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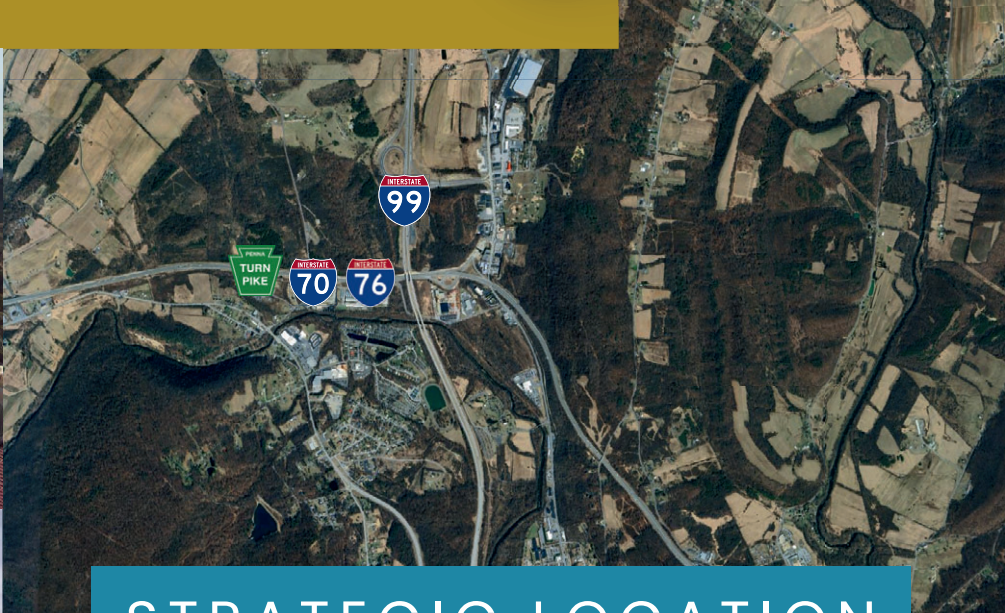
the

Bedford County Advantage

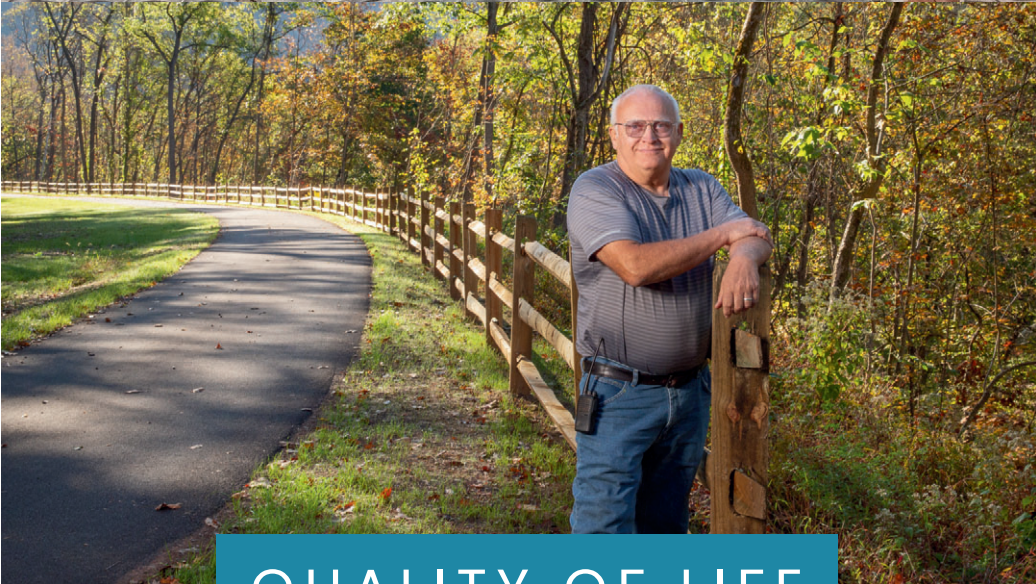
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Bedford County Development Association

