Buyer: Christophe Brunski
Seller: Marc Newton
Price: \$225,400
Mortgage: \$180,000
Lender: Fidelity Cp Bk
Date: 3/16/20

139 Reed St.
Buyer: Ardelyne Rosario
Seller: Chad Telford-Drigo
Price: \$133,900
Mortgage: \$129,431
Lender: Evolve B&T
Date: 3/2/20

80 Rich St.
Buyer: Solid Adobe LLC
Seller: Lakeview Loan Servicing
Price: \$165,000
Date: 3/3/20

34 Royal Ave.
Buyer: John Mccarthy Sr +
Seller: Hannah Bushway
Price: \$149,484
Mortgage: \$142,010
Lender: Athol CU
Date: 3/26/20

76 Tyler St.
Buyer: Brittney Flynn
Seller: Schmidt Arthur Est +
Price: \$125,000
Mortgage: \$385,000
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/31/20

410 West Shaft Rd.
Buyer: John Meyeite
Seller: Donald Morrison
Price: \$153,608
Mortgage: \$148,992
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/4/20

131 Woodlawn Ave.
Buyer: US Bank NA Tr
Seller: Linda Trottier +
Price: \$128,350
Date: 3/25/20

OTIS

29 Bay Point
Buyer: Marc Maddalena +
Seller: Lisa Marchitto +
Price: \$165,000
Mortgage: \$157,500
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/31/20

201 Judd Rd.
Buyer: Eric Oneill +
Seller: Joseph Costa +
Price: \$260,000
Mortgage: \$208,000
Lender: LoanDepot.com
Date: 3/30/20

726 N Main Rd.
Buyer: Ronald Isaacs +
Seller: James Murtha +
Price: \$365,000
Mortgage: \$292,000
Lender: Bk of America
Date: 3/13/20

11 North St.
Buyer: Richard Randi +
Seller: Jonathan Grande +
Price: \$179,000
Date: 3/20/20

13 Pine Grove Ridge Rd.
Buyer: Gregory Hurley +
Seller: Edward Hurley +
Price: \$85,000
Date: 3/2/20

PERU

247 E Windsor Rd.
Buyer: Michael Penrod +
Seller: Adam Larson +
Price: \$240,000
Mortgage: \$204,000
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 3/13/20

PITTSFIELD

56 Alba Ave.
Buyer: Justin Rowland+
Seller: David Fields Sr
Price: \$220,000
Mortgage: \$220,000
Lender: Navy FCU
Date: 3/5/20

276 Barker Rd.
Buyer: Samuel Canfield
Seller: Marc Levasseur
Price: \$224,500
Mortgage: \$229,663
Lender: USAA Fed SB
Date: 3/26/20

179 Bradford St.
Buyer: Kaitlyn Wheeler +
Seller: Patricia Almeida
Price: \$86,500
Mortgage: \$86,500
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/18/20

112 Brighton Ave.
Buyer: Joey Mathes
Seller: Robert Hagmeir
Price: \$218,400
Mortgage: \$218,400
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 3/27/20

7 Central Berkshire Blvd.
Buyer: Greystone FCU
Seller: Harry Creamer 2nd +
Price: \$120,000
Date: 3/6/20

189 Churchill St.
Buyer: Emily Wojtkowski
Seller: Gregory Sheehan
Price: \$200,200
Mortgage: \$155,200
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/31/20

195 Churchill St.
Buyer: Nora Considine +
Seller: Gelaznik Mary Est +
Price: \$215,000
Mortgage: \$172,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/31/20

445 Churchill St.
Buyer: Michael Hearn +
Seller: Benjamin Gillers +
Price: \$379,000
Mortgage: \$303,200
Lender: TD Bank
Date: 3/24/20

81 Commonwealth Ave.
Buyer: Christopher Spaulding +
Seller: Hung Nguyen
Price: \$257,500
Mortgage: \$263,422
Lender: Wintrust Mtg
Date: 3/19/20

9 County Ct.
Buyer: Norman Soule +
Seller: Ronald Gerber +
Price: \$334,000
Mortgage: \$300,400
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/20/20

