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PENN’S NORTHEAST

Working together to attract quality employers

By John Augustine
President/CEO Penn’s Northeast

PITTSTON — For many years our communities have tried to attract companies to their backyard. Often times this was done as individual cities or counties.

Today, Penn’s Northeast works with our partners and members to bring all of the assets of these communities together to improve our quality of life and bring good jobs to Northeastern Pennsylvania.

A lot to the table

• A talent pipeline fueled by 19 different higher education institutions that together account for over 40,000 undergraduate and graduate college students.
• Ample opportunities for creative partnerships with NEPA’s colleges, universities, and K-12 educational systems.
• A labor force renowned for its productivity.
• Superb proximity to New York City, New England and other major markets.
• A location adjoining the world’s second-largest natural gas resource.
• A low cost of doing business, combined with a marvelous quality of life built around immediate access to the great outdoors.

Regional economic vision

In the late 1990s, we realized that the ground was giving way under the manufacturing and production jobs dominating our community. We had to figure out how to foster the growth of the knowledge economy in Northeastern Pennsylvania — but we had to start from scratch.

So, we created a new series of partnerships — between competing colleges and universities, between rival communities, between industry and academia — and we began to build a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem from the ground up.

Today:

• A regional network of nine incubators provides vital support to the region’s entrepreneurs and early-stage firms.
• One of the region’s incubators, the Scranton Enterprise Center has spawned 20 start-up companies that have created 175 jobs, while a one-time SEC anchor tenant, TMG, has become Lackawanna County’s largest office employer with more than 1,200 workers.

• Similarly, one of the original tenants of the Innovation Center at Wilkes-Barre, search-engine-marketing firm Pepperjam, grew from a 2-person start-up to a global company which today employs more than 120 people in Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

• A series of coordi-
Pittston — Northeastern Pennsylvania is comprised of seven counties with a total population of 1,028,926. The region's urban center is the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton Metropolitan Statistical Area, with a population of 558,166.

Our region is increasingly diverse: Northeastern Pennsylvania's minority population has grown from 5.9 percent of the total in 2000 to almost 15 percent today.

Many of our residents are descended from immigrants who came here to build better lives for themselves and their families. Now, our newest residents are moving here because Northeastern Pennsylvania offers them the same opportunities today.

We're confident that, with the right employment mix, Northeastern Pennsylvania has the ability to attract and retain strong technical talent.

We've already built the human capital pipeline — today, more than 40,000 graduate and undergraduate students are enrolled at our 19 area colleges and universities.

Our seven counties have a total labor force of 494,900, with 3.2 percent of all jobs within the region (11,239 people) employed in the professional, scientific, and technical services sector, and another 6,388 people (1.8 percent of total) working in the information sector.

From 2013 to 2015, 315 new tech jobs were added within the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton metro area, representing a compound average growth rate of 9.4 percent from 2013 to 2015.

In order to enhance the technical skills of our region's existing workforce Northeastern Pennsylvania has established several workforce development programs.

One example is “Skills in Scranton,” the Greater Scranton Chamber’s Business Education Partnership, which uses industry-specific committees, educator in the workplace forums; an annual high school principals’ forum; employer-driven curriculum counsel; and coordination of regular student visits to work-sites and industry expert lectures in classrooms to facilitate career awareness, internships, and apprenticeships for hundreds of area students and dozens of employers.

We offer affordability. Your dollar goes much further in Northeastern Pennsylvania. We offer a dramatically lower cost of living compared to similarly large and mid-sized cities in other parts of the country.

In 2015, the Economic Policy Institute reported that the cost of living in the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton metro area was approximately 95 percent of the U.S. average.

Housing prices comprise a large portion of those cost savings; in August 2017, Zillow reported that the MSA's
We offer access
Northeastern Pennsylvania is only a two-hour drive from both New York City and Philadelphia. We’re within 600 miles of 50 percent of the nation’s population and 80 percent of the U.S. population can be reached within two days or less. We are the Northeast’s interstate hub — the place where Interstates 80, 81, 84, and 476 meet, accessing 80 million consumers within an overnight drive.

• 55 percent of the approximately 351,000 workers within Northeastern Pennsylvania’s seven counties travel fewer than 10 miles to work each day.
• Another 22 percent commute between 10 and 24 miles.
• The remaining 23 percent commute greater than 25 miles on a daily basis. In fact, the average NEPA resident spends only 21 minutes commuting to work.

Additionally, our region’s highway network provides easy access to the substantial employment pools in the adjoining New York/New Jersey, Greater Philadelphia, Lehigh Valley, and Binghamton metro areas.

We offer productivity
Northeastern Pennsylvania possesses real economic strength — the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton metropolitan area alone represents $23,068,000,000 in annual economic output.

However, we also have plenty of room to grow — the three urbanized counties along the region’s Interstate 81 corridor are home to 300,000 fewer residents than at their peak.

Put another way, our region’s urban centers currently possess the infrastructure to accommodate a population twice the number that’s here today.

We offer resiliency/sustainability
Northeastern Pennsylvania is a resilient and sustainable region. We’re a place with a very low risk of disruption from natural disaster — whether it’s earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, droughts, or rising oceans. We possess an abundance of fresh water, a surplus of available land, and a robust transportation and telecommunication infrastructure with the capacity to support growth.

We offer a unique combination — we adjoin the Northeast megalopolis, but we’re just far enough away not to be subject to our neighbors’ threat profile, overcrowded highways, and extreme housing prices.

We offer superb quality of life in a high-quality place
Northeastern Pennsylvania offers a wealth of walkable neighborhoods, beautiful historic buildings, cultural institutions, parks, and sporting opportunities that enrich the lives of our region’s residents.

Our remarkably low cost of living is combined with an amazing quality of life: beautiful lakes, rivers, and forests; strong anchor institutions, our abundant historic architecture and unparalleled access to the natural landscape — in order to support the ongoing efforts to strengthen our communities through economic and entrepreneurial development, and to ensure that our residents’ hard work will result in better lives for themselves and their families.
Driving millions in growth easy as ABCs

WILKES-BARRE — Through the combined efforts of our ABCs — Academia, Business and Community — a coalition of community and business leaders have created an environment that is driving millions of dollars in new capital investment and creating thousands of new jobs for NEPA and the Greater Wilkes-Barre region.

We have added millions of square feet of business space to our inventory to both grow legacy businesses and attract new businesses. And in turn, we are seeing growth in jobs and in wages to our labor force.

Our present unemployment rate is at an all-time low. It is down more than five basis points in five years. That’s cut more than half from the 11 percent highs we saw in 2013 to the 4.5 percent we are seeing today in Luzerne County. It is fueled by a broad range of businesses who find this area to be a great place to work and to live. The result is that we have developed a varied, vibrant and more stable economy through a diversification of industrial segments and the size and scope of our local businesses.

Diversification is creating centers of excellence. The downtown is becoming a strong innovation hub utilizing the intellectual capital of our colleges and universities and pairing it with the strong nascent entrepreneurial young professionals that want to make the downtown their chosen place of business. In turn we have powered our entrepreneurs by incubating innovation through Wilkes Barre Connect; Wilkes University’s Allan P. Kirby Enterprise Center, Small Business Development Center, Family Business Alliance, Sidhu School of Business; The Institute of Public Policy and Economic Research; Invent Penn State; the THINK Center; and the McGowan School of Business at King’s. All of these along with the Diamond City Partnership, Ben Franklin Technology Partners and CareerLink have rallied together to make our downtown an Innovation Center of Excellence.

We also have strong legacy businesses with companies like Berkshire Hathaway Guard, Benco Dental, Borton Lawson, Colours, Internetro, Martz, McCarthy Tire, Medico, Mercer, Mountain Productions, Pride Mobility and Trion interspersed through the Wyoming Valley. Berkshire Hathaway Guard, which recently committed to a new downtown headquarters at 39 Public Square, has doubled its revenues while increasing its local workforce by 25 percent.

Our biggest industry sector is health care which employs close to 50,000 professionals and represents 14 percent of the region’s total gross domestic product. It is also the region’s economic driver with health care spending translating to more than 14 percent of the region’s total gross domestic product. It is also the region’s economic driver with health care spending translating to more than 14 percent of the region’s total gross domestic product.

We offer a chance to reinvent a region

We believe that growing existing companies and locating new quality employers can serve as a catalyst for the next phase of Northeastern Pennsylvania’s economic reinvention.

As a purely economic proposition, our region’s human capital, its wealth of educational institutions, its unparalleled location, and its existing infrastructure represent enormous latent value. We’ve already begun the job of unlocking that value.

Let Penn’s Northeast be your easy button for economic development in Northeastern PA. Visit www.pennsnortheast.com to see how we can help your company.

John L Augustine III is President/CEO at Penn’s Northeast.

Strategy

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low-impact recreational activities. Just in the four Pocono Mountain counties alone, visitation translates to more than 9.1 million overnight trips and 15.9 million day trips annually.

For fans of spectator sports, NEPA offers NASCAR racing at the Pocono International Raceway; professional minor-league baseball (the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Rail Riders, the Triple-A affiliate of the New York Yankees, plays at PNC Field in Moosic); and professional minor-league hockey (home ice for the Wilkes-Barre Scranton Penguins, the AHL affiliate of the Pittsburgh Penguins, is the Mohegan Sun Arena in Wilkes-Barre).

NEPA communities such as Jim Thorpe and Stroudsburg helped to pioneer Pennsylvania’s Main Street revitalization efforts, reviving once-dormant downtowns with new economic activity. Today, downtown revitalization is transforming the region’s largest cities, as Carbondale, Hazleton, Pittston, Pottsville, Scranton, and Wilkes-Barre are working to create downtowns that are points of pride for their communities, with new activity centers and amenities that attract workers, residents, and visitors.

The results have been startling. For example, during the past five years, the number of graduates residing in Downtown Wilkes-Barre has doubled, while 32 percent of wage-earning downtown residents now walk to work — compared to 3 percent in Luzerne County.

The relationship between healthy, walkable mixed-use neighborhoods and the growth of the knowledge economy has been embraced in Wilkes-Barre’s center city — it holds more than two-dozen different tech start-ups, and it’s home to one-third of all the information-sector jobs in the metro area.

About the Chamber

Founded in 1769, Greater Wilkes-Barre is rich in history and initiative.

More than 200 years ago, the Wyoming Valley was on the frontier of history during the American Revolution. One-hundred years ago, anthracite mining created an economic boom that resonated in the area and the nation, giving Wilkes-Barre its nickname – the Diamond City. Today, the region is noteworthy for its business and economic diversity across multiple industry segments including healthcare, manufacturing, high-tech, logistics, distribution, defense and transportation.

Central to its infrastructure is an array of higher-education institutions drawing over 50,000 college students to the area. Home to a collection of year-round recreation and entertainment venues, it is an appealing destination for both visitors and locals alike.