The Bedford County Advantage

WHERE OPPORTUNITY MEETS COMMUNITY

strategic location

50%

Bedford County provides a regional distribution network reaching 50% of the U.S. population within a 500-mile, one-day drive.



dedicated workforce

23,800

in Bedford County's labor force

While not a "metro region," Bedford County boasts a diverse and growing economy, fueled by a robust talent pipeline.



quality of life

100+ miles

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ease of doing business

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90 acres

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Workforce Development

Local workforce development partners adjust to changing industry demands

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

Two career-focused educational partner institutions fill a very important gap between secondary education and Bedford County's employers.

The Bedford County Technical Center and the Allegany College of Maryland's Bedford Campus both provide instruction and hands-on experiences for 10th through 12th grade students and career advancement credit and workforce development training for adults.

Established in 1985 as a shared-time technical center serving the Bedford Area and Everett Area School Districts, the 36,000 square foot BCTC expanded its programming 16 years ago to begin enrolling students from the county's three other school districts on a paid tuition basis.

"We have about 330 students enrolled today, and our enrollment increased by about 50% when we expanded from two to three sessions a day to accommodate other school districts," said Mike O'Dellick, who's now in his 5th year as BCTC's administrative director.

ACM also provides technical training for high school students in its 20,000 square foot facility and has operated in the county since 1990.

Technology driver

There's a significant and growing demand for skilled labor in Bedford County, O'Dellick said, driven by a declining population and the retirement of baby boomers. Automation, advanced production technologies, and evolving industry needs also enter into the equation.

"Bedford County is rich in manufacturing, and those employers' needs are also changing rapidly with the advancement of technology," he said.

To better understand those needs, BCTC recently partnered with a consulting firm to conduct a demand analysis in Bedford County and the surrounding Southern Alleghenies region. The study surveyed local employers and middle school students and combined that information with Department of Labor and industry-specific data.

"The final report listed the county's top demands as advanced welding, advanced manufacturing, and HVAC skills," O'Dellick said.

BCTC issued a request for proposals in September 2025 seeking bids on the architectural design of the school's expansion. The expansion would include a second welding program, advanced manufacturing and electrical labs, and an HVAC program. The addition of diesel mechanic and heavy equipment workshops could be addressed in a later phase.

BCTC's welding program is currently at capacity and turned away nearly 50 students in the past three years.

"The manufacturing lab will allow us to mirror a lot of current industry needed skills to help develop students so they can step right into employment and be successful and marketable," O'Dellick said. "We're also looking at adding an HVAC program."

Wide variety of subjects

ACM offers 13 degree programs, nine certificate programs, and six letters of



recognition in fields that include nursing, business, computer technology, criminal justice, psychology and general studies.

It also offers a variety of technical training opportunities and education in partnership with the BCTC, whose programs include automotive repair, building trades, welding, health technologies, cosmetology, culinary/hospitality and Agriculture/Biotech.

"Our early college program focuses on a seamless transition for high school students," according to David Jones, President of Allegany College of Maryland.

ACM is working to better understand how to effectively utilize artificial intelligence in instruction. Our programs are looking at ways to better embrace AI, which will allow students and future employees to effectively use this technology in the workplace," Jones said. "Our goal is to prepare our students for the workplace of today and tomorrow. AI is becoming a tool that they will use."

Industry partners who help ACM develop programming include several of the largest employers in the county through the Bedford County Campus Advisory Committee.

"Unmet workforce needs serve as a guide as the College develops and revises our academic and instructional programs," Jones said. "When we heard of the need to provide cybersecurity training as well as advanced manufacturing training, the College worked to develop these instructional programs to meet the needs of the community".

ACM's cybersecurity program now delivers the skills necessary for Cisco and CompTIA industry certification exams, and provides formal recognition for individuals working in the computer field who want to certify or upgrade skills.