115 Crane Ave.
Buyer: Tury Cruz +
Seller: Jose Goncalves
Price: \$174,000
Mortgage: \$168,780
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/30/20

11 Dickinson Ave.
Buyer: Sydney Smith
Seller: Timothy Sherman +
Price: \$137,500
Mortgage: \$133,375
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/2/20

20 Elm St.
Buyer: Joseph Rubin FT +
Seller: Family Practice LLC
Price: \$2,100,000
Date: 3/18/20

278 Elm St.
Buyer: John Lyons
Seller: Michael Frieri
Price: \$137,000
Mortgage: \$102,750
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 3/6/20

Forest Hill Ave.
Buyer: David Houghtlin
Seller: Henrietta Perkins +
Price: \$80,000
Date: 3/31/20

26 Holmes Rd.
Buyer: Daniel Obrien
Seller: Keith Ferry +
Price: \$217,900
Date: 3/31/20

221 Holmes Rd.
Buyer: Maria Brun
Seller: James Sylvia +
Price: \$315,000
Mortgage: \$252,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/20/20

47 Kittredge Rd.
Buyer: Jacob Burke +
Seller: Lagrotteria FR Est +
Price: \$180,000
Mortgage: \$173,126
Lender: Joseph Burk
Date: 3/6/20

70 Lenox Ave.
Buyer: Chrysaetos Holdings LLC
Seller: Chester Niedzwiecki +
Price: \$108,750

Mortgage: \$105,000
Lender: Visio Financial
Date: 3/4/20

74 Lenox Ave.
Buyer: Chrysaetos Holdings LLC
Seller: Chester Niedzwiecki +
Price: \$140,000
Mortgage: \$105,000
Lender: Visio Financial
Date: 3/4/20

38 McArthur St.
Buyer: Jeremy Tenneson +
Seller: Anthony Martini
Price: \$77,000
Mortgage: \$61,900
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/27/20

16 Meleca Ave.
Buyer: Ryan Hicks
Seller: Thomas Church +
Price: \$200,000
Mortgage: \$190,000
Lender: Aldenville CU
Date: 3/27/20

33 Michael Dr.
Buyer: Carol Caird +
Seller: Lynn Wesley
Price: \$205,000
Mortgage: \$164,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/11/20

20 Michigan Ave.
Buyer: Dimitri Regalman
Seller: Raymond Noyes
Price: \$116,000
Mortgage: \$112,520
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/12/20

149 Mill St.
Buyer: Susan Gedney-Cunio
Seller: Michael Wiehl +
Price: \$82,500
Mortgage: \$74,250
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/2/20

11 Morewood Dr.
Buyer: Elizabeth Gates
Seller: Jack Rubin +
Price: \$292,000
Mortgage: \$142,000
Lender: First Tech FCU
Date: 3/6/20

102 Newell St.
Buyer: Joshua Bruchbacher +
Seller: Katie Russett
Price: \$165,000
Mortgage: \$95,000
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/18/20

199 Onota St.
Buyer: Georges Ghomsi
Seller: Lomaglio NT +
Price: \$77,500
Mortgage: \$74,913
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 3/31/20

20 Oxford St.
Buyer: David Rittenhouse 2nd +
Seller: Webster Thomas Est +
Price: \$110,500
Mortgage: \$104,975
Lender: Greystone FCU
Date: 3/13/20

240 Partridge Rd.
Buyer: Natalie Stracuzzi +
Seller: Norman Soule +
Price: \$249,900
Mortgage: \$219,900
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/20/20

746 Pecks Rd.
Buyer: Wells Fargo Bank
Seller: Joel Rawson +
Price: \$162,360
Date: 3/19/20

43 Rhode Island Ave.
Buyer: Brooke Delsoldato
Seller: Williamson Diane Est +
Price: \$144,000
Mortgage: \$141,391
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 3/2/20

76 Ridgeway Ave.
Buyer: J Kevin Berry +
Seller: William Jamross 2nd
Price: \$185,900
Date: 3/31/20

523 South St.
Buyer: 523 South Street LLC
Seller: Jon Gotterer
Price: \$170,000
Mortgage: \$136,000
Lender: Bk of America
Date: 3/9/20

