

# *Luzerne County* **BUSINESS NEWS**

## ON THE MEND

Tornado-damaged businesses  
making their way back



Right time for ice cream • Page 6

Changes in medical marijuana • Page 5

# Recovery efforts ongoing in WB Twp.

## Questions remain about whether some business will return

By Bill O'Boyle

boboyle@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE TWP. — Recovery can mean a lot of things — a return to a normal state of health, mind or strength, for example.

As businesses continue to come back after the devastating EF-2 tornado of June 13, that definition of recovery could be aptly applied to the enormous effort that's been taking place along Mundy Street. Businesses in the Arena Hub Plaza, the Wilkes-Barre Township Commons and others nearby have been

struggling to not only reopen their doors, but to also regain their place in the community.

The area was hard hit by a tornado on June 13, doing extensive damage to buildings that housed successful businesses, leaving loyal customers longing for their return.

The stores in the Arena Hub Plaza are expected to reopen sometime in October, while those in the Wilkes-Barre Township Commons have an uncertain future — the buildings that

See RECOVERY | 3

Join Our  
Growing Team!

Over the past 10 years, our annual sales grew from \$200 million to over \$1.2 billion.

In the past five years, our staff has more than doubled . . . with more hiring planned, which is the reason we recently acquired a new headquarters (see right) scheduled to be occupied in 2018.

Clearly, opportunities exist.

At GUARD, we like to believe we are helping people develop careers with family-sustaining benefits, not just jobs. Positions encompass a diverse group of disciplines that range from business, accounting, mathematics, IT, education, marketing, and communications to nursing, the law, and more. We hire both experienced and entry-level talent . . . and are always on the lookout for qualified, motivated individuals interested in working in a fast-paced, dynamic, and FUN environment! Some benefits include: generous vacation and sick time; 401k with company match and profit sharing; tuition reimbursement; and competitive health-care.

For a current list of openings, visit our web site. If you don't see a job in your area of expertise, submit an online application anyway!



[www.guard.com/careers](http://www.guard.com/careers)

EOE

80894772



GUARD's future Headquarters in downtown Wilkes-Barre



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Many of the store signs were blown out of the Arena Hub Plaza sign along I-81 during the June 13 tornado.

**PUBLISHER**

Mike Murray  
570-704-3986  
mmurray  
@timesleader.com

**ADVERTISING DIRECTOR**

Kerry Miscavage  
570-704-3953  
kmiscavage  
@timesleader.com

**MARKETING DIRECTOR**

Renee Sager  
570-704-3976  
rsager  
@timesleader.com

**CIRCULATION DIRECTOR**

Tom Salvo  
570-704-3966  
tsalvo  
@timesleader.com

**EXECUTIVE EDITOR**

Joe Soprano  
570-991-6393  
jsoprano  
@timesleader.com

# Recovery

From page 2

housed those stores have been condemned. While the property owner, Urban Edge Realty of Paramus, N.J., has yet to announce its plans for the site, the township manager says the plaza will be rebuilt and reopened.

But aside from the reconstruction, remodeling and re-stocking of the affected businesses, much more depends on the recovery:

- The regional economy has taken a hit with so many businesses closed, or at the very least, temporarily shut down.

- The host community, Wilkes-Barre Township, will see less local services tax revenue and less mercantile tax. The exact amount won't be known until next year, but the effect is expected to be significant.

- How will the region's retail landscape look when the dust of recovery finally settles? What stores will return? Which ones will no longer exist, despite their pre-tornado popularity?

## A retail re-build

Larry Newman, executive director of the Diamond City partnership in Wilkes-Barre, said because it's only been one month since the tornado hit the Mundy Street shopping area, it's not surprising that recovery continues to be a work in progress. He said what makes the tornado's destruction so distinctive is the way that the destruction followed

## Arena Hub Plaza

Exclusively developed and managed by TFP Limited, Arena Hub Plaza is anchored by Lowe's Improvement Warehouse. Arena Hub features some of the industry's leading retailers including: Ulta, Five Below, Michaels, Dick's Sporting Goods, TJ Maxx, Carter's, Osh Kosh Bigosh, Staples, Best Buy, Shoe Dept., Banana Republic Factory Store, Old Navy, Bed Bath & Beyond, PetSmart, Barnes & Noble, Eddie Bauer Outlet, Mens Wearhouse, Avenue, Pier 1 Imports, Olive Garden, and Outback Steakhouse.