Adult education

BCTC offers evening classes for adults looking to advance their careers or upskill.

"Our Certified Nursing Assistant program is popular and prepares students to take their certification exam," O'Dellick said. "Adult welding classes are also popular, and we also offer industrial electricity and electrical motor controls classes."

Many adult students work during the day and take classes in the evening, while others enroll to learn a skill for a hobby or give themselves the knowledge they need to start their own business, he said, adding that many employers sponsor their employees and even pay for all of their tuition in some cases.

On the high school side, "We've set records with the number of students we've placed in the industry through our co-operative program

during their senior year," O'Dellick said. "Last year we placed more than 30 students with industry partners. They get paid by the employer through that program."

Jones added that the Pathways in Technology Early College High School Pennsylvania program offers students the opportunity to complete a Cybersecurity Certificate while still in high school, with rigorous courses designed to deliver a 31-credit certificate from ACM.

Continued partnership

When it comes to education, "We're undoubtedly witnessing a paradigm shift driven by technology, not only at the high school level but in colleges as well," O'Dellick said. "The demand is there, and the good news is that that demand increases wages."

BCTC has kept up with technology developments by adding a CNC plasma cutter and CNC press brake in its welding program, and by adding CNC routers and engravers in its carpentry program.

"We were able to purchase a \$100,000 anatomage table with grant money that uses digital imagery to simulate a cadaver so that our nursing students can study different body systems," O'Dellick said. "We've also added a Snap-On scan tool for automotive diagnostics. Technology is driving everything, and we're in the process of getting drones for our Ag Science program, because we're seeing more drone-based applications in that industry."

It's a challenge to keep up with technology changes and ensure that instruction is meeting the needs of a constantly evolving workplace, O'Dellick said.

"We are very fortunate and blessed with the tremendous amount of community, industry and employer support that we receive," he continued. "They're constantly asking what we need and providing support, whether it's expertise or financial, and we're extremely grateful for that."

As Jones also noted, the vast majority of students who attend local community colleges like ACM tend to remain in that community when they graduate.

"All of the training we do directly supports industries and jobs that are right here in Bedford County. It's a good investment," he observed. "When it comes to educating the workforce here, we don't know what the next 10 years will look like, but we'll continue to listen to our local stakeholders and work diligently to provide the education and training to meet the needs of the community."

Bedford County school districts are preparing now to meet future education needs

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

New technologies, artificial intelligence and the demand for new skill sets are rapidly changing the workplace, meaning that college and career preparedness is more critical than ever.

In response, each of Bedford County's five school districts is making strategic adjustments to ensure educators and students have the tools, resources and environment to adequately prepare for the next steps, beyond school.

To start with, each school district is currently engaged in renovations of some sort, targeting energy savings with mechanical systems and LED lighting upgrades, improving security and structures, and modernizing classrooms to improve the learning environment.

The Northern Bedford County School District (NBC) has invested more than \$6 million in upgrades since 2020, and current projects include a new 4,000 square foot wellness center, asbestos tile removal, and new kitchen equipment.

The Bedford Area School District's (BASD) \$50 million in investments will include an update to technology in its television studio and the improvement of virtually every aspect of its outdoor athletic assets, to include lighting, seating, concession areas, and the field and track surfaces.

Roof replacements are planned for Everett Area School District's (EASD) Middle School and High School Building. Updated auditoriums are planned for BASD and NBCSD. Chestnut Ridge School District is building a new elementary school expected to cost approximately \$30 million and open in time for the 2027-2028 school year. Those are just some of the highlights among a lengthy list of capital projects happening throughout the county.

Cutting edge technology

Superintendent David Burkett said EASD operates on a six-year curriculum cycle to ensure instruction materials remain current and align with standards. New English Language Arts, Math and Science programs were introduced in the last three years, and the next cycle will see new Social Studies materials adopted in the 2026-2027 school year.