222 Springside Ave.
Buyer: Jason Casey
Seller: David Casey
Price: \$108,750

Mortgage: \$108,750
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 3/13/20

299 Springside Ave.
Buyer: Marcial Barahona +
Seller: Michael Trova
Price: \$190,000
Mortgage: \$171,000
Lender: Prime Lending
Date: 3/19/20

51 Stonehenge Rd.
Buyer: James Watroba +
Seller: Patrick Chambers +
Price: \$415,000
Mortgage: \$225,000
Lender: MountainOne
Date: 3/20/20

40 Westminster St.
Buyer: Soncere Williams
Seller: Marcial Barahona +
Price: \$174,900
Mortgage: \$174

Berkshire County real estate transfers



3 Norfolk Rd.
Buyer: Nicholas Holliday
Seller: Frederick Swartz +
Price: \$445,000
Mortgage: \$300,000
Lender: USAA Fed SB
Date: 3/6/20

S Beech Plain Rd.
Buyer: Gabriella
Sciannella
Seller: Robert Arcott
Price: \$97,500
Date: 3/5/20

SAVOY

548 Loop Rd.
Buyer: Philip Turgeon
Seller: Sarah Young +
Price: \$141,500
Mortgage: \$134,425
Lender: Republic State
Date: 3/13/20

SHEFFIELD

290 Bow Wow Rd.
Buyer: Lisa Fried
Seller: Bernard Schneider
Price: \$600,000
Mortgage: \$480,000
Lender: Wells Fargo
Date: 3/11/20

135 Fiddlehead Trail
Buyer: Alfred Giardina +
Seller: ABCDS Dream
LLC
Price: \$1,825,000
Mortgage: \$1,600,000
Lender: Citibank
Date: 3/31/20

Weatogue Rd.
Buyer: Trustees of
Reservations
Seller: Wayne Haase +

Price: \$220,000
Date: 3/5/20

STOCKBRIDGE

12-A Castle Hill Rd.
Buyer: Sarah Fels
Seller: Usalliance FCU
Price: \$285,000
Mortgage: \$228,000
Lender: Pittsfield Coop
Date: 3/10/20

38-A Glendale Rd.
Buyer: CFAI Special
Assets LLC
Seller: College Degree LLC +
Price: \$500,000
Date: 3/6/20

12 Quiet Knoll Rd.
Buyer: Rodney Clark +
Seller: Wilmington Svgs
Fund Soc
Price: \$262,000
Mortgage: \$226,000
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 3/11/20

WEST STOCKBRIDGE

17 Glendale Rd.
Buyer: Alan Cahmpney +
Seller: David Jadow
Price: \$415,000
Mortgage: \$332,000
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 3/9/20

Lenox Rd. Lot 3
Buyer: Marc Gouran +
Seller: David Potter
Price: \$115,000
Date: 3/6/20

Lenox Rd. Lot 4
Buyer: Marc Gouran +

Seller: David Potter
Price: \$115,000
Date: 3/6/20

Lenox Rd. Lot 5
Buyer: Marc Gouran +
Seller: David Potter
Price: \$115,000
Date: 3/6/20

77 Pixley Hill Rd.
Buyer: Mark Sadecki +
Ulric Gelinis +Seller:
Price: \$110,000
Date: 3/2/20

17 State Line Rd.
Buyer: Joseph Delsoldato
3rd +
Seller: Darlene Delsoldato +
Price: \$100,000
Mortgage: \$240,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 3/9/20

Stone Ridge Rd.
Buyer: Nina Gallant
Seller: Stone Ridge
Associates
Price: \$425,000
Date: 3/13/20

WILLIAMSTOWN

86 Buxton Hill Rd.
Buyer: Janet Holmgren
Seller: Susan Yates-Mulder
Price: \$505,000
Date: 3/13/20

1448 Cold Spring Rd.
Buyer: Daniel Barenski +
Seller: Guy Sheperd +
Price: \$220,000
Mortgage: \$228,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 3/31/20

66 Jerome Dr.

Buyer: Lars Reinhard +
Seller: Williams College
Price: \$300,000
Mortgage: \$285,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 3/9/20