## W-B Township Commons

Hardest hit was the building that housed Panera Bread, Tovan & Co., America's Best Contacts & Eyeglasses, LA Nails, Sneaker King, GameStop and Famous Footwear. Other buildings in the Commons are Smokey Bones, Petco, The Dress Barn, Marshall's, Bob's Discount Furniture, Catherine's and Target.

such a narrow path.

"Along Mundy Street, you see obliterated commercial properties adjoining other businesses that were essentially undamaged and were able to reopen as soon as emergency responders gave the all clear," Newman said. "That's a very different story from, say, the mass destruction of the 1972 flood. In Downtown Wilkes-Barre one month after Agnes, the only stores that had managed to reopen were holding 'disaster sales' to dispose of damaged merchandise; the Boston Store could only use its upper floors; and every restaurant in downtown remained closed."

So, Newman said, while there's no question that the tornado's destruction disrupted habitual retail patterns, those patterns seem to have quickly returned. He said while several affected businesses will not be reopening, many others are working hard to do so, and some have already reopened in temporary space.

"Now, buildings need to be rebuilt and there are businesses that unfor-

tunately will not return, but the larger pattern is one of recovery," Newman said. "The tornado was shockingly destructive, but thankfully — and most importantly — there was no loss of life, and I don't believe that it will meaningfully affect the shape of local retailing in the long run."

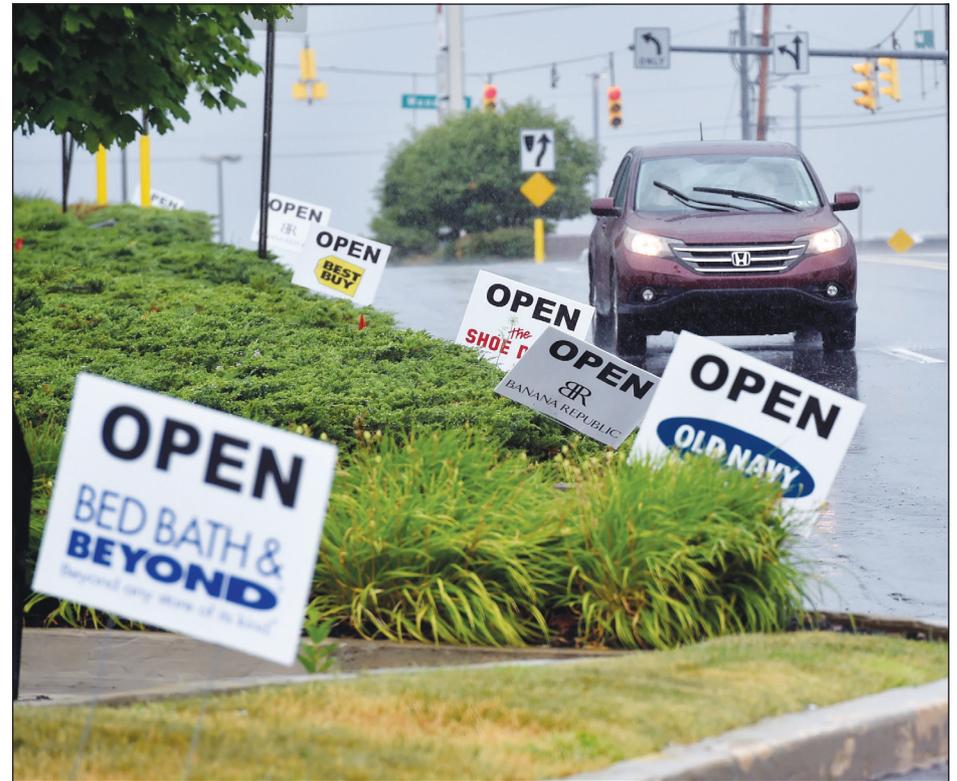
Instead, Newman said long-term change to the local retail landscape will continue to come from the same factors — such as the growth of e-commerce — that had been driving change in that sector prior to the June tornado.