Skiing, golfing, fishing, hiking, kayaking, whitewater rafting, biking, arena sports/entertainment and casino gaming are just a few highlights. The region is home to the AAA affiliate of the New York Yankees, the AHL affiliate of the Pittsburgh Penguins, harness racing at Pocono Downs, and NASCAR and Indy racing at Pocono International Raceway. Natural resources abound, including a multitude of parks, trails, trout streams, lakes, rivers and forests.

The area has a rich history, a dynamic business environment and unique cultural attractions that make it a destination point, an innovation center of excellence and a wide-ranging economy. These qualities, along with its location at the hub of major interstates, make the Wilkes-Barre area a unique place to live, work, and raise a family.

See GROWTH | 8
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The fastest growing segment with a plus-1.2 percent year over year rate of growth. The health care industries and their associated occupations are expected to account for a large share of new jobs projected through 2023. And our colleges and universities are responding in kind with programs and graduates geared toward this growth. The growth of the East Mountain Corporate Center, anchored by Geisinger’s large health care and hospital complex, is a great example of the magnitude of the health care sector. AllOne Health, Commonwealth Health, and Highmark add to the vibrancy of our central city. In Highland Park, we have seen exponential growth with Allied Services on Mundy Street, and in Kingston, Erwine Home Health and Hospice anchors the community. All of these clearly illustrate the strong and growing presence of diverse health care segments in our community, fueled by higher paying jobs for our professional labor force and a stronger community presence in the valley.

Our transportation value proposition with access to the major highway grids and transportation corridors makes our area a critical logistics hub. With the rise of e-commerce, the transportation and warehousing and logistics sector have become increasingly important to our growth initiatives.

More than 6,000 new jobs have been created in the last 5 years, and there are development plans in the works for 3,000 more. With employment of close to 30,000 workers, it is the second largest occupation group in our area and the highest concentration of employment compared to the national average with a location quotient of 2.04.

The transportation corridor also attracts manufacturing, with close to 600 manufacturing establishments contributing 13 percent of the total regional GDP at $3 billion toward the region’s $23.3 billion in GDP. Along with logistics and manufacturing, our transportation grid attracts retail and with 30,469 retail employees contributing 7 percent of the region’s total GDP. Highland Park with the Arena Hub is interspersed with national, regional and local brands, restaurants and boutiques attracting shoppers and diners from across the state.

Our region and our economy are no longer dependent as it had been on a single major employer. Over 100 years ago, it was the coal industry. More recently, it was the large garment, shoe and tobacco industries.

Today we are much more diversified and much more resilient to the ebbs and flows of the economy. Making major changes in our region’s economy did not come easily. It has been a 50-year journey made with long range vision and imagination represented today in a re-tooled and re-branded NEPA with new ideas to delivery and sustain economic development.

It took ingenuity to turn mine scarred wastelands into industrial parks that are home to over 500 businesses and a new location quotient of 2.04. And with our colleges and universities, we are incubating innovation and driving tech services into an innovation center of excellence.

Today, Wilkes-Barre and Northeastern PA are at a critical juncture in which the right kinds of investment in businesses, job growth, workforce, entrepreneurialism and community improvement are placing us at the forefront, making us nationally recognized, and setting a self-sustaining, vibrant course of successful realization and a new era of growth.

Revitalizing the Wilkes Barre and NEPA area holds infinite potential for real improvement, growth and sustainability.

Wico van Genderen is President/CEO of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce.
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NEWMAN: Downtown WB is regional economic engine

By Bill O'Boyle
bobboyle@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — As a center of commerce, Downtown Wilkes-Barre packs an awful lot into a compact package, and at the center is the new home of Berkshire Hathaway Guard at 39 Public Square.

Larry Newman, executive director at the Diamond City Partnership, said Downtown Wilkes-Barre is a regional economic engine.

"It's actually NEPA's largest concentrated employment center, with more than 11,300 daytime employees," Newman said. "That's 10 percent of all the jobs in Luzerne County. In fact, there are more jobs in Downtown's 20 blocks than in the Crestwood and Dallas School Districts combined."

Newman said half of the downtown's jobs are in office-using businesses like finance, insurance and professional services. And, the center city office market got a big boost last October, when Berkshire Hathaway Guard Insurance Companies elected to expand its corporate headquarters through the purchase of the office tower at 39 Public Square.

A decade ago, Guard employed around 250 people in the downtown, Newman said. Today, they've more than doubled their workforce, and by the end of 2019, Newman said the company will employ more than 700 people in Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

Newman said Berkshire Hathaway Guard stands in good company — many of the region's largest concentrated employment centers are in Luzerne County.

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Engine

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most significant businesses, such as AllOne Health, Chubb Agribusiness, Highmark Blue Cross and Lackawanna Insurance — also call downtown home.

“Downtown isn’t only about big businesses,” Newman said. “It’s also a regional center of start-up activity. Today, one-third of all the information-sector jobs in our metropolitan area are situated in Downtown Wilkes-Barre.”

For example, Newman said the former Woolworth’s now houses a business incubator — a space called the THINK Center — which functions as the Wyoming Valley’s entrepreneurial hub, and the corporate offices of the search engine marketing firm Pepperjam. Just down the street, Wilkes University’s Enterprise Center houses another nine start-ups.

In fact, Newman said downtown is home to more than two-dozen different tech start-ups, companies like Edify Universal, LSEO, Mobin-it, PlanGuru, Revere, Special Guest App, and more — all supported by our entrepreneurial ecosystem and bolstered by the downtown’s Keystone Innovation Zone designation.

“Downtown is the region’s college neighborhood,” Newman said. “It’s a relatively new role — 15 years ago, even though the campuses of King’s College and Wilkes University book-ended the central business district, you rarely saw college students around Public Square. Then, King’s and Wilkes chose to collaborate, bringing a shared Barnes & Noble bookstore to South Main Street.”

Today, Newman said King’s College’s health sciences programs adjoin Public Square, and King’s is rehabilitating the historic Spring Brook Water Company building to house the college’s new civil and mechanical engineering programs. Wilkes University has transformed the second block of South Main Street with a new business school, a new home for the Sordoni Art Gallery, and student housing.

More than 7,800 students are now enrolled between King’s and Wilkes, Newman said.

“That figure — and the total number of college students in downtown — is only going to continue to grow,” Newman said. Downtown is a regional center for arts, dining, and entertainment. Its cultural anchor, the F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts, has been averaging a show every three days.

“In fact, last month, it was ranked No. 75 in the nation in Pollstar’s annual ranking of theater venue ticket sales,” Newman said. “Over on Northampton Street, Wilkes-Barre Movies 14 attracts hundreds of thousands of patrons each year. The number of downtown dining options has doubled over the past decade, and Downtown Wilkes-Barre has become the region’s restaurant row, featuring cuisines from around the world.”

And, Newman said, downtown has become a place to live — in fact, it’s becoming the region’s walk-to-everything neighborhood of choice.

- 200 new market-rate lofts and apartments have been developed in eight rehabilitated buildings during the past six years, representing almost $20 million in new private investment.
- Even better, another 30 units are currently under construction, with more in the pipeline.

The result, Newman said, is that the number of young college graduates living in the downtown is now higher than it is statewide.

So, why are people paying top dollar to live downtown? One big reason Newman cited is that it provides them with a walkable, mixed-use, live-work, college-anchored neighborhood — something that’s sought after by a growing segment of the residential market.

“It’s not really surprising to learn that, according to Census data, 32 percent of wage-earning downtown residents walk to work — compared to 8 percent of city residents and 3 percent of county residents,” Newman said.

Another big reason is the uniqueness of Downtown’s housing product — Newman said loft apartments with high ceilings and huge windows, and historic townhouses offer incredible character and detail.

“None of this is a coincidence,” Newman said. “As we have continued to improve downtown’s public environment, build upon its fundamental assets, and enhance its walkability, amenities, and diversity of use, it has become ever more attractive as a residential option for the region’s millennials — and as a business location for their employers.”

Newman explained that it’s all part of a larger vision for Downtown Wilkes-Barre — a vision crafted by the community and implemented by the Diamond City Partnership (DCP), Wilkes-Barre’s nonprofit downtown management organization. DCP’s work-plan, funded by downtown property owners and businesses through the Downtown Wilkes-Barre Business Improvement District, provides the center city with a full range of place management, marketing, and development services — sidewalk cleaning to beautification, planning to promotions, security to business recruitment.

Newman said that investment has generated good returns — in addition to the successes noted earlier, 2018 marked Downtown Wilkes-Barre’s 12th consecutive year of net increases
Downtown WB’s walkability an advantage

WILKES-BARRE —
AllOne Health, Berkshire Hathaway Guard Insurance, Coal Creative, Comitz La, Highmark Blue Cross, LSEO, Mobiniti, PA Cyber, Pepperjam, PlanGuru, Roth Insurance, Special Guest App, The Times Leader.

What do these businesses — large and small — have in common?

All of them recently chose to locate or expand their operations in Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

That’s no accident. Neither is the continuing growth in Downtown Wilkes-Barre’s roster of start-up companies.

Both circumstances reflect a larger national trend, documented in a recent report by global real estate advisers Cushman & Wakefield, titled Core Values: Why American Companies are Moving Downtown.

The report, which studied the locational decisions of nearly 500 different companies across the United States, found that an increasing number of office-using businesses are specifically choosing walkability as a basic site-selection amenity. Driven by employee demand and business value, they are “moving to and investing in walkable downtown locations where people want to both live and work.”

The trend is clear from the report’s analysis of corporate moves using data from “WalkScore.com,” — which ranks addresses for walkability on a 1-to-100 scale. The average Walk Score of surveyed companies’ previous locations was 52; the average Walk Score of the companies’ new locations is 88 — a 32 percent increase.

So, how does Downtown Wilkes-Barre rank on Walk Score? The answer is that our center city boasts a Walk Score of 90 — placing it in the “Walkers Paradise” category reserved for those neighborhoods where “daily errands do not require a car.”

Why are smart corporate decision-makers increasingly choosing walkable center-city locations? The Cushman & Wakefield report cited six basic reasons:

• To attract and retain talented workers: As companies compete for new hires and the best talent, being located in a vibrant neighborhood is considered a crucial selling point. The businesses in our study report that current and potential employees want neighborhoods with restaurants, cafes, cultural institutions, entertainment and nightlife as well as easy access by public transportation.

• To build brand identity and company culture: A downtown location projects innovation, connectedness, uniqueness and allows companies to literally be at the center of things. For many companies, moving downtown was a way to set themselves apart from their competitors and to inspire their employees to live up to related brand aspirations.

• To support creative collaboration: Many companies chose locations in dynamic, creative, engaging neighborhoods to help inspire their employees and encourage collaboration among co-workers as well as with employees at other companies or in other industries.