505 Main St.
Buyer: Tamarana NT +
Seller: Steven Peltier
Price: \$93,000
Date: 3/4/20

404 North St.
Buyer: Zakary Mervine +
Seller: Allison Pacelli
Price: \$330,000
Mortgage: \$313,500
Lender: MountainOne
Date: 3/16/20

290 Pine Cobble Rd.
Buyer: Gregory Phelan +
Seller: Williams College
Price: \$422,500
Date: 3/13/20

30 Sunset Dr.
Buyer: Scott Campbell +
Seller: Colleen Taylor
Price: \$400,000
Mortgage: \$380,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 3/9/20

520 White Oaks Rd.
Buyer: Timbaerau LLC
Seller: Mary Gangemi
2003 RET +
Price: \$625,000
Date: 3/18/20

WINDSOR

Berkshire Trail
Buyer: Chippery LLC
Seller: James Dicken-Crane
Price: \$350,000
Date: 3/19/20

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AGRIculture

Farmers markets shift to virtual format to keep food accessible

BY JOHN TOWNES

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

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

However, numerous initiatives are underway to continue to enable the region's farmers and producers to sell their food to consumers.

Among these efforts, farmers markets in Berkshire County's two cities, Pittsfield and North Adams, have transitioned to a virtual online format for sales and delivery.

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

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

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

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

"Our weekly markets are a vital community service, but many of the people who come to them are in vulnerable populations," said Suzy Helme, director of tourism and



Roots Rising staff and volunteers fill orders submitted by customers through the online store that has been established for the Downtown Pittsfield Farmers Market during the COVID crisis. Barrington Stage Company has donated the use of its 5,000-square-foot production facility for the program. (Roots Rising photo)

community events with the City of North Adams, which operates the North Adams Farmers Market. "So we decided to do it as an online mobile farmers market as a substitute for now."

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

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

Each market has set up its own online store. They have arranged with farmers and other vendors to sell their products on that. Payments from customers are transferred to the vendor.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The organizers of both markets rely heavily on volunteers.

Volunteer-driven effort

The North Adams Farmers Market is usually held Saturdays during the growing season in the St. Anthony Municipal Parking

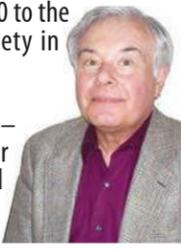


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Lot. From November through May it is held indoors at 85 Main St. on the first Saturday of the month.

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

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

The market accepts online orders beginning Monday at 3 p.m. through Wednesday, or until the market reaches its quota for orders.

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

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

In lieu of the official SNAP discount, the market uses emergency funding to provide matching discounts, primarily from a \$10,000 COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund grant. It covers half of the total purchase up to \$30 per week to EBT customers. If someone orders \$25 of food, they will pay \$12.50. If a person spends \$60, they are reimbursed for \$30.

The program is based at HiLo, a nightclub that is currently closed because of the pandemic (see related story on page 14). HiLo is donating use of the site.

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

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

Helme oversees the North Adams market as one of her responsibilities as a city official. She works with a market manager and a core of five volunteers, with a larger pool of volunteers who handle deliveries and other tasks.

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

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

Transition delayed

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

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

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

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

Its online store is accessible through www.rootsrising.org/virtualfarmersmarket with updates available on the Facebook pages Roots Rising and Pittsfield Farmers Market.

BT&C

The Business Journal For Berkshire County
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The Pittsfield market received a \$25,000 grant from the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for its food subsidies and other expenses. In addition, the Berkshire Agricultural Ventures Resiliency Fund is supporting a full-time program coordinator for the virtual market. It also received contributions and support from the Harvard Pilgrim Health Plan Foundation and other sources.

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

The market also received a federal Paycheck Protection Program loan.

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

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

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

"The Food Justice programs at the farmers market are vital at any time, because other-

wise the price of quality food is out of reach for many people," said Samowitz. "Right now, during this crisis, that's especially important because so many people have lost their jobs or are living at a reduced income."

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

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

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

Samowitz said that they have been steadily increasing their capacity.

"When we started, we were able to fill about 100 orders," she said in an early May interview. "We've been gradually increasing that each week. Now we're doing about 200 a week."

Samowitz did not predict how long they would continue operating on this basis.

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

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

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