## Township hit hard

Michael Reavitt, Wilkes-Barre Township manager, said several of the businesses in the Wilkes-Barre Township Commons plaza are moving to temporary space. Reavitt would not say where those businesses are relocating to, but said they would be in "nearby space."

Reavitt said Ashley Furniture and U-Haul will be rebuilding, and Urban Edge Properties will rebuild the plaza that

See RECOVERY | 4



Signs line Tambur Boulevard at the Arena Hub Plaza for each of the stores that remain open since the June 13 tornado.

Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

# HELPING MAKE YOUR MARK



At Landmark Community Bank, we take great pride in supporting that sense of belonging and helping you secure a special place in your community. With a strong product selection, we are ready to help you open a business, buy a home, save for your children's education, and enjoy retirement to its fullest. Stop at your local branch to learn more about our full range of services.

**LANDMARK COMMUNITY BANK IS PROUD TO PROVIDE EXCEPTIONAL PERSONAL ATTENTION, ALONG WITH A VARIETY OF COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL FINANCIAL PRODUCTS.**

We enjoy being your neighbor. We are working hard to be your bank of choice.



**PITTSFORD**  
2 S. MAIN ST.  
(570) 602-4522

**FORTY FORT**  
1320 WYOMING AVE.  
(570) 714-8036

**SCRANTON**  
3016 PITTSTON AVE.  
(570) 558-9730

**HAZLETON**  
383 S. POPLAR ST.  
(570) 501-7001

**NEW HAZLE TWP.**  
781 AIRPORT RD.  
(570) 497-8841

[LCBBank.com](http://LCBBank.com)



## Recovery

From page 3

occupied Panera Bread and several other stores. Urban Edge officials would not comment on the status of their plans for the plaza.

But despite the promise of a return for those businesses, the extended loss of revenue from the closed businesses will have a significant impact on the township's finances.

Reavitt said the township collects a local services tax (LST) of \$1 per week per employees working in the township, and the mercantile tax, which is based on sales, is expected to be less. Reavitt said the township

has already some effects of the reduction in LST revenue.

"But how much of that is related to the tornado, we can't say," Reavitt said. "There have been recent layoffs at Lord & Taylor which accounts for a lot of that lost revenue."

Reavitt said the mercantile tax is not due until April 2019.

"All of that will have an impact on our budget," Reavitt said. "But considering everything that happened here, it's remarkable how all the communities came together."

Reavitt said some 30 different municipalities sent first responders to the township when the tornado hit.

The township is most

grateful for all the help offered during a difficult time," Revitt said.

### Kurlancheek mulling options

Ronnie Kurlancheek, owner of Kurlancheek's Furniture, said she is in a temporary location for now and is deciding what her next move will be.

Kurlancheek, 67, said she has opened a temporary location in the Gateway Shopping Center in Edwardsville, where the Gateway Cinema once stood. She said she has a small showroom for now.

"Right now, I am looking into rebuilding on the (Mundy Street) site or relocating," Kurlancheek said. "I'm exploring both options."

Kurlancheek said



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

**The Wilkes-Barre Township Commons plaza remains closed and no work is being done. The buildings have been condemned and will be demolished. The developer has not announced plans for the site.**

she owns the property on Mundy Street, but rebuilding would take a long time.

"Mundy Street has been a wonderful location," she said. "But building is a long-term goal. If I could find a suitable location now, we could re-open a lot quicker."

Kurlancheek's building was destroyed by the tornado. She had been at that location for five years, taking over the former Kaplan's Furniture building.

Kurlancheek said she couldn't believe the damage that the tornado did to her building and others, like U-Haul.

"It was just unbelievable to see it," Kurlancheek said. "My employees gave me a pair of ruby slippers, like the ones from the Wizard of Oz."

Kurlancheek said most of her 15 employees are still working for her and she said she had business interruption insurance that helped employees out as well.

### Coming back

Most of the stores in the tornado-damaged Arena Hub Plaza will reopen before the holidays, but there is no definitive word yet on the future of the adjacent Wilkes-Barre Township Commons.