• To be closer to customers and business partners: Streamlining the process for employees who take in-person meetings with clients and partners downtown.

• To centralize operations:
A central downtown location, because of its proximity to everything, was a natural choice for many companies when consolidating multiple locations, particularly if those locations were spread out over a single region.

• To support triple-bottom line business outcomes: For many companies, investing in a city’s center was an opportunity for good corporate citizenship and a way to use their sizable investing power for good. Some reported that triple-bottom line business practices came with the ancillary benefit of making them more attractive as an employer.

The reasons above help to explain why so many businesses, large and small, are choosing to grow in Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

After all, downtowners benefit from the following amenities, all within a five-minute walk of the office:
• A full range of retailers and personal services — from barbers to bankers, books to Boscov’s — for lunchtime errands.
• A global smorgasbord of dining options, encompassing more than three dozen different restaurants.
• A wide array of fitness, recreation, arts, culture, and entertainment choices — the River Common, Movies 14, the

Times Leader file photo

Downtown Wilkes-Barre boasts a Walk Score of 90 on a scale of 1 to 100.

Osterhout, the YMCA, the F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts, and more.

• Immediate access to the human and academic resources of King’s College, Wilkes University, and LCCC’s Wilkes-Barre Center.

• All manner of private and public meeting and conference venues.

• An expanding menu of downtown residential options, ranging from loft apartments to historic townhouses.

• An endless supply of all of those opportunities for informal networking — from Farmers Market to the sandwich line at Circles - that make it easier for people to take care of business.

Does that sound attractive? If so, maybe it’s time to join a national trend. Consider doing business here in Downtown Wilkes-Barre — the walk-to-everything neighborhood that, with more than 11,000 daytime employees, is already Northeastern Pennsylvania’s largest concentrated employment center.

Larry Newman, AICP, is the Executive Director of Diamond City Partnership, 4 Public Square, Wilkes-Barre.
A variety of incentives in Downtown WB

By Bill O’Boyle
boboyles@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Larry Newman, executive director at the Diamond City Partnership — stewards of the city’s downtown — said Downtown Wilkes-Barre’s businesses and investors are able to benefit from a variety of place-based incentives.

For example, Newman said Downtown Wilkes-Barre is designated as a Keystone Innovation Zone (KIZ) — part of a statewide initiative to foster entrepreneurship in Pennsylvania, KIZs are geographically designated zones, established in communities hosting institutions of higher education, with the specific intention of creating an “innovation district.” Newman said the KIZ program offers a range of incentives.

“One of the features of the KIZ program is a saleable state business tax credit, administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development. In 2018, DCED awarded more than $1.4 million in KIZ tax credits to qualifying early-stage Luzerne County companies.”

Larry Newman, executive director of Diamond City Partnership

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Incentives

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of financial resources and assistance to early-stage start-up companies located in Downtown Wilkes-Barre and working in one of the following targeted industry sectors — Health care/Life Science; Nanotechnology and Advanced Manufacturing; Information Technology and New Media; Back Office/Finance; and Homeland Security.

“One of the features of the KIZ program is a saleable state business tax credit, administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development,” Newman said.

“In 2018, DCED awarded more than $1.4 million in KIZ tax credits to qualifying early-stage Luzerne County companies.”

Newman said another commonly used development incentive takes advantage of Downtown Wilkes-Barre’s remarkable legacy of historic architecture.

“It’s the Historic Preservation Tax Credit (HPTC), which provides a 20 percent federal tax credit to taxpayers who complete the restoration of a qualified historic structure as an income producing property,” Newman explained.

“All HPTC projects must include a qualified rehabilitation plan that is approved by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC).”

Pennsylvania has a companion state historic preservation tax credit, which can also be applied for in connection with qualified rehabilitation projects, and which can be used in tandem with the federal HPTC, Newman said.

Most recently, Newman said Downtown Wilkes-Barre was selected for the Federal government’s new place-based incentive — the Qualified Opportunity Zone (QOZ) program.

“Congress established the Qualified Opportunity Zones program as part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, in order to encourage long-term investments in targeted urban and rural communities nationwide,” Newman said. “The QOZ program provides a tax incentive for investors to reinvest their unrealized capital gains into Qualified Opportunity Funds that are dedicated to investing within QOZs that have been designated by each state’s governor.”

The core of Wilkes-Barre’s downtown, Newman said, extending from South Street to North Street, and from Pennsylvania Avenue to the river, has been designated as a QOZ by Gov. Tom Wolf.

There are three primary benefits to investing in a QOZ:

• A temporary deferral of capital gains invested in a Qualified Opportunity Fund through 2026.

• A step-up in basis for capital gains reinvested in a Qualified Opportunity Fund, increasing by 10 percent if held for at least 5 years, and an additional 5 percent if held for at least 7 years.

• A permanent exclusion of new capital gains if the investment is held for more than 10 years.

NOTE: More information about Qualified Opportunity Zones, Historic Preservation Tax Credits, Keystone Innovation Zones, or other incentives available in Downtown Wilkes-Barre can be obtained by contacting the Diamond City Partnership (www.downtownwilkes-barre.org).

Reach Bill O’Boyle at 570-991-6118 or on Twitter @TLBillOBoyle.
Revitalized train station area thrills business owners

By Jennifer Learn-Andes
jandes@timesleader.com

A renovated strip mall at the 6.36-acre downtown Wilkes-Barre train station tract is now full and receiving positive reviews from tenants.

“It’s a very good site,” said Jeff Thomas, who leases a portion of the mall housing the Market Street Business Center.

Four businesses operate out of the center: Gold Star Digital Document Services, a digital print shop providing blueprints and litigation support; Business Office Systems, for sale and service of copiers and printers; JTBillyboxes, which offers packing and shipping, mailboxes and Penske truck rentals; and Color Junction, which specializes in graphic arts and advertising.

The complex has been markedly spruced up since Market Square Properties Development LLC purchased the site from the Luzerne County Redevelopment Authority for $1.2 million in 2016, Thomas said. Market Square is an investment group led by engineer and developer George Albert.

In addition to work at the strip mall, Market Square has added a new road and lighting to make it more inviting and accessible to customers, Thomas said.

“It’s extremely well lit. This work has really been the catalyst,” Thomas said of the business activity at the strip mall.

Lauren Smith opened The Art Party Place in the mall in May, saying the building has “great curb appeal” and is in a high-traffic location at the corner of Wilkes-Barre Boulevard and Market Street.

The business offers art parties, youth activities, wine and paint parties and lessons. Walk-ins are invited to paint on canvas or ceramics or participate in other crafts, she said, with hours posted at www.theartpartyplace.com.

City Brokers Real Estate also has located in the strip mall, said business representative and Realtor Greg Barrouk. The business concentrates on commercial and residential sales and property management, he said.

The remaining tenants: Domino’s Pizza and Salon Plus.

In addition to restoring the brick train station built in 1868, the $7.5 million to $8.5 million project called for three new structures housing eateries, a grocery store or other retail/commercial tenants, the developer has said.

However, Albert has said multiple lawsuits filed by Thom Greco have halted development plans, including construction of a Burger King. Greco has said he embraces development but was forced to pursue litigation to protect his existing lots in the complex, which house McDonald’s and Citizens Bank — parcels he owns with his company, TGRG LLP.

Albert could not immediately be reached for comment for this story. He said last June he was “very close” to securing all tenants for the former New Jersey Central train station, which also will house his office.

Because it is a historic structure with complex architectural features, the station renovation will cost about $1 million, or $263 a square foot, he has said, noting he could build a new structure at that amount but had committed to saving the structure for the community. The station was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975.

The status of the train project is unclear. Market Square is seeking a $500,000 Local Share Account grant funded by gambling revenue to help cover restoration costs. According to paperwork associated with the request, the work will include a new roof system, windows, electrical/plumbing/HVAC systems, ADA-accessible bathrooms and lighting. An observation tower will be repaired, and original finishes will be restored.

“The restoration will remove a central source of blight, increase the tax basis of the overall tract, create 10 new permanent jobs, 20 construction jobs, provide a critical improvement to the downtown gateway and result in a prominent project for the community,” the paperwork said.

Reach Jennifer Learn-Andes at 570-991-6388 or on Twitter @TLJenLearnAndes.
### 15 Public Square

- 74,354 square feet of office space available for sale.
- Premier location at the heart of Wilkes-Barre’s Center City
- High profile multi-tenant office and retail asset
- Landmark presence with significant frontage on Wilkes-Barre’s Public Square
- Adjacencies to two parking garages offering 679 spaces
- One block from the 752-car Intermodal parking facility and bus hub
- Two blocks to the Susquehanna River Common, Courthouse and City Hall, midway between the Kings College and Wilkes University campuses
- High Walk Score© of 85

**Offering Summary**

- High profile multi-tenant office and retail asset
- 74,548 square feet, six stories, 85% occupied
- Landmark presence with significant frontage on Wilkes-Barre’s Public Square
- Adjacencies to two parking garages offering 679 spaces, and is one block from the 752-car Intermodal parking facility and bus hub
- Two blocks to the Susquehanna River Common, Courthouse and City Hall, midway between the Kings College and Wilkes University campuses
- Has the attributes so important to the millennial labor force: prime location in resurgent Center City convenient to highways, bus routes, dining, shopping, new luxury residential, office, government services, healthcare, academic institutions, cultural attractions and entertainment venues
- High Walk Score© of 85

Colliers International, as exclusive agent of the Seller, is pleased to offer for sale to qualified investors the office and retail building located at 15 Public Square in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The asking price is $3,600,000 which is approximately $48 per square foot and an 8.5% cap rate on projected 2018 net operating income at current occupancy.

Why buy? Office rents in Northeastern Pennsylvania continue to climb while vacancy is at the lowest in recent history. The vacancy rate for Class A and B office space in Northeastern Pennsylvania at the end of 2018’s first quarter decreased to 6.2 percent from 6.3 percent at the end of the previous quarter. Absorption was flat due to low leasing volume. The weighted average asking rent for Class A space increased to $19.20 per square-foot, full service. Class B rent increased by almost one percent to $18.85, full service. Also, no new office construction is planned in Center City Wilkes-Barre. Further, the proliferation of new apartment and condo developments in Center City adds to 15 Public Square’s appeal to the millennial labor force.

The Property has an ‘A’ location, is well maintained, recognized for its distinctive modern design, has a strong track record of high occupancy, and is located in a newly established federal opportunity zone that provides significant tax incentives.