"We intend to purchase an anatomage table," he said, a 3D anatomy visualization tool that will enhance science and health curricula with hands-on learning experiences often found only in higher education or medical training settings.

"The classroom of the future must prepare students for emerging demands in the workplace," Burkett said, which prompted an October professional development session at EASD to train staff to use generative AI as an instructional tool.

NBCSD has also purchased ViewSonic Boards that enable teachers to write or access digital tools during lessons without breaking the flow of instruction.

"We're asking teachers and kids to do more, and AI is helping administrators write their memos and emails," said BASD Superintendent Paul Ruhlman. "Students use AI and other technologies when they create their video packages."

While there are tremendous possible upsidest to AI, there is also the potential for harm, acknowledged Tussey Mountain School District (TMSD) Superintendent Jerry Shoemaker.

"We're developing policies, regulations and guidelines to use AI in our district, with input from several stakeholder groups," he said.

"The opportunity is to prepare students for a workplace that will look very different than it does today and thoughtfully integrate tools that enhance teaching and learning, and that are flexible enough to adapt as innovations emerge," said Kyle Kane, Chestnut Ridge School District (CRSD) Superintendent. "We will soon be hosting opportunities for students, parents and



other community members to understand the capabilities and dangers of AI."

Industry support

County schools work with local industry partners to develop curricula and hone in on the skills and education that employers need.

"The most difficult arena to keep up with is within the engineering and manufacturing sectors," Kane said. "CNCs, welders and laser cutters continue to evolve, and it's nearly impossible to continually upgrade this technology for our students, so we continue to be creative and problem solve to give our young people access and experience."

Burkett said EASD cultivates partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, the Bedford County Technical Center (BCTC) and the Allegany College of Maryland to expose students to possible careers, access dual-enrollment, and give students hands-on learning experiences.

"Cottle's Asphalt provided a tremendous amount of resources for our automotive students," said NBCSD Superintendent Todd Beatty. "We're also meeting with other local businesses that are interested in partnering with the district."

TMSD works with local businesses who employ students to develop learning experiences that can lead to post-graduation employment, Shoemaker said, and engages with Mount Aloysius College, St. Francis University, ACM and Penn State Altoona to develop dual enrollment opportunities.

"One aspect of workforce development that doesn't get talked about much is developing the entire student," Ruhlman said. "We concentrate on character and perseverance through our Bison Pride initiatives, doing things the right way and to the best of your ability, so that our students can go out and be great team workers, great team players, and great team leaders."

Hands-on experience

In terms of translatable skills, BASD Principal Kevin Steele said programs like BattleBots that are supported by Kennametal and other local employers have been successful in teaching robotics and 3D parts printing, skills that are applicable in the real world environment.

"We have a hiring fair each spring and community members help prepare our students for interviews," added BASD Assistant Superintendent Brian Thompson. "We also work closely with BCTC on student placement as interns with employers. We get feedback from the students on what works and what needs improvement by holding exit interviews with our graduating seniors, and invite past graduates to share their experiences

with us in the board room."

Karen Eppley, BASD's Transition Coordinator, noted that the school's partnership with local employers provides meaningful exposure to potential employment for students with diagnosed disabilities.

"Homewood Living Springhouse warmly opened their doors for a job sampling program, giving our students with disabilities opportunities to explore maintenance, nursing, marketing, dietary service and reception careers," she said. "Some of our students enter more supported employment in our school buildings, and our students also tour the Hiram G. Andrews Center in Johnstown to receive a full vocational evaluation and sample some of their programs."

Positive outlook

Taking all of these things into consideration, the county's superintendents all agree that the outlook for education and meeting the future needs of the workplace is strong and positive.

"We're seeing improvements in achievement and engagement, strengthened instructional capacity, and the benefits of universal free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision," Burkett said.

"Our senior classes have averaged over 500 college credits upon graduation from Northern Bedford the past several years, and our district has always had a very high graduation rate," added Beatty.