Robert Tamburro, trustee/general manager of TFP Limited, owner of the property, said Friday he expects the stores in the Arena Hub Plaza to be back in business by "early fourth quarter" — October, November, December.

"That is our goal," Tamburro said.

There have been no issues with any of his tenants affected by the EF2 tornado that struck June 13.

"They all are coming back," he said. "There is no question or debate on that."

As a result of the storm, eight buildings were condemned and 14 were listed as unsafe.

The stores in the Arena Hub Plaza that were forced to close due to tornado damage are:

Barnes & Noble, Dick's Sporting Goods, TJ Maxx, Staples, Carter's, OshKosh, Pet Smart, Eddie Bauer Outlet and Men's Wearhouse.

Of them, Tamburro said Men's Wearhouse is closest to reopening.

Officials with Barnes & Noble have said their store is slated to re-open before Thanksgiving. The bookseller will open a pop-up store in the East End Centre in September.

At Wilkes-Barre Township Commons nearby, buildings that were severely damaged and condemned have yet to be demolished. The owner of the property is Urban Edge Properties of Paramus, N.J.

Hardest hit was the building that housed Panera Bread, Tovan & Co., America's Best Contacts & Eyeglasses, LA Nails, Sneaker King, GameStop and Famous Footwear.

Robert Minutoli, executive vice president and chief financial officer at Urban Edge, declined to comment on the status of the Wilkes-Barre Township Commons or offer a status report on whether any of the businesses affected by the tornado would return.

Other buildings in the Commons are Smokey Bones, Petco, The Dress Barn, Marshall's, Bob's Discount Furniture, Catherine's and Target. They were largely spared damage and reopened within days.

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



### FEATURING:

- HOME CREST & OMEGA CABINETS
- FORMICA & WILSON ART PRODUCTS
- BATHROOM & ENTERTAINMENT CABINETS
- AFFORDABLE INSTALLATIONS
- SOLID SURFACE COUNTERTOPS
- GRANITE AND QUARTZ COUNTERTOPS

### HOURS:

MONDAY TO THURSDAY 9-5 • FRIDAY AND SATURDAY 9-1  
SUNDAY CLOSED • OTHER HOURS BY APPOINTMENT

107 WEST END ROAD, HANOVER TWP., PA 18706

570-825-6956 • WWW.MORRISKITCHENSLLC.COM

EMAIL: MORRISKITCHENSLLC@GMAIL.COM



80896477

# Changes in state's medical marijuana program

## Legalization of dry leaf among new factors affecting local participants

By Jerry Lynott  
jlynott@timesleader.com

After a few months dispensing medical marijuana, Abbe Kruger can cross off some of the unknowns and plan ahead.

The CEO of the Justice Grown Pennsylvania in Edwardsville knows what's selling, who's buying and why they're using since the dispensary opened in February.

"The largest quantity is vape pens," Kruger said of the most popular selling item that vaporizes marijuana processed into oil for inhalation.

At the July 23 "Medical Marijuana Mondays" outreach program at Canteen Park in Kingston that Kruger has been hosting, she filled in some of the blanks. Half of the customers are over the age of 50, she said. The makeup is pretty even between male and female. They're treating conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, Parkinson's Disease, cancer and pain. And they're paying cash because health insurance doesn't cover medical marijuana.

The federal government has enforcement powers for the possession and use of marijuana that's still designated as a controlled substance. But so far it's agreed not to prosecute participants

in medical marijuana programs.

"We've been seeing a lot autism and epilepsy" in children, Kruger added.

All are qualifying conditions listed in Pennsylvania's Medical Marijuana Program signed into law by Gov. Tom Wolf in April 2016. It's a work in progress, responding to the growing demand from residents for products that provide legal relief previously unavailable.

"What is new to the program is dry leaf," Kruger said. "Dry leaf is coming."

It'll be here soon and that will likely affect sales at the Justice Grown's dispensary in the Gateway Shopping Center and the two others it's allowed to operate with its state-issued permit.

"We're about to open up in Dickson City and Bethlehem," Kruger said.

The Dickson City dispensary should be open in October and Bethlehem will follow, she said.