**Contact**

Jeff Algatt  
Senior Vice President  
Cell: +1 610 684 1860  
Email: jeff.algatt@colliers.com  
www.colliers.com

15 Public Square, 15 Public Square, Scranton, PA 18503  
+1 570 578 8296  
steve.cole@naimertz.com  
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18706

---

### 60 Public Square

- 4,500 square feet to 11,500 square feet of office space available for lease
- Rare opportunity for large block of Class A space in 70,000-square-foot building located in the heart of Wilkes-Barre’s Center City.
- 10,000 square foot floorplates
- Building signage available
- Tenant only fitness center on site
- Adjacent to two universities
- Adjacent to public parking garage
- Within walking distance to numerous hotels, restaurants, and shops.

Colliers International  
John Susanin  
John.Susanin@colliers.com  
610.684.1860

---

### 827 Sans Souci Parkway

- 225,000 square feet of industrial space on 28.79 acres for sale or lease
- Former Air Products & Chemicals Building
- Located in close proximity to major transportation routes I80, I81, Rte. 309
- Rail Served by The Norfolk Southern rail line
- The main fabrication facility and extensive yard area on the north, east, and west sides of the facility are fenced

NAI Mertz of PA  
Steve Cole  
steve.cole@naimertz.com  
570.578.8296

---

### 200 Technology Drive

- 247,726 to 1,023,000 square feet of newly constructed industrial space available for lease
- Close to I-81, I-476 and PA Route 315
- Located in CenterPoint Commerce & Trade Park East, Jenkins Township
- Real estate taxes on improvements are 100 percent abated for 10 years (LERTA)
- Mericle Commercial Real Estate Services  
Bob Besecker  
besecker@mericle.com  
570.825.1100
## AVAILABLE PROPERTIES

### 55 Thayer Ave.

- +/- 50,559 square feet industrial space on 2.23 acres industrial land for sale or lease
- HVAC Heat and A/C in Offices.
- Gas fired ceiling unit heat in warehouse/mfg spaces.
- Public water, sewer, gas and electricity

Hinerfeld Commercial Real Estate  
John Cognetti  
Jcognetti@hinerfeld.com  
570.207.4100

### 206 Carey Ave.

- 15,554 SF total building area in Automobile dealership building
- Ideal for automobile sales, service and repair uses
- Good candidate for neighborhood service and retail uses
- Gas heat and electric thru-wall air conditioning systems
- Heavy duty electrical service
- On-site parking and fenced-in yard areas
- Heavily populated neighborhood

Hinerfeld Commercial Real Estate  
John Cognetti  
Jcognetti@hinerfeld.com  
570.207.4100

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## PROPERTY INFO SHEET

### INDUSTRIAL REAL ESTATE

#### FOR SALE OR LEASE

- +/- 57,200 SF Industrial Space on  
  +/- 10 Acres Land  
  Zoned I-1 General Industrial District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>411 (a.k.a. “555”) Country Club Road, Dallas Twp, PA (LUZERNE COUNTY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROPERTY</td>
<td>+/-10 Acres (2 parcels. Parcel 1 := 7.17 Acres, Parcel 2 = 3.00 Acres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPROVEMENT</td>
<td>+/- 57,276 SF (office = 3276 SF, whse = 18,000 SF, mfg/whse/r&amp;d = 36,000 SF)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZONING</td>
<td>I-1 General Industrial District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIN(S)/DEED</td>
<td>10-D8-00A-34A, 10-D8-00A-34E / DB 3008 - Pg. 273361 &amp; DB 3008- Pg. 273367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAXES</td>
<td>Approximately $27,000 per year. (Assessment: $1,449,200)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HVAC</td>
<td>Heat (electric) and A/C in Offices, Mfg./Whse/R&amp;D. Gas fired forced air heat in whse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPRINKLERS</td>
<td>Yes, with outdoor water tank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELECTRIC</td>
<td>3 phase – (1) 2500 kVA, (1) 1500 kVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROOF</td>
<td>Rubber EPDM and/or standing seam metal roofing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEILINGS</td>
<td>23’ in production, 24-26’ in warehouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCESS DOORS</td>
<td>(2) ground level entry O.H. door. / (2) Dock door w/levelor system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARKING</td>
<td>Approximately 60 parking spaces, paved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>Recycling compactor available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTILITIES</td>
<td>Water = PAWC , Sewer = DAMA, Gas = UGI, Electric = PP&amp;L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST PRICE</td>
<td>SALE : $2,100,000 LEASE: $3.25 PSF NNN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**All information furnished regarding property for sale, rental or financing is from sources deemed reliable, but no warranty or representation is made as to the accuracy thereof, and same is submitted, subject to errors, omissions, change of price, rental or other conditions, prior sale, lease or financing, or withdrawal without notice.**
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OFFERING SUMMARY

• Outstanding conversion opportunity
• Landmark 50,000 square foot, ten-story office building
• Includes an adjoining off-street, gated, 71-space surface parking lot
• Adjacent to successful apartment conversions at the neighboring PNC and Citizens Bank buildings

Colliers International, as exclusive agent of the Seller, is pleased to offer for sale to qualified investors the office building located at 15 South Franklin Street in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania for full or partial conversion from office space to a variety of alternate uses such as:

• Market rate rental apartments
• Residential condominiums
• Student housing
• Extended stay suites
• Boutique Hotel
• Conventional Offices for smaller sized tenants
• Flexible coworking office spaces (e.g., WeWork, Regus, etc.)
• One block to the Susquehanna River Common and Public Square
• Midway between Kings College and Wilkes University
• The site has a high Walkability Score© of 85

This is an outstanding opportunity for the astute investor to capitalize on the success of Wilkes-Barre’s continuing Center City residential resurgence. The Property’s architectural distinction, “A” location, and private parking, its panoramic river and city views, extensive window line, double loaded corridor layout, and flexibility to deliver floors for residential conversion creates significant potential to capture the unmet demand for additional units.

The building can be made available for conversion upon M&T Bank’s departure in the summer of 2019 and upon the law firm vacating in the spring of 2020.

2017’s Tax Cuts and Jobs Act also established Opportunity Zones offering tax incentives for investing in a “qualified investment zone.” 15 South Franklin and its 71-space gated, private parking lot are located within such a zone. Tax incentives include the temporary deferral of inclusion in gross income for capital gains reinvested in a qualified opportunity fund and the permanent exclusion of capital gains from the sale or exchange of an investment in the qualified opportunity fund.

VITAL DATA

Offering Price $2,500,000
Address 15 South Franklin Street, Wilkes-Barre PA 18701
(Luzerne County)
Building Area 50,000 square feet (+/-)
# Floors 10 plus basement
Parking Off-street, gated, 71-space surface lot
Year Built/Renovated circa 1920 / Continuously
Site Area 0.74 acres (+/-)
Zoning C-3 Commercial, Central
Title Fee Simple*

*except for a 0.13-acre parcel of the parking lot which is controlled by another owner.

15 South Franklin St.

• 50,000 square feet of office/multifamily apartment for sale to qualified investors for full or partial conversion from office space to residential living or a boutique hotel.
• Includes an adjoining off-street, gated, 71-space surface parking lot
• Adjacent to successful apartment conversions at the neighboring PNC and Citizens Bank buildings
• One block to the Susquehanna River Common and Public Square
• The site has a high Walkability Score© of 85
• Midway between King’s College and Wilkes University
Colliers International
John Susanin
John.Susanin@colliers.com
610.684.1860

800 Schecter Drive

• +/- 4000 square feet of bank office on 1.67 acres
• Commercial high visibility from I-81
• Strong traffic counts.
• Located on Schecter Drive near hotels and foodservice
• ¼ mile from SuperWalMart & Mohegan Sun Arena, etc.
• Former Credit Union branch.
• Quality construction, very good condition.
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- ASCM (previously APICS) Certified Supply Chain and Professional
- Project Management Certificate Program
- AutoCAD: Levels 1, 2, and 3
- Introduction to Business Management Certificate Program
- Introduction to Corporate Communication Certificate Program

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Downtown Wilkes-Barre is Northeastern Pennsylvania’s largest concentrated employment center.

OFFICE MARKET:
Approximately 11,300 people work in Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

46% of downtown employment is in office-using industries: The Finance, Insurance, Real Estate sector, professional and business services, or the information sector.

Education and Healthcare account for another 27% of total downtown employment.

More than two-dozen different startups, and one-third of all the information-sector jobs in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton metropolitan area, are situated in Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

The largest of Downtown’s tech businesses is the E-commerce marketing company Pepperjam. Currently employing 120 people in its South Main Street corporate offices.

The Wilkes Enterprise Center, a university-affiliated business incubator, houses another nine startup businesses.

In 2010, 46% of downtown employees earned at least $40,000 per year; by 2015, that percentage had increased to 55% of the downtown workforce. (Source: US Census LEHD)

RESIDENTIAL MARKET:
1,200 Housing Units
3,500 Residents

EDUCATION ENROLLMENT:
King’s College: 2,300
Wilkes University: 5,545

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East Mountain offers tenants ideal location

By Bill O’Boyle
boboyle@timesleader.com

PLAINS TWP. — The real estate mantra goes “location, location, location,” and the East Mountain Corporate Center provides the perfect location for its tenants.

James A. Cummings, Vice President Marketing, Mericle Commercial Real Estate Services, said the East Mountain Corporate Center, located along Route 115 in Plains Township, near Wilkes-Barre, is just 10 minutes from Downtown Wilkes-Barre and Wilkes-Barre’s major suburban shopping areas can be reached in just five minutes. The park is just one mile from Exit 170A of I-81 and four miles from Exit 105 of I-476.

Cummings said the park can accommodate companies needing as little as 2,000 square feet to as much as 100,000 square feet. Some of the park tenants include Mericle’s corporate headquarters, Borton Lawson, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Geisinger Wyoming Valley Healthcare, Social Security Administration, and RCN.

Cummings said more than 736,000 people live within 30 miles of the park and there are 17 college campuses with approximately 51,000 enrolled students within an hour’s drive.

“The anticipated ease with which companies are able to recruit a talented workforce, especially during this time of low national and local unemployment rates, plays a critical role in their ultimate site selection decision,” Cummings said. “The East Mountain Corporate Center does very well by this standard. It largely comes down to drive time and close to 240,000 people live within a 25 minute commute to the park. There aren’t many parks in Northeastern Pennsylvania that can top that.”

Cummings said the park meets the needs of those office and healthcare companies that prefer Class A space in a suburban setting with abundant, on-site parking.

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“Geisinger presence

Cummings said Geisinger’s strong presence has enhanced the park’s reputation as a good place to do business.

“Geisinger has brought world-class talent to world-class facilities,” he said. “Companies that consider moving into the park feel a sense of security knowing that after much deliberation, Geisinger chose this location as its main hub in Northeastern Pennsylvania.”

Cummings said technically, the large Social Security Administration Call Center (282,000 sq. ft.) is not located in the park. The park is defined as the exact boundaries as developed by the Wilkes-Barre Chamber years ago. However, to the average person, SSA is in East Mountain Corporate Center.