"We have a fair amount of industry for a small rural town, but that industry walks hand in hand with us because we're a pipeline for them and they make sure we understand their needs," Ruhlman said.

At TMSD, "We have developed a supportive and safe learning environment," Shoemaker said. "We're constantly working to determine the needs of each individual student, and working with teachers and local employment partners to develop curricula and teaching methods to meet those needs."

If there is one problem to acknowledge, "It's that we haven't always done the best job of advertising our successes," Kane said. "Our students excel in Advanced Placement and dual-enrollment courses, they earn industry certifications, and achieve at levels near or at the top in the region. We're proud of the many ways our students contribute to Bedford County and beyond the county."



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Strategic Location

Manufacturing background strengthens Reinforced Logistics’ steady growth

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

Bedford County didn’t become a prominent manufacturing and employment center by accident. Business owners and development officials here all say there’s thought and intention behind every decision that has led to job creation and strong industry competitiveness.

One of the best examples of that can be found at Reinforced Logistics, which started as an in-house solution for Bedford Reinforced Plastic’s own transportation needs and took just two short years to become a respected third-party logistics provider and asset-based carrier active throughout the continental United States, Canada and Mexico.

Greg Hauck, a Chestnut Ridge alum who graduated from Shippensburg University with a supply chain management degree, helped set up BRP’s freight division before leaving to work for another freight broker. He was quickly asked to return to fill the role of the controller, who had announced his intention to retire.

“Seeing the long-term growth of the company and my own career growth, I didn’t hesitate,” Hauck said. “I understood the freight expense, brokerage costs and the uncertainty in the market, and we grew the company to help control finances.”

Making services available to local businesses helped Reinforced Logistics gain a foothold in the logistics market.

“Manufacturing is one of our biggest markets, and we understand the needs of that market completely because of our own manufacturing background, which differentiates us from our competitors,” Hauck said. “We ship all kinds of products that include refrigerated and controlled climate shipments, so we now serve ice cream and meat production customers too.”

Efficiency upgrades

Brokerage constitutes the majority of business for Reinforced Logistics.

“We have our own fleet, which we use to learn the lane and help us understand exactly what new customers need before we partner with a good, reliable local carrier in their region,” Hauck said. “That gives us a pool of thousands of truck drivers we can rely on to haul freight at any given time to cover



urgent orders and fulfill those orders quickly.”

A recent technology upgrade saw Transportation Management Systems software from DAT Freight & Analytics added to the company’s trucks, enabling live tracking and real-time updates for clients who need to know exactly when shipments are arriving.

“Imagine a crane waiting for a piece of material that needs to go on the roof of a high-rise building in Brooklyn,” Hauck said. “They can see the truck coming and minimize the time they have to shut down the road for safety.”

Drivers are also able to pass off electronic paperwork immediately to customers who don’t like to wait days to receive invoices or other documentation.

“That really improves efficiency to help us stay ahead of competition,” Hauck said.

Since its founding in 2018, Reinforced Logistics’ sales have doubled year after year and continue to grow.

“We were built into BRP at the beginning but we have our own full staff now with four fleet drivers and six office employees, including a sales team and an accountant,” Hauck said.

Although Bedford County has a strong pool of professional drivers with years of experience, it can be difficult to find drivers experienced in oversize and other specialized freight needs.

“We’ve overcome that with our own training program,” he acknowledged. “Some of our employees walked through the door out of college or the medical field, and within

four or five months they were able to sell freight and efficiently service our customers.”

Earned trust

Proximity to the turnpike and multiple interstate highways makes Bedford the perfect location for a company that specializes in logistics, Hauck said.

“Walmart operates one of the largest cold chain distribution warehouses in the region here in our county, so there’s always a great pool of owner-operators who don’t want to drive to Pittsburgh or Chambersburg to pick up a return load,” he observed. “That helps fulfill the needs of all the manufacturers who ship products out of the county and helps convince others to locate here and bring more tax revenue to the area.”