The dry leaf or flower of the plant must be vaporized and not smoked, according to the program's rules. Its availability will place more product in the dispensaries, cut down the delivery time and make it more affordable, Gov. Wolf noted after



Abbe Kruger, CEO of Justice Grown Pennsylvania, right, speaks to a group interested in learning about medical marijuana in Kingston earlier this month.

Tony Callaio file photo | For Times Leader

state Secretary of Health Rachel Levine in April said she would implement recommended changes to the program.

"Typically it's going to cost less," said Allbritton Robbins, chief marketing officer of Standard Farms LLC in White Haven, the only licensed grower and processor in Luzerne County. There's less processing of the dry leaf compared to turning the

plant into an oil for use in a vape pen, Robbins said.

Standard Farms and other companies with grower/processor permits are producing pills, oils, tinctures, topical ointments and liquids that contain the chemical compounds of tetrahydrocannabinol or THC and cannabidiol or CBD. THC produces psychoactive or mind

altering effects. CBD, on the other hand, is non-psychoactive.

The addition of dry leaf could expand the program's reach, a possibility Robbins supported.

"The program is an opportunity for people of Pennsylvania to take back control of their healthcare," Robbins said.

The state issued a permit to Columbia Care

Pennsylvania LLC to establish a dispensary in the county. The company received approval from the Wilkes-Bare Zoning Hearing Board to set up shop on Kidder Street. It is still under construction. The company opened a dispensary in Scranton on Keyser Avenue in April.

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

# The right time for ice cream shops

## Cool treats can be big business in the summer

By Mary Therese Biebel | mbiebel@timesleader.com



Maureen's Cones and More is a fixture on Mill Street in West Nanticoke, also known as Route 29.

Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

WEST NANTICOKE — She could have ordered a s'mores sundae with marshmallow, crushed graham crackers and chocolate syrup, reminiscent of an evening around the campfire.

Or a Hawaiian sundae loaded with coconut, pineapples and cherries. Or even a "Dirty Sundae" decorated with Gummi Worms and cocoa powder.

But, no, when 15-year-old Savanna Ebenoe, of Shavertown, came to Maureen's Cones & More along Route 29 to help her friend Bella Napersky, of Hunlock Creek, celebrate her recent 18th birthday, she ordered something a little more basic.

"It's vanilla," Ebenoe said with a giggle, sounding almost sorry, as if she were disappointing a reporter who was out on the ice cream beat. "Just vanilla."

There's no need to apologize for being a fan of basic, unadorned, pure vanilla ice cream. Lots of people would say that's the best.

But as you visit your favorite ice cream stands this summer, be prepared for a dizzying area of possibilities.

"I like the flavor of the week, tangerine," said Maureen Martin, of Wilkes-Barre, explaining she would have

chosen that flavor of soft ice cream at Curley Creme on River Street in Plains Township even if it hadn't been flavor of the week.

"I love the peanut butter," said Molly Pietrzak, of Wilkes-Barre, also a customer at Curley Creme, as she watched her husband, Matthew, feed a strawberry cone to the couple's golden retriever, Cooper.

"We bring him here about once a week," said Matthew Pietrzak.

Visiting an ice cream stand can be more than just a place to satisfy your sweet tooth.

It's also a place to meet friends, Martin said, noting how many people flock to the stands.



It's hard to resist some hard ice cream in a waffle cone, especially when that cone has been dipped in chocolate. Here, Meagan Mootz offers a serving of peanut butter explosion ice cream at The Creamery at Michael Mootz Candies in Hanover Township.

couple's golden retriever, Cooper.

"We bring him here about once a week," said Matthew Pietrzak.

Visiting an ice cream stand can be more than just a place to satisfy your sweet tooth.

It's also a place to meet friends, Martin said, noting how many people flock to the stands.

See ICE CREAM | 7



The Creamery at Michael Mootz Candies in Hanover Township.

Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

## Ice Cream

From page 6

Sometimes the physical surroundings are an added treat, said Margie Eastwood, of Hunlock Creek, explaining that she likes to bring her grandchildren to Maureen's Cones & More, where they can play near picnic tables set up with a view of the creek that flows behind the building.

Other ice cream shops can boast there are local ingredients in their recipes.