Therefore, including the SSA building (but not the hospital or the small buildings directly across the street from the hospital on East Mountain Boulevard), Cummings said there are 12 office buildings in the park totaling 676,000 square feet within 30 miles of the park and there are 17 college campuses with approximately 51,000 enrolled students within an hour’s drive.

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Cummings said the park meets the needs of those office and healthcare companies that prefer Class A space in a suburban setting with abundant, on-site parking.

“When you add in the park’s quick access to I-81 and I-476, its reliable power and telecom service, and its close proximity to the area’s labor pool, you can see why it is home to thousands of jobs,” Cummings said.

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Founded in 1986, by Wilkes-Barre native, Tim Evans, Colours, Inc. began with just one location and three people in Wilkes-Barre and now serves over 32 locations in five states including Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Maryland and West Virginia.

Offering the finest in automotive paint, body shop supplies and equipment to the collision, fleet and manufacturing industries, commitment to quality, coupled with the utmost in service has made Colours, Inc. one of the most progressive and fastest growing automotive paint distributors in the United States and one of the most accomplished distributors of PPG.

Employing over 300 people and boasting over 30 locations including 2 distribution centers, Colours, Inc. recently has moved into their new headquarters, training center and distribution center located in Hanover Township consisting of over 40,000 square feet.

Colours, Inc. services independent body shops, car dealerships, service centers, and, essentially anyone that uses automotive paint and supplies in the Mid-Atlantic region for more than 30 years.

“Going above normal service and delivery for our customers and our ability to adapt is what sets us apart,” Ali Mahalak, CFO.

Colours, Inc. is constantly working to improve customer service and experience. From focusing on enhancing company processes with our Business Development Team to hosting open houses and providing access to expert-led industry training seminars.

Additionally, Colours has built an industry leading Tech Team that helps customers, staff and vendors regarding current products, as well as new products entering the market.

With industry standards changing rapidly with new laws and regulations, Colours, Inc. understands the importance of keeping our customers informed on all the latest standards, compliances, regulations and new technology.

As an exclusive PPG Platinum Distributor, Colours, Inc. provides customers with state-of-the-art training, local market knowledge, new products and additionally hosts an annual summit meeting which brings together suppliers and customers to share products, industry news, training and certifications from top industry leaders.

Looking ahead, Colours is striving to maintain its exceptional customer service and its relationships with suppliers. Continuing to focus on training, technology and commitment to our employees and customers, Colours will continue to foster company growth and development.

“Colours business continues to grow, and with it the demand for increased distribution and fulfillment operations. Our new Pennsylvania facility will be a key factor in the growth of Colours, Inc., and we are pleased to be able to keep investing resources and creating jobs in NEPA and beyond,” Tim Evans, President and CEO of Colours, Inc.

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Location

From page 26

- Mericle developed seven of those buildings totaling 288,000 square feet.
- There is room in the park to construct eight buildings totaling 346,000 square feet.
- Mericle estimates that 3,400 people work in the 12 existing office buildings.

About Mericle Development

- Mericle Commercial Real Estate Services is a privately-owned, full-service, commercial real estate development and brokerage company headquartered in Plains Township, Pennsylvania, near Wilkes-Barre.
- Founded in 1985 by Wilkes-Barre native Robert Mericle, Mericle has become one of the most accomplished developers of industrial, flex, office, and medical space on Pennsylvania’s I-78/I-81 Corridor.
- Altogether, Mericle has developed more than 22 million square feet of industrial, flex, and office space in Northeastern Pennsylvania, most of it on speculation. That’s enough square feet to cover 383 football fields.
- Today, Mericle owns and maintains close to 15 million square feet of space. Their in-house Property Management Department is available 24-7 to make sure your space stays in tip-top shape at all times.
- 14,500 people work in the buildings we’ve developed in Northeastern Pennsylvania.
- Mericle uses a “vertically integrated master-builder” structure, which allows the developer to cut out the profit centers that often drive up costs and slow down jobs. That virtually guarantees that Mericle will finish your project on time and on budget. In fact, in more than 30 years, Mericle has never missed a client’s occupancy deadline.
- Mericle’s in-house team includes licensed architects and electricians, land planners, professional engineers, surveyors, plumbers, carpenters, certified public accountants, legal counsel, leasing and marketing professionals, licensed brokers, property managers, and more.
- Mericle does all of the site work for projects, often preparing sites in advance. Many heavy equipment operators use dozens of Mericle-owned pieces to build roads, install utilities, clear, grade, and compact the parcels, and secure all of the necessary permits and approvals long before you show interest.

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

An aerial photo of the 12 buildings in the Mericle Development East Mountain Corporate Center.
DiscoverNEPA showcasing region’s quality of life

By Bill O’Boyle
bobboyle@timesleader.com

PLAINS TWP. — Mericle Development Corporation is taking big steps to help North-eastern Pennsylvania’s quality of life stand out when companies are considering moving or expanding here.

In 2018, Mericle launched DiscoverNEPA® — a 10-county initiative whose mission is “to encourage North-eastern Pennsylvania’s best and brightest to stay in the region — to promote local quality of life assets and communities, to recruit talented individuals to the region, and to assist local non-profits by cultivating awareness and volunteerism; branding the region as one of the nation’s best places to live.”

Jim Cummings, Mericle’s Vice President Marketing, said to date, Mericle has published information about more than 2,000 regional amenities on discovernepa.com and has listed more than 2,600 events on the site’s calendar.

Cummings said DiscoverNEPA’s digital marketing team produced approximately 100 videos in 2018 that together have been viewed close to 625,000 times.

DiscoverNEPA already has more than 26,000 Facebook followers and more than 8,600 Instagram followers and regularly runs contests on social media with giveaways that have included gym memberships and gift certificates to local restaurants and other businesses.

“In today’s economy, skilled workers know that they are part of a small supply trying to fill a large demand. Where do skilled workers live? In many respects, anywhere they want to. Their scarcity gives them flexibility when deciding what community is right for them. That’s where quality of life, the 4th highest ranked factor in the Area Development survey comes in.”

Mary Kolessar
DiscoverNEPA Executive Director

See QUALITY | 31
That’s where quality of life, the 4th highest ranked factor in the Area Development survey comes in.”

Kolessar said many skilled workers, especially millennials, are drawn to those communities known as great places to live.

“Communities such as Austin, San Diego, Seattle, Raleigh-Durham, and Madison, often show up on best places to live surveys, giving them a decided advantage when it comes to retaining and recruiting skilled workers,” Kolessar said.

Kolessar said Mericle created DiscoverNEPA to show this region’s best and brightest that Northeastern Pennsylvania’s quality of life does compare favorably with the Austins and the Madisons, that you can do just about everything here, and that they should choose NEPA as the place to start and grow their careers.

“We hope our tenants and other area businesses will use DiscoverNEPA as a tool to recruit talented people and their families to this region,” Kolessar said. “We also invite the area’s 18 colleges and universities to use DiscoverNEPA to convince prospective students — our future workforce — to be educated here and stay here upon their graduation.”

Cummings said Mericle Commercial Real Estate Services has provided commercial space to several hundred companies since 1985 and more than 14,500 people work in the 22 million square feet of industrial, office, flex, and medical space the company has developed in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Mericle has constructed seven buildings in the East Mountain Corporate Center totaling 288,000 square feet and has plans to eventually develop as many as eight more buildings in the park.

Mericle markets the virtues of its available sites and buildings to a wide audience of corporate decision makers, commercial real estate brokers, site selection consultants, and economic development officials, Cummings said.

However, he said when companies are going through the site selection process, more factors come into play than just the availability of a certain type of building or site.

Recently, the national business publication Area Development Magazine surveyed hundreds of corporate executives from around the country who are actively engaged in site selection for their companies. The executives were given a list of 28 factors that are typically considered when companies are considering opening new facilities. The executives then rated each factor's importance to their business and the ratings were averaged by the magazine.

Not surprisingly, Cummings said that “highway access” was rated the most important factor, while “labor costs” ranked 2nd and “availability of skilled labor” ranked 3rd. However, in a surprise to many, “quality of life” was rated the 4th most important factor out of 28, with more than 87 percent of the executives listing it as being either important or very important to their site selection decision.

If interested in learning more, visit DiscoverNEPA.com and to follow the initiative on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Reach Bill O’Boyle at 570-991-6118 or on Twitter @TLBillOBoyle.
Geisinger’s economic impact estimated at $12.7B

By Bill O’Boyle
boboyle@timesleader.com

PLAINS TWP. — The impact of Geisinger on Northeastern Pennsylvania’s economy is more than significant.

To give you an idea of the size of Geisinger’s regional footprint, consider this:

• Number of buildings — 412
• Number of employees — 31,539
• Number of buildings in Luzerne County — 53
• Number of employees in Luzerne County — 4,383.

According to Alysha Davis, Geisinger’s Media Relations Manager, Geisinger spends approximately $2.5 billion annually in salaries, wages and medical and retirement benefits for its employees.

In the past year, Davis said Geisinger invested more than $40 million in its employees through merit increases, tuition reimbursement and employee recognition programs.

“Geisinger continues to invest in facilities, services and programs to benefit the people of Northeastern Pennsylvania,” said Anthony Aquilina, D.O., president of Geisinger Northeast. “We are focused on providing a wide range of professional and compassionate medical services locally so patients do not have to leave the area for their healthcare.”

Davis added that the Pennsylvania-based health system leverages an estimated $12.7 billion annual positive impact on the economy. Of that, the annual positive economic impact provided by Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center (GWV) in Wilkes-Barre is $776 million, and Geisinger Community Medical Center (GCMC) in Scranton is $386 million.

With expansion at GWV, the addition of GCMC and the Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Geisinger employs more than 7,140 people in its northeast region and is recruiting even more as Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre reopens its emergency department and GCMC brings back maternity services, Davis said.

“We take seriously our role not only as a healthcare provider, but also as a major employer and driver of the local economy,” said Ron Beer, chief administrative officer of Geisinger Northeast. “It is gratifying that the work we do and the investments we make to take care of patients also create a significant benefit to our area’s economic well-being.”

Other Geisinger sites in Luzerne County include:

• East Mountain Specialty Clinic, 1155 East Mountain Blvd., 41,134 sq. ft., Women’s Health, Reproductive Endocrinology, Dermatology and MOHS Surgery, Podiatry, CareWorks Convenient Care, Pre-Surgery Center, Laboratory, Radiology.

• Orthopaedics Center, 1175 East Mountain Blvd., 24,517 sq. ft., Orthopaedics, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy.

• Geisinger Outpatient Specialty Center, 675 Baltimore Drive, 40,495 sq. ft., Ophthalmology, Optometry, Cardiac Rehabilitation, Ornish Lifestyle Medicine program, Endocrinology, Rheumatology, Laboratory, Bone Densitometry, Plastic Surgery, Infectious Disease, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery.