Bedford County Development Association and other partners “do a phenomenal job of bringing manufacturing to Bedford County,” Hauck added. “The strong demand for logistics here speaks to the strength and health of those industries here.”

In turn, Reinforced Logistics supports BCDA and the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce, and frequently brings in interns from the county’s schools to learn about different roles in the company.

“What works best for is that we have a huge carrier pool of reliable truck drivers ... and we’re an honest trucking company that came from a manufacturing background and understands those needs. That brings an unmatched level of trust to our customers, and that’s our biggest selling point.”

Q&A with Grove Dixon, president of Smith Transport Warehouse

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

Smith Transport LLC was established in 1982, though founder, Barry F. Smith started his long-haul career as an independent contractor and managed a small fleet of trucks for his father several decades prior. It’s now a national carrier that serves the world’s largest retailers and manufacturers.

In addition to its trucking operations, the company also branched out into full service warehousing and logistics and quickly grew to dominate that space as well. Since 1998, Smith Transport Warehouse has been serving Bedford County, the surrounding region, and customers across the United States from its Bedford location near Cessna. Grove Dixon currently serves as Smith Transport Warehouse’s President.



Q: How did Smith Transport Warehouse begin operations?

Dixon: Our warehouse company started in 1982 in Roaring Spring. From 1997 through 2022 we built an additional 1.5 million square feet of warehouse space, which now includes the 300,000 square foot warehouse in Bedford built in 1998.

Q: How big are your operations there?

Dixon: We have 12 employees. Our capabilities are fairly straightforward, we provide storage, inbound and outbound loading capabilities, and local shuttle moves that support local manufacturers and other businesses throughout Bedford County and the local region.

Q: How has technology changed what you do?

Dixon: On the technology side, we have a robust Warehouse Management System that allows tracking of inventory by item and lot, and supports all types of inventory rotation that including First-In, First-Out management for non-perishable goods, and First-Expired, First-Out management that allows more stringent controls for perishable items that prevents waste and ensures freshness. We also use multiple forms of electronic order tenders and product recall tracking software, and we have a web portal that allows

our customers to see their inventory live. Additionally, we communicate all transactions through a wireless RF (radio frequency) environment, which improves efficiency.

Q: What major industries do you serve?

Dixon: We primarily serve manufacturing and online retail. Our territory is national, but with more focus on the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and New England. Our customer base is very stable with an average tenure of 14 years. However, we tend to add a new customer annually.

Q: What benefit does your location provide?

Dixon: It’s always beneficial to be located near an Interstate intersection such as the Pennsylvania Turnpike and I-99, which are both less than a mile away from our warehouse. The location is also very close to the Bedford Business Parks, where a lot of our local customers are located. We have easy access to all compass directions from here.

Q: Has this location helped you with access and marketing?

Dixon: The Bedford location offers next day service to the Carolinas, New England and the Chicago market, while providing a lower cost environment than the I-81 and I-95 corridors

Q: What did it take to develop Smith Transport’s reputation, and how do you work to maintain that?

Dixon: Barry Smith is still the driving force behind the company. He uses his entrepreneur skills, business instincts and a willingness to take risks to guide the company. He has always insisted that his equipment and facilities be first class and doesn’t compromise. His approach was the same with the people he hired, and he expected a “can-do” attitude toward servicing our customers. Our job is as simple as being a solutions provider for our customer and being easy to do business with.

Q: What do you see in terms of the commercial and industry strengths in Bedford County?

Dixon: Bedford County offers a good location for market access, and a quality workforce. It is easy to see why many quality companies, both homegrown and national, have chosen to locate and grow their businesses in Bedford County.

Q: Is there anything that’s missing?