At Kevin and Kacy's Ice Cream Shoppe in Wilkes-Barre's Midtown Village, for example, the milk comes from the Manning Family Dairy in Dalton, Lackawanna County.

Meanwhile, at the Creamery at

Michael Mootz Candies on the San Souci Parkway in Hanover Township, Michael Mootz's own candies make their way into the ice cream.

"Our co-packer takes our own fudge and chocolate-covered pretzels and puts it into the ice cream," Meagan Mootz explained on a recent Wednesday afternoon, just as Paula Blockus, of Nanticoke, was about to satisfy her chocolate craving.

"I'm a chocolate person," Blockus said with a laugh, noting the chocolate ice cream treat she'd just purchased was filled with Oreos, fudge and tiny M&Ms.

"It's delicious," she said with a smile.

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



Savanna Eneboe of Shavertown, Bella Napersky of Hunlock Creek, Haley Hackling of Wapwallopen, Kelsey Butco of Harveys Lake and Frye Kaufman of Wapwallopen celebrate Bella's 18th birthday with ice cream at Maureen's Cones and More in West Nanticoke.



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

**John Loyack, King's College vice president of business affairs, points to renderings of the Springbrook Water Co. building after renovations, expected to be done early next year. It is one of three historic buildings in downtown Wilkes-Barre King's is re-purposing.**



Bill Tartuis | For Times Leader

**Wilkes University President Patrick Leahy shows the renovations made to the Stark Learning Center courtyard.**

# Colleges continue to reshap downtown WB

**By Mark Guydish**

mguydish@timesleader.com

**WILKES-BARRE —** The signs are mostly subtle, the implications profound: A fence outside the old church on North Street near Franklin Street, trailers parked at the old Springbrook Water Co. building on Franklin Street, missing shrubbery outside old buildings along River or Franklin Streets.

Wilkes University and King's College continue to dramatically revitalize and revamp Wilkes-Barre's downtown, with big projects underway this summer.

Wilkes President Patrick Leahy begins a quick tour of campus upgrades by gesturing to the missing shrubs outside



Bill Tartuis | For Times Leader

**Wilkes University President Patrick Leahy oversees campus renovations from the new south entrance to Stark Learning Center.**

Weckesser Hall, home to his office. It's one of eight or so venerable buildings getting a modest redo, with overgrown landscaping flora yanked, the facades scrubbed clean, and new shrubbery poised for planting that

will show off the work.

He beams with pride upon arriving at the small courtyard in the middle of the Stark Learning Center, itself getting a major overhaul to house state-of-the-art labs for an expanded and updated



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

**The Kings College Springbrook building. Renovations began a few weeks ago.**

engineering program. The courtyard makeover is so new the seams are still visible where one roll of sod abuts the next.

"Nobody used to use this space," he offers. "Now it's so inviting."

A persistent pitch-

man for Wilkes' many upgrades, Leahy has not been shy touting the \$100 million being spent to renovate much of the campus, including gray walkway pavers and new lighting to unify the disparate urban space.

He slipped through the work area on the south side of Stark without a hard hat to show off the new "south gateway" connecting it to the Henry Student center, then went to a small room with three glass walls in the Cohen Science Center that overlooks the entire Fenner quadrangle east of Stark.

Here his pause spoke volumes, as he stared out at extensive work underway to reshape the space into two large ovals surrounding grass, flagpoles in the center, and at the far end the statue of namesake Isaac Barre, made more clearly visible by the removal of old trees, some of which will be replaced to set it off

See COLLEGES | 9

## Colleges

From page 8

without hiding it again.

His characteristic pride in how the school is helping reinvent downtown bubbled up.

“I can’t tell you how enthusiastic I am.”

A few blocks away, in a first floor corner office along River Street, John Loyack rattles off big changes at King’s College as well.

“We bought the Springbrook building about two and a half years ago and we’re just starting work now,” he said, which may sound like a long time until you consider the Franklin Street property sat idle for some 15 years. “It’s set to be completed around February or March next year.”

Work on the historic Memorial Presbyterian Church on North Street began just a few weeks ago, he adds, with an expected completion around the same time.