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Berkshire Hathaway GUARD

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Geisinger

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Gastroenterology, GI Nutrition, Bariatric Surgery.
• Memory and Cognition Center and Office Spaces, 620 Baltimore Drive, 18,252 sq. ft., Memory and Cognition Center.
• Geisinger Health Plan, CenterPoint Commerce and Trade Park near Pittston — Geisinger Health Plan worked with CenterPoint’s developer, Mericle Commercial Real Estate Services, to tailor a new, three-story, 79,000-square-foot facility to our requirements at CenterPoint Commerce and Trade Park near Pittston. This includes:
  • Customized collaborative floor plan and building systems.
  • A work space filled with natural light and outfitted with modern amenities, such as broadband service. Multiple telecommunications companies have deployed fiber connectivity throughout CenterPoint.
  • In addition to being close to major highways connecting Luzerne and Lackawanna counties, the site is served by public transportation with plans for a walking trail for employees to utilize to maintain and enhance their overall wellness.
• Geisinger Medical Group, Kingston — Geisinger opened an $8.5 million multi-specialty clinic in December 2018. The 20,800-square-foot clinic at 560 Pierce St. enhances patient care with a 50-person team supporting these services include:
  • family medicine for adult and pediatric patients
  • a Careworks walk-in clinic
  • medication therapy management (MTM)
  • laboratory
  • radiology
  • nutrition
  • case/care management.

It boasts 26 exam rooms and two treatment rooms. Staff includes physicians, advanced practitioners, a clinical pharmacist, a licensed clinical social worker, community health assistant and teaching faculty for family medicine residents.

“The rebirth of our South Wilkes-Barre campus is a great example of our efforts to provide care close to home,” said Dan Landesberg, administrative director at Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre and Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center. “We’ve opened a new emergency department, as well as expanded both inpatient and outpatient services, to provide convenient access to care for residents of the south Wilkes-Barre and surrounding community.”

Reach Bill O’Boyle at 570-991-6118 or on Twitter @TLBillOBoyle.
Arena Hub Plaza offers strong lineup of retail stores

By Bill O'Boyle
bob Boyle@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE TWP. — When Barnes and Noble reopens its main store in the Arena Hub Plaza, the comeback from last June’s tornado will be complete.

Robert Tamburro, Trustee/General Manager of TFP Limited, owner of the property, said his family has been blessed with the opportunity to develop and manage the Arena Hub project over the last 20 years.

“We have been very fortunate to have attracted and maintained a great lineup of tenants over the years,” Tamburro said.

Tamburro said in today’s “omni-channel retail world” — retailers selling products and services through physical stores, on line, and other methods, all at the same time — the tenant lineup is critical to a shopping center’s success property.

“It’s like a baseball team,” Tamburro said. “If you have a strong lineup of tenants (stores people want to visit that sell products and services people want to buy) that complement each other, you will be successful. If you do not have a strong lineup, your success will be limited.”

The Arena Hub Plaza off of Mundy Street is an approximate 438,344 square foot shopping center covering about 62 acres and anchored by Lowe’s Improvement Warehouse.

Due to its size, tenant roster, and layout, the property is known as a power center, Tamburro said. The International Council of Shopping Centers categorizes a power center as a “Specialized Purpose Center” that features category-dominant anchors, including discount department stores, off price stores, wholesale clubs, with only a few small tenants.

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 B’gosh, 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 Restaurant and Outback Steakhouse.

To the best of the owner’s knowledge, Arena Hub Plaza is the largest open air center in Northeast Pennsylvania.

Tamburro noted that Arena Hub is located along the Mundy Street/Highland Boulevard retail corridor, northeast Pennsylvania’s dominant retail area. He said Arena Hub is accessible via Interstate 81 Exit 168. In addition to the Wyoming Valley Mall located across the street, Arena Hub enjoys direct access to Urban Edge’s 319,080 square foot Wilkes-Barre Township Commons that is anchored by Target. It is also located across the street from PREIT’s 910,000 square foot Wyoming Valley Mall.


Tamburro’s Plains Township-based TFP Limited, a company founded and initially led by northeast Pennsylvania entrepreneur, Robert L. Tambur. His son, Robert Tamburro operates the company today.

The plaza stores employ an estimated 1,000 people, Tamburro said.

“The Arena Hub Plaza is important to the region because it enhances the quality of life, employment, and economic impact,” Tamburro said. “It serves as one of the prominent retail properties in the region, giving area residents a variety of shopping options all within a convenient location.”

Despite the changing retail landscape, Tamburro believes the center will continue to be the go-to place for shopping and dining.

“Northeast Pennsylvania is located in an important and strategic part of our nation,” Tamburro said. “Contrary to some in our community who have a pessimistic viewpoint, I believe there are ample real estate and business opportunities in the region. We will continue to invest and seek new opportunities in the region as a locally owned and operated business.”

Tamburro said he and his company are excited by the opportunity to elevate the region.

“I believe our region has improved in many ways since King Coal was dethroned by oil shortly after World War II,” Tamburro said. “However, there is still a long road ahead. That prospect of making progress here, in our backyard, is exciting to me.

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Lineup
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and my family.”
• Other notable projects owned by Tamur family entities:
  • Blue Ridge Trail Golf Club, Dorrance Township, a 27-hole championship golf course.
  • Marketplace, a 13,000 square foot strip center located at 1189 Route 315, Plains Township, anchored by Bayada.
  • Mundy Street Square, a 12,000 square foot strip center featuring Chipotle, Five Guys, Mattress Firm, and Vitamin Shoppe.
  • Richland 315, a mix-use project featuring Dunkin Donuts, FNCB Bank, a retail space (currently listed for lease), and a future 54,000 square foot Class A office building.
  • RLT Properties, LP, a mix-use building featuring AC Fitness, Isabella Restaurant and Bar, and 10,000 square feet of Class A office space in Plains Township.
  • Future/Proposed Tambur family projects:
    • Valley Crest Commons, a 62-acre parcel generally located at the intersection of Pennsylvania Route 309 and Interstate 81 Exit 170 A&B in Plains Township. The parcel is zoned MU (Mixed Use) generally permitting residential and commercial development.

Crest LP, owner of the property, proposes to redevelop the site as a mix-use center, featuring retail and entertainment uses. Multi-family housing, lodging, restaurants, and medical buildings may also be part of this project. The project will commence once highway improvements are constructed in the area generally located around the intersection of Pennsylvania Route 309 and Mundy Street.
• Richland 315, a Class A, four-story office building, to be located in the Richland 315 development. The building construction package is currently out to bid.
• Thirty-one acres of industrial land in the Grimes Industrial Park, Dupont Borough and Pittston Township. The developer proposes to prepare building parcels that could accommodate up to 258,000 square feet of new warehouse/flex buildings. Initial phases of construction are projected to commence in 2020.
• The Preserve at Blue Ridge, a proposed Planned Residential Development (PRD) featuring 134 single-family homes and twin units that will generally surround the Blue Ridge Trail Golf Club. Development will begin if and when the project is approved by the applicable court of jurisdiction.

Reach Bill O’Boyle at 570-991-6118 or on Twitter @TLBilOBoyle.

NEPA Alliance: Economic impact of arena continues to grow

By Bill O’Boyle
boboyleh@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE TWP. — The Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza serves as a major economic engine for Luzerne County and the surrounding counties, drawing more than 360,000 visitors and residents annually.

In 2015, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance released its Economic Impact Study of the SMG-managed Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza and impact has kept increasing since.

“The Arena has an estimated impact of over $60 million and supports 1,100 jobs,” said Steven N. Zaricki, Research & Information Manager at NEPA Alliance. “Having a recreational asset, such as the Arena, helps support the regional economy, while also assisting us in attracting new businesses to the area.”

According to the study conducted in 2015 by Zaricki and NEPA Alliance, the economic impact analysis, which was developed by using IMPLAN®, consisted of several distinct scenarios including:
• The overall impact of the operations of the Arena, which includes the impact from visitors traveling from outside the impact region.
• The impact from the construction and operations of the newly proposed concourse expansion including two new concessions areas and full service bar, which opened in 2016.
• The negative impact that would be evident if the Arena did not exist.
• The impact of operation and visitation in 2013 showed the following results:
  • Total estimated output or economic activity of $62.6 million.
  • Total estimated employment supported of 1,141 jobs, which are either full-time of part-time.
  • The total estimated labor income was $22.6 million.
  • Total estimated taxes of $9.9 million, which consists of an estimated $5.0 million in federal taxes and an estimated $4.9 million in state and local taxes.

Brian R Sipe, SMG General Manager at the Arena, said in the 20 years the venue has been open, not only has the Arena Hub Plaza succeeded, but various restaurants and an increasing number of hotels have proven that the Arena has been a large economic contributor to the region.

“Hundreds of thousands of people come to our venue every year for WBS Penguins Hockey, a concert, a family show or a graduation of a friend or family member,” Sipe said. “As we just had our fastest sellout ever on record with Kenny Chesney, we move into 2019 in a strong position to continue to break records and make NEPA a great place for entertainment.”

The NEPA Alliance was contracted by the Luzerne County Convention Center Authority, the governing body of the Mohegan Sun Arena, in May of 2014 to conduct the study on behalf of the Authority.

“The Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza has made a significant impact on our regional economy and community,” said LCCCA Board Chairwoman Donna Cupinski. “We are proud to have teamed with the NEPA Alliance in developing this comprehensive study. We are confident the Arena will continue its positive impact for years to
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ISO 9001:2015 Training Internal Auditor Training - NEPIRC Training Facility - 75 Young Street, Hanover Township, PA.

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What is ISO 9001:2015 Internal Auditor Training? This course provides an understanding of auditing quality management systems. Participants will learn about auditor conduct and the different roles of an auditor, including how to structure and plan an effective audit, and how to evaluate and communicate audit findings. This course is ideal for companies with internal auditors who are in need of continued education and for companies with newly-promoted leaders responsible for ISO compliance and internal audits.

Pre-Requisite: Familiarity with the ISO 9001:2008 standard is suggested but not necessary. If you already are an auditor, your knowledge of the audit process will be expanded.

Who Should Attend? Individuals responsible for performing or participating in internal audits under ISO 9001:2015.

How to Register: Visit www.NEPIRC.com or simply call Ms. Sheree Klemow at 570.819.8966 x 119.

Six Sigma Green Belt Training - NEPIRC Training Facility - 75 Young Street, Hanover Township, PA.

Dates: Each Thursday, March 21 - April 18, 2019 (5 Sessions)  
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What is Six Sigma? Six Sigma is a problem solving methodology that uses statistical tools and techniques to greatly reduce the frequency of defect and errors within products and services. Six Sigma initiatives increase customer satisfaction and decrease operating costs by identifying, analyzing and eliminating variation within production, business administration and customer service processes. Typically, Six Sigma is implemented through targeted improvement projects that apply proven approaches to a specific production or administrative process. Most projects can be performed by qualified Six Sigma Green Belts, with Six Sigma Black Belts assisting as needed. More intensive projects may require the extensive experience typically held only by certified Six Sigma Black Belts or Master Black Belts.