Dixon: The only obstacle we see from a warehouse/logistics perspective is the lack of rail service, but that doesn’t prevent us from giving our customers the best service possible, meeting their needs, and continuing to grow and improve our operations

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Strategic Location

REI is genuinely in its element in Bedford County

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

When outdoor recreation retailer REI was looking for a second distribution location to replenish stores on the eastern half of the United States faster and more frequently, Bedford emerged as the obvious choice.

Since opening its doors in 2007, the 525,000 square foot REI distribution center has grown to employ 300, running seven days a week across three shifts. It supports the replenishment of 47 stores and fulfills online orders for customers in the northeast and some international orders as part of a network of four distribution centers throughout the US.

Tina Molski, who was the second employee hired by the REI distribution center and now serves as its director of operations, said there were four reasons that Bedford stood out.

“The I-99 corridor and the Pennsylvania Turnpike make it efficient to bring freight in and ship it back out,” she said. “We also interviewed several local companies and had a consistent response that the workforce in Bedford County was excellent, and we’ve found this to be true.”

The location provides easy access to outdoor recreation, she added, including three state parks, thousands of acres of State Forest and State Game Lands, and a network of water, hiking and cycling trails, all of which are central to REI’s focus.

And finally, she said, the Bedford County Development Association was prepared for the company’s arrival. “BCDA had a pad-ready site available, which significantly reduced the time needed to get our distribution center built and up and running,” Molski said.

Growing demand

The operation’s biggest growth has been tied to online ordering, and recently REI responded to that demand with a substantial technology upgrade, introducing a pocket sortation system that created additional capacity to process and ship orders quickly.

“The new system significantly increases our ability to flex up to higher demand periods, like our bigger sales,” Molski said. “We can fulfill and ship customer orders within approximately 24 hours. Today’s consumer appreciates that convenience, and it has been a huge success for our operation.”

A modern distribution center like REI needs a competent workforce, and Bedford County’s labor pool has no difficulty meeting that need, Molski said.

“It was really apparent when we hit our facility’s 15-year anniversary and approximately 50 of our



employees were also celebrating their 15-year anniversary with REI,” she said. “The following year we had approximately 50 additional employees celebrating their 15-year anniversaries as well.”

Although REI discontinued Community Based Vocational Training programs for high school students during the pandemic and hasn’t restarted that activity, it still supports local workforce development in other ways.

“We are open to and have provided countless tours of our distribution center to Leadership Bedford County, Youth Leadership Bedford County, teachers, Penn State University students, international students and many other groups,” Molski said.

Authentic location

With its focus on outdoor recreation, Molski said REI strives to be authentic in deciding where to locate distribution centers and how to get involved in the local communities that support them.

Since 2007, REI has held 119 service projects in Bedford County, provided \$330,000 in grants to local non-profit organizations, and has established relationships with 50 community partners.

Outside of her responsibilities at REI, Molski serves on the Board of Directors for the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation. She’s also a member of the Elevate Steering Committee and the Outdoor Business Alliance of Pennsylvania Advisory Committee.

“My husband Jim and I love the outdoors and take advantage of the hiking, cycling and camping resources we’ve found here,” Molski said. “We love the dark skies at night, the generally light traffic, and it’s been fantastic to see new businesses continuing to open and invest in Bedford. It’s been the perfect place for us, and for REI.”

Q&A with Jim Veach, Airport Manager at Bedford County Airport

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

The Bedford County Airport began service in 1947 as a grass and gravel landing strip in Cessna known as Max Hunt Memorial Field, which supported a successful flight school. When that airstrip was abandoned, it was replaced by a more contemporary airport built in 1960 and situated closer to the Pennsylvania Turnpike to help pilots locate it from the air.

Recognizing the need for a larger, more modern airport, the Bedford County Airport Authority broke ground on the current facility, and the new airport opened for business in 1994. Jim Veach serves as the current Airport Manager.

Q: What types of air traffic are most common at Bedford County Airport?