Springbrook will house the school’s expanded engineering programs. The church, appropriately, will become the new chapel and campus ministry center. The current chapel and ministry offices will likely be melded with the library and student center to create a “learning commons.”

Another major project — the former Times Leader building on North Main Street — is in relative infancy. Bought for about \$700,000 when the Times Leader consolidated operations in the press building a few



The historic Memorial Presbyterian Church on North Street, where King’s College recently began renovations

Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

blocks away, the immediate concern is environmental remediation, Loyack said. Predictably, the venerable building that once housed a press in the basement has some lead and asbestos to be removed.

Use of the Times Leader building is still being debated, though Loyack said odds are good it will become additional space for the expanding allied health programs. The former Ramada Hotel across the street was bought and renovated for those programs several years ago, but is already



Bill Tarutis | For Times Leader

Renovations continue on the Fenner Quadrangle on the Wilkes University campus.

“at capacity.”

Another project still in the earliest stages:

streetscaping similar to what Wilkes has been doing, with new

sidewalks, lighting and landscaping along North Main, Franklin and River streets to unify the campus. King’s is looking for \$3 million state financial aid for that idea. If that plan comes through, Loyack said he expects King’s will spend a total of about \$23 million on the three buildings and the street project.

There’s a theme that runs through these decisions. Whenever possible, Loyack said, King’s prefers to buy buildings that are structurally sound outside yet flexible to redo inside.

The historic facades are refreshed while the insides are dramatically re-purposed.

“That allows us to really grow without changing the footprint of the downtown,” he said.

Both he and Leahy tout the boon such expansions offer the city when old space finds new meaning: More faculty, more students, more business and more money being spent downtown.

Reach Mark Guydish at 570-991-6112 or on Twitter @TLMarkGuydish

## Midtown Village plays host to variety of shops



Aimee Dilger file photo | Times Leader

Ruth Smith runs One Stop Pop Shop in Midtown Village in Wilkes-Barre. The shop is one of several niche retailers that call the area home.

# Niche retailers find a home

By Patrick Kernan  
pkernan@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — With numerous changes throughout the years, one thing does remain consistent about the Midtown Village in downtown Wilkes-Barre: its unique offerings to the downtown shopping district.

Located at 41 S. Main St., the complex is a series of buildings situated around an open courtyard. The village is host to a small handful of shops, including restaurants, a gift shop and specialty ice cream and candy stores.

JoAnne Zarick, 55, of Olyphant, is the new owner of one of the more long-standing store

fronts in the village, the Bee Hive Gift Shop.

According to Zarick, the village offers a unique smattering of things to purchase.

“I think it’s a nice location,” she said. “We all have our own little niche. I think everyone offers something different.”

That’s true enough of her own store. Zarick said the gift shop aims to offer gifts for every person you might be shopping for. Carrying everything from sports memorabilia to bridal gifts, toys for younger children and jewelry, it’s clear how her shop alone fits the “unique” description.



Sports items on a shelf for sale at the Bee Hive Gift Shop in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

See MIDTOWN | 11

Sean McKeag | Times Leader

## Midtown

From page 10

In February, Zarick took the store over from Patty Leighton, the store's original owner and wife of former Wilkes-Barre mayor Tom Leighton. Zarick had been one of Leighton's employee's for a time before taking over, and said she just loved the store. Now, she said she's slowly working on making it her own.

"It's slow but sure. There are new product lines we'll be introducing, but I also want to keep what people love about the store," she said.

According to Zarick, the store's location is a large part of its continuing success, saying that the store is at its busiest when downtown employees stop in during their lunch break.

Further down the Midtown Village lane, a newer store is just starting to get its footing.

Kevin and Kacy's Ice Cream Shoppe opened up in the village in December. Selling Manning's ice cream and milk, the shop is the brick-and-mortar extension of a popular area ice cream trailer.

Store manager Kayla Seymour, 22, said similarly to Zarick that the location is a blessing.

"It's nice because we're close to a local dance studio and close to the YMCA. And we're right by the movies too," Seymour said, saying she frequently sees people come into the store after those activities.

The recent heat wave has also been a help, she



Sean McKeag | Times Leader

Jewelry is featured as some of the items for sale at the Bee Hive Gift Shop in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

**"I think it's a nice location. We all have our own little niche. I think everyone offers something different."**

**JoAnne Zarick**

Owner of the Bee Hive Gift Shop

said.