How is the Course Structured? This five-session course provides comprehensive coverage a variety of Six Sigma statistical tools and other Six Sigma concepts, roles and implementation approaches. Participants will learn how to identify, evaluate and conduct Six Sigma projects within their companies and will apply the Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control (DMAIC) process to a Six Sigma project that spans the length of the course. Participants will also be provided with Minitab statistical software for use during the course. At the onset of the course, each participant will be encouraged to identify and perform a small Six Sigma project within their workplace. Individuals accepting that challenge will be given additional one-on-one coaching time for help with their unique project.

Requirements: Each participant is strongly encouraged to have a notebook-style computer for his/her own use during the class. NEPIRC has a limited number of notebook computers available for reservation on a first come-first served basis. Individuals using their own computer may purchase Minitab from NEPIRC (at cost) or load their own version of Minitab, provided that it is the latest release. Individuals wishing to purchase Minitab should contact NEPIRC for more information.

How to Register: Visit www.NEPIRC.com or simply call Ms. Sheree Klemow at 570.819.8966 x 119.
Arena

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Sipe said SMG is proud to manage such a fantastic facility that not only brings great entertainment to the region, but that also makes such a significant financial impact on Northeastern Pennsylvania.

“We continue to show the world that the Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza is the definition of an excellent entertainment venue,” Sipe said.

About the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance (NEPA Alliance) is a regional multi-county economic development agency providing leadership, planning, expertise and services to regional and local governments, businesses, institutions and individuals through innovative and beneficial collaborations and partnerships to enhance the economic development and quality of life of the area.

The NEPA Alliance was organized in 1964 by the private sector that saw the need for a regional approach to economic and community development issues within the region. The NEPA Alliance is now a public/private sector partnership with representation from government and non-governmental private sector organizations.

The goal of the NEPA Alliance is to provide a quality menu of programs and valuable services that best match the needs of our partners and add value to our region.

The NEPA Alliance carries out its mission within the counties of Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Schuylkill and Wayne, which have a total population of 1,015,692 people (according to estimates provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, July 1, 2014) and covers 4,476 square miles.

The NEPA Alliance is one of seven regional agencies called Local Development Districts (LDDs). LDDs help coordinate community and economic development activities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The NEPA Alliance is guided by a fifty (50) member Board of Directors, headed by Board Chairperson, Mary Beth Wood, of which 45 members have voting capabilities. Members of the Board of Directors represent industries, labor, governments, general businesses, professionals and citizens in each of the seven counties that the NEPA Alliance serves.

Jeffrey K. Box, President & CEO of the NEPA Alliance, provides executive leadership working with state and federal legislators to expand and explore opportunities that will be beneficial for northeastern Pennsylvania.

About the Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza

Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza is owned by the Luzerne County Convention Center Authority, a government body appointed by Luzerne County.

The arena is managed by SMG, the world leader in entertainment and sports facilities management with catering and concessions services provided by SAVOR at Mohegan Sun Arena.

The arena opened on November 13, 1999 when the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins of the American Hockey League made their debut.

Originally called the Northeastern Pennsylvania Civic Arena, the facility became First Union Arena at Casey Plaza when First Union Bank purchased the naming rights. The name changed to Wachovia Arena at Casey Plaza in 2002 after a corporate merger. In January 2010, Downs Racing, LP purchased the naming rights and changed the venue name to Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza.

The arena’s primary tenant is the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins hockey team, an American Hockey League affiliate of the National Hockey League Pittsburgh Penguins.

With over 8,000 permanent seats and a capacity of nearly 10,000 for concerts, the arena has played host to some of the biggest names in entertainment, including Elton John, Cher, Neil Diamond, James Taylor, Carole King, Barry Manilow, Janet Jackson, The Eagles, AC/DC and Simon & Garfunkel.

About SMG

Founded in 1977, SMG provides management services to more than 240 public assembly facilities including convention and exhibition centers, arenas, stadiums, theatres, performing arts centers, equestrian facilities, science centers and a variety of other venues. With facilities across the globe, SMG manages more than 15 million square feet of exhibition space and more than 1.5 million sports and entertainment seats. As the recognized global industry leader, SMG provides venue management, sales, marketing, event booking and programming, construction and design consulting, and pre-opening services for such landmark facilities as McCormick Place & Soldier Field in Chicago, Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco, Houston’s NRG Park and the Mercedes Benz Superdome. SMG also offers food and beverage operations through its concessions and catering company SAVOR, currently serving more than 140 accounts worldwide.

For more information visit www.smgworld.com.

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

Arena events

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Arenacross
WWE Live
Monster Jam
Little Big Town
Harlem Globetrotters
Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade
Judas Priest
Kevin Hart
PIAA Basketball District 2 Championships
PA Junior Wrestling
Home and Garden Show
NEPA Employment Expo
Marvel Universe Live
PA1 Call
NEPA Synod
WWE Smackdown Live
Trump Rallies
Jehovah’s Witnesses
Bull Riding
Newboys
Jake Owen
Sesame Street Live
Big Church Night Out
John Fogerty
TSO
Lynyrd Skynyrd
Paw Patrol Live
Toys for Tots Skate
Harlem Globetrotters

Upcoming Events

Disney on Ice
Justin Moore
Steve Martin/Martin Short
Compassion International Roadshow
TobyMac
Kenny Chesney (fastest arena sellout)
Alabama with Charlie Daniels Band

The Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza.
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CAN DO is a DCED certified economic development organization
Miller’s Ale House opens; hires 93 employees

By Bill O’Boyle
boboye@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE TWP. — The Nov. 26 grand opening of Miller’s Ale House was all about the numbers — 48 beers on tap, 65 big-screen televisions and, most significantly, 93 new employees.

As customers filed in, the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony Monday to welcome Miller’s to Northeastern Pennsylvania. Miller’s is located at 2310 Wilkes-Barre Township Blvd., in the space formerly occupied by Logan’s Roadhouse.

Miller’s Ale House is a casual sports-themed restaurant and bar with freshly made food, known for its signature hand-breaded, boneless chicken Zingers, tossed in a choice of more than 15 sauces. The menu also features a wide variety of appetizers, burgers and entrees, including steaks and seafood.

Ray Holden, president and chief operating officer of Miller’s Ale House, Inc., that operates restaurants in 13 states. The Wilkes-Barre Township Miller’s is the 90th for the chain and its eighth in Pennsylvania.

Holden said Jack and Claire Miller opened the first Miller’s Ale House in 1988, in Jupiter, Fla., as a local place to be enjoyed by all walks of life. He said the Millers sold the business to Roark Capital of Atlanta, Ga.

“We’re expanding our footprint from the Philadelphia area across the state,” Holden said. “We searched for a good spot to open in Northeastern Pennsylvania and we believe we found the right place in the right community.”

Holden said Miller’s likes to be a part of the community it serves and he said, “We will earn our stripes by providing great food and service.”

Holden and his employees showed customers and guests around the remodeled space.

“We’ve made a few changes,” We hope you like what we’ve done with the place.”

Holden urged everyone to spread the word about the new place in town.

“Tell your family and friends and tell them to pass it along,” he said.

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Ensuring an even brighter economic future

By Joe Boylan
Executive Director, Wilkes-Barre Connect

WILKES-BARRE — For decades, the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business & Industry (CBI), in addition to other nonprofit economic development organizations in Northeastern Pennsylvania, served as the primary real estate developer in the region.

This role was not only timely as private investment was stagnant in NEPA, but represented a much-needed philosophical approach to develop and attract new industries and diversifying our local economy — learning from our missteps during the dominance of the coal industry.

The goal was simple — redefine our economic engine while laying the groundwork for future private development.

This strategy proved to be sound, in particular when reexamining development that had occurred during the past two decades in the Highland Business Park, Arena Hub, East Mountain Corporate Center and downtown Wilkes-Barre.

Our vision provided opportunities for the Tambur family, Mericle Commercial Development and others to execute and attract several key strategic investments spanning multiple industries. The result has been an influx of jobs and provided a significant enhancement to the quality of life in our region.

More importantly, both Tambur and Mericle, in particular, continue to invest and drive economic development in Northeastern Pennsylvania, making our region attractive to large employers and retail outlets — and officially taking the developer role from the local economic development providers.

With the role of developer now in our rear-view mirror, the CBI spent the last few years redefining the appropriate role as a non-profit economic development organization. It was time for us to pivot. After countless research and strategic sessions, the CBI began its transformation from a developer of bricks and mortar to developer of programs and initiatives. This switch allowed us as an organization to go back to our roots of being a true advocate for the business community.

This approach is now the core mission of Wilkes-Barre Connect — the program in which we drive entrepreneurial and economic development in NEPA. Housed in the CBI, Connect provides entrepreneurs, start-ups, and existing businesses with the providers, resources and facilities they need to grow in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Connect is fueled by its unique blend of partners — Penn State (Wilkes-Barre) University, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, Diamond City Partnership, and Wilkes University (SBDC, Family Business Alliance, Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development, and the Allan P. Kirby Center for Free Enterprise and Entrepreneurship). Connect has established itself as a problem solver by understanding and adapting to trends and developing user-friendly solutions. Connect effectively provides on-demand services that are customized to meet the needs of businesses. The approach acknowledges and solves the age-old problem of economic development organizations (and academic institutions) not being able to keep up with the speed in which private industry operates.

As we turn the calendar to 2019, this strategic vision is needed more than ever. Access to a ready and able workforce continues to be the number one issue facing our businesses — in particular Highland Park, Arena Hub and the East Mountain Corporate Center.

Businesses are struggling to identify and capture talent locally — yet we are surrounded by 14 higher education institutions graduating more and more students each year. We don't have a lack of talent — we have a lack of access to the talent.

For 2019, Connect and CBI have set out to change that narrative by rolling out a new program called the Park Website Initiative.

The initiative will deliver new websites for each park in the Greater Wilkes-Barre footprint (including Highland and East Mountain), with a forward-facing approach to educate and promote the businesses within the park. More importantly, the site will feature a tenant portal providing businesses to access a newly-developed on-demand platform.

The platform will provide businesses with access to a variety of solutions in a streamlined, user-friendly, online process — allowing tenants to address issues such as workforce, structuring academic-industry partnerships, developing intern programs, and public funding initiatives at a click of a button. The Park Website Initiative will establish new pipelines between our job providers and job seekers — strengthening the bond between the academic and business community.

The initiative — which launches in March 2019 — perfectly captures the new direction of the CBI and Connect, providing programs and initiatives to help businesses flourish in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Now when we drive through Highland Park, East Mountain Corporate Center and Arena Hub, we don’t talk about what we’ve done — we talk about where we are going.