Veach: We have seven business class jets, 19 general aviation aircraft and two helicopters based here. Business and private charters, flight instruction, and helicopter traffic make up a large percentage of daily operations. We currently have no cargo operations, but we can accommodate them with our available building sites. We see a lot of East Coast business travel, destinations as far away as Canada and the Caribbean, and a lot of flights to Florida in the winter. Non-business charters are frequently used for hunting and fishing trips and by people attending professional sporting events. On occasion we receive visitors who are traveling to the Omni Bedford Springs Resort, and the Bedford Fall Foliage Festival draws a lot of visitor air traffic.

Q: What accommodations do you provide?

Veach: We have a corporate hangar and office space available. Our fixed-base operator, Bun Air



Corporation, offers aircraft on-demand charter, fuel, aircraft maintenance, flight training, and aircraft management. We have 5 future building sites available, ranging in size from 0.41 acres to 9.32 acres, enrolled in the Airport Land Development Zone program. This incentive-based tax credit program fosters development by providing a \$2,100 per-job tax credit to approved businesses operating within an ALDZ. We do have a conference room available for business travelers, but it’s not utilized too much. Bun Air offers courtesy cars for travelers, which get used frequently. We’re not like a commercial airport with a lot of other traveler amenities or services, because most people don’t have to hang around very long. There’s no TSA line or lengthy check-in process, they pull in, meet their pilot, board the aircraft and take off to their next destination.

Q: How do you support the local manufacturing and business community?

Veach: We are a gateway for business and recreational travelers. Our rural location means no traffic to contend with, no airport lines, just quick, easy, affordable access just minutes

from your car to the air.

Q: What are your size and weight limits?

Veach: With a 5,005 foot by 75 foot runway, the Bedford County Airport is ideally suited for B-II class aircraft such as the Cessna Citation CJ3, but we currently house a Falcon 900 as well, and routinely see Challenger 350 and Gulfstream G450 aircraft.

Q: What are the benefits of your location?

Veach: We’re adjacent to Bedford County Business Park I, and only a few minutes from I-99 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and not far from I-68. We’re less than a two-hour drive to Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Washington, DC, Baltimore, and Morgantown. We’re also less than a 30-minute flight to most major cities in the northeast.

Q: What does the future look like for the airport, how much demand is there?

Veach: We are currently in the design phase of constructing a new box hangar to house a single jet, but we do have available space for 1 or 2 business-class jets in a shared hangar. We also have ample space for expansion and are seeking build-to-suit lease partners

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Quality of Life

Q&A with Sean Bardell, board chair of the Shuster Way Heritage Trail

By **George Berkheimer**
For the Bedford Gazette

The Shuster Way Heritage Trail marked its 10-year anniversary in September. Overseen by the Bedford Joint Municipal Authority, the 8-mile out and back multi-use trail system connects downtown Bedford with surrounding tourist attractions anchored by the Omni Bedford Springs Resort and Old Bedford Village.

Sean Bardell serves as chairman of the board of the Shuster Way Heritage Trail.

Q: What's unique about this trail?

Bardell: It's a true history trail and one of the few that actually ties a lot of historic assets together, from the historic resort to Fort Bedford, the Whiskey Rebellion, and all of the history on display at the Old Bedford Village.

Q: What kind of impact has the trail had on Bedford?

Bardell: It's a quality of life asset for our residents, providing opportunities for social connection, safe places for recreation and commuting, and encouraging health through fitness and exercise. It also contributes to the community's identity. In addition, The Omni Bedford Springs Resort welcomes about 100,000 visitors annually who can walk from the resort right into the downtown area, and they patronize the shops and restaurants there and take in some history. On the other side of that, Old Bedford Village also has a large draw of people annually and they can now come from the north section into Bedford. The economic impact of the trail to our local businesses is a huge plus for our community.

Q: What kind of events does the trail support?

Bardell: The trail's biggest event is the annual Pink Ribbon Walk for Breast Cancer, it raises awareness for