"It's been leading more people to find us," she said with a laugh.

Seymour said the store is unique by offering "farm fresh" dairy in downtown. She also added it's a family friendly store, with toys and coloring books to keep the kids happy.

Besides these stores, Midtown Village is also home to several restaurants, including Subway,

Thai Thai and Dino's Pizza Express, along with a gourmet candy, soda and popcorn shop called the One Stop Pop Shop.

Last Christmas, Midtown Village was also the temporary home to a series of Holiday Pop-Up Shops. Twelve area retailers set up in a vacant storefront in the village, allowing the retailers to "test-drive" possible downtown storefront locations.



Items on sale at the Bee Hive Gift Shop in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

# Business booming at Four Blooms

## Drums restaurant occupies former Stagecoach Inn site

By Michael Reich  
mreich@timesleader.com

**DRUMS** — A family famous for its greenhouses is now putting down roots in the restaurant world.

Lori van Hoekelen made her name in business over the last 30 years as co-founder of van Hoekelen Greenhouses near McAdoo, which grows and distributes many types of plants and flowers and has been ranked among the top 100 growers in the U.S.

But van Hoekelen is now branching out into the world of upscale dining with her Four Blooms restaurant along Route 309 in Drums, only a few miles north of Hazleton and a quick jaunt down Interstate 81 from the Wyoming Valley. (The parking lot is exactly 1.5 miles from the Dorrance interchange.)

Four Blooms occupies the building that was once home to the Stagecoach Inn, which opened in 1947 and operated well into the 2000s.

The old inn was gutted when van Hoekelen bought the place.

"I don't think I would know it was the same building. They really updated it," said bar manager and Hazleton-area native Jessica Benjamin.



The entrance to Four Blooms' expansive patio area, which features its own bar, entertainment and a separate menu that reflects a 'more casual vibe,' says bar manager Jessica Benjamin. But anything served inside could be made for outside dining as well.

After the extensive renovations, the eatery opened as Theodora's with chef Drew Wandishin of Top of the 80s fame before closing in the spring of 2017.

Early last fall, the restaurant was re-branded as Four Blooms.

Among the changes include a new executive chef, Tim Wooster of upstate New York, who is committed to introducing the area to dishes you would be hard-pressed to find anywhere

else.

For instance, the menu boasts seared scallops with a white chocolate-tahini parsnip puree. Another unique seafood dish: butter and lemon poached monkfish, or what they call a "poor man's lobster," served with a sweet potato puree and a lemon crema.

But there are plenty of everyman options as well.

"You can come here and get a really good

cheeseburger. Or you could come here and get a really good steak and crab," said Benjamin.

Four Blooms also stands out from the crowd thanks to its on-site smoker, allowing Wooster and his staff to offer smoked ribs, a smoked pork belly, a smoked brisket sandwich with fried green tomatoes and more.

Outside on the expansive patio, complete with its own bar and entertainment schedule,

the menu reflects a "little more casual vibe," says Benjamin. You could order sharables that include nachos, a hummus plate and loaded chips. But even though the patio has a separate menu, everything available inside can be made for outside dining as well.

The outdoor space should be open through October, according to Benjamin, and maybe even later if the weather cooperates.

### 'Word of mouth'

The logo for the restaurant tells its own story. It includes four tulips, an obvious homage to the owner's greenhouse background, and a separate fifth tulip with a cross in its stem. The four tulips growing together represent the family's four children, the fifth separate tulip with the cross is in memory of a son who was lost.

Four Blooms, which also has plenty of room available to host holiday parties, family functions and bridal showers, is already popular but seems to be getting even busier as people realize the site is back in operation.

"A lot of people walk in the door and say 'We didn't even know you reopened,'" Benjamin explains. "Word of mouth spreads and we're getting more people and hopefully that continues."

The restaurant employs a maximum of about 32 people during the summer season, says general manager Suzie Scarcella.

Closed Mondays and Tuesdays, Four Blooms is open 5-10 p.m. Wednesday, 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, and 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday.

Michael Reich | Times Leader