The vision and dedication of past Chamber officials laid the foundation for the private sector to assume the role of developer.

It’s now time for the current Chamber team to protect that investment and ensure an even brighter future by providing current tenants and developers with the resources they need to grow in NEPA.
Report cites initiatives aimed at challenges, opportunities

By Bill O’Boyle
boboyle@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — The Institute for Public Policy and Economic Development has released its new Talent Report as a workforce development initiative to help address the challenges and opportunities being sought as a region in the coming decade.

Teri Ooms, executive director at The Institute, said the report is important because a region that has the ability to provide a skilled workforce will be on top economically, as workforce development is directly linked to successful economic development.

“The report highlights the workforce needs throughout multiple industries along with wages, projections and post-secondary awards in this data profile of Luzerne and Lackawanna counties,” Ooms said. “The study provides answers to questions regarding the education and talent demand and supply in the two-county region.”

Workforce Trends
- As of 2017, both counties had a total workforce of 262,714 workers. In the next five years, the population distribution by age suggests that both counties could face a net deficit of nearly 9,390 workers. This is because the total number of workers (ages 55 to 64 years) who might be leaving the workforce is higher than the number of people who would be entering the workforce (ages six to 15 years) to replace them.
  - The labor force participation rate in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties has consistently remained lower than the rates in the rest of the state and nation.
  - The region’s higher education infrastructure is an asset in addressing workforce needs. In the 2016-2017 academic year, a total of 7,747 degrees were awarded by 15 colleges and universities in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.
  - In the past five years, both counties combined have seen a net employment growth of more than 6,000 — an increase of 2.4 percent.
  - The total number of degrees awarded in both counties combined represents four percent of all degrees awarded in the state. The most commonly-awarded diplomas were bachelor degrees, which also represents four percent of all bachelor degrees awarded in Pennsylvania.

Employment
In 2017, a total of 256,077 people were employed across all the industries in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties. Over the last five years, both regions have experienced an increase of 8,332 jobs, at an annual rate of +0.7 percent. The top five employers are Health Care and Social Assistance (46,639), Retail Trade (30,469), Manufacturing (26,058), Transportation and Warehousing (23,044), and Accommodation and Food Services (20,707).

Health Care
Of the sectors in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties, Health Care and Social Assistance contributed the largest portion to the GDP in 2017. This sector represented about 14 percent of the region’s total GDP. The region’s top industry by employment is the Health Care and Social Assistance, employing 46,639 workers. Employment in this sector is expected to be the fastest growing over the next five years, with a +1.2 percent year-over-year rate of growth. This translates to an increase of 2,916 jobs over this period. Within the same time-frame, the occupations with the projected fastest job growth in the region are Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (779 jobs) and Personal Care and Service Occupations (705 jobs).

From 2018 to 2023, this industry is projected to be the fastest growing as well as have the highest expected demand. The forecast indicates that the health care and support assistance industry in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties will have a demand for about 25,450 workers during the next five years. During this time-frame, employment is projected to increase by 2,916 jobs, with about 11,072 workers anticipated to exit the workforce and another 11,462 workers transferring to other industries.

Retail Trade
Of the sectors in the region, retail trade is the fourth largest contributor to the regional GDP and represents about seven percent of the regions total GDP. With 30,469 employees, it is the second largest sector based on number of workers. In addition, the Sales and Related Occupations group has 24,132 workers, making it the third largest occupation group after the Office and Administrative Support Occupations (41,735 workers), and Transpor-
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The manufacturing industry in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties will have a demand for over 11,000 workers during the next five years. During this time-frame, about 4,839 workers are anticipated to exit the workforce and another 8,253 will transfer to other industries. It is crucial that both counties position themselves strategically in this fast-changing and advancing sector.

Transportation, Warehousing & Logistics

The transportation and warehousing sector has become increasingly important due to the rise in e-commerce. With an increase of 5,832 jobs over the last five years, the transportation and warehousing industry has shown the best job growth in the region. As of the first quarter of 2018, Transportation and Warehouse (+5,832 jobs), Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services (+1,861), and Accommodation and Food Services (+1,743).

Despite the estimated decrease of 151 jobs, this industry is expected to have third highest new demand in the region — after Health Care and Sales. With projected increase in the number of new jobs, about 7,389 workers exiting the workforce, and another 9,300 transferring to another industry, the demand for workers in the accommodation and food services industry is estimated at over 16,500 workers in the next five years.

Administrative & Support Services

The Administrative and Support Services sub-sector of the Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services sector has shown fast growth over the past five years, with expected job growth in the next five years. This industry has added 1,779 jobs over the last five years, bringing the total employment to 16,129 workers. On the occupation level, Office and Administrative Support Occupations is the largest major occupation group in the both counties combined, employing 41,669 workers. From 2018 to 2023, this occupation group is projected to experience the highest separation demand (occupation demand due to retirements and workers moving from one occupation to another) of 22,703 jobs. This followed by the Transportation and Material Moving Occupations field (17,518).

Over the next five years, employment in this sector is expected to reach a new high of +0.3 percent year-over-year rate of growth. This translates to an increase of 273 jobs over the period. In both counties combined, this industry will demand about 9,664 workers. During this time-frame, about 4,008 workers are anticipated to exit the workforce, with another 5,383 workers transferring to other industries.

Construction

Over the last five years, the construction industry has been one of the fastest growing sectors in both counties combined, with an average annual growth rate of 1.4 percent. As of 2018, a total number of 10,891 workers are employed in this industry. The Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction sub-sector shows the highest growth among all other sub-sectors. This sub-sector reported an annual growth rate of 1.6 percent over the next five. Building construction has also shown a similar projection of 0.2 percent growth from 2018 to 2023.

The construction industry remains one of the few industries with continual job growth. It is projected to have one of the fastest growing sectors, with an anticipated five-year annual growth of 0.5 percent. From 2018 to 2023, this industry is projected to add about 248 jobs, with about 1,941 workers exiting the workforce and another 3,463 workers transferring to other industries. As a result of these changes, the industry will experience a demand for about 5,651 workers.

Finance and Insurance

Between 2013 and the second quarter of 2018, the finance and insurance industry experienced an average annual employment growth rate of 0.8 percent. At this rate, this industry was the seventh fastest growing industry in the last five years. The same growth rate was seen in the Manufacturing and the Health Care and Social Assistance industry. As of 2018, a total number of 10,417 workers are employed in the finance and insurance industry, with a total of 738 employers.

A decrease in employment is expected in the finance and insurance industry. The projections reveal that 123 jobs could be lost in the next five years. This brings the estimated total new demand to 4,757 workers. About 1,867 workers are anticipated to exit the workforce, while another 3,013 workers could be transferring to other industries.

Population

According to the 2017 Census Bureau estimates, Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties had a combined population of 528,104 people. This makes the Scranton—Wilkes-Barre—Hazleton, PA Metro Area the 100th largest metropolitan area in the United States, with total population of 555,426 residents.

Population Change

Since 2010, the nationwide population has continued to increase. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has also shown population increases, except in 2016. Over the years, Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties have shown some consistency in their total populations. However, both counties saw a combined population decline between 2012 and 2016. The population decline could be attributed to natural causes and migration.

Reach Bill O’Boyle at 570-991-6118 or on Twitter @TLBillOBoyle.
HAZLETON — Companies throughout Greater Hazleton and southern Luzerne County turn to CAN DO to develop business financing solutions.

At CAN DO, businesses meet with economic development staff to address their project and financing goals, map out strategies, work with state and regional partners, and secure funding to expand their operations.

CAN DO facilitates financing opportunities that play a pivotal role in shaping the future of businesses and industries, resulting in economic development benefits for the region. CAN DO's expertise and partnerships provide assistance and resources to help companies grow and create additional jobs. From small, family-owned businesses to multi-national corporations, CAN DO facilitates wide-ranging financing opportunities that allow industries to flourish, create and retain more jobs and spur continued economic development in northeast Pennsylvania.

CAN DO staff meets with business owners, addressing their needs and concerns, developing a game plan for financing opportunities, engaging their network to carry out strategies, and completing projects that turn ideas into reality. If a business requires machinery and equipment, for example, CAN DO will review the best financing options for the project, complete the application process, and ensure funding is in place for the acquisition.

When Susquehanna Brewing Company (SBC) explored financing for machinery and equipment, CAN DO was there to help. SBC contributes to Pennsylvania's distinction as the nation's leader in craft beer production. In 2017, SBC contacted CAN DO to discuss its plans to expand its production operations. The craft brewer previously worked with CAN DO on financing projects and, based on this experience, turned to the organization's economic development staff to facilitate financing opportunities for additional machinery and equipment costs.

CAN DO packaged a $190,000 Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA) machinery and equipment loan, with a special 2.00% interest rate incentive on a 10-year term. The PIDA loan was matched by financing from Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance (NEPA Alliance), based in Pittston, which approved a $200,000 loan at 2.00% on a 10-year term. Through CAN DO's partnerships and leadership, SBC secured the fitting package to complete its project, which ultimately expanded its operations.

Recently, Summit Utility Structures (SUS) worked with CAN DO on a similar financing project. The company, which produces tubular poles for use in the utility industry, turned to CAN DO in securing financing as part of its relocation to Hazleton. CAN DO played a pivotal role in acquiring machinery and equipment, along with working capital, for the company.

In November, the PIDA board approved a $1,000,000 machinery and equipment loan, matched by $1,000,000 in bank financing, with a 3.75% interest, 10-year term. CAN DO also facilitated PIDA's $100,000 working capital line of credit, which will assist SUS with its relocation, which in turn will result in the creation and retention of jobs.

Through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, CAN DO is a Certified Economic Development Organization. As a CEDO, CAN DO works with PIDA in providing low-interest loans and lines of credit for eligible businesses that commit to creating and retaining full-time jobs. For businesses like SBC and SUS, PIDA loans can finance the expansion of facilities, the purchase of new equipment or machinery, and working capital. CAN DO is permitted to complete PIDA loans for all of Luzerne County. It is through PIDA that many CAN DO clients secure financing for their projects.

In addition to its work with PIDA and NEPA Alliance, CAN DO partners with organizations like the Luzerne County Office of Community Development and Metro-Action to help businesses acquire land and building acquisition loans, working capital loans, machinery and equipment loans, and job creation and investment loans.

CAN DO recognizes that financial assistance plays an integral role in the success of a project or growth of a business and that’s why it acts as a liaison between businesses and service providers, working to tailor solutions to each individual client. CAN DO’s economic development staff has decades of experience in identifying the appropriate comprehensive financial resources that leverage federal, state, regional and local funding.

For more information on CAN DO’s financing program, contact Charles McElwee III at 570-455-1508, ext. 2007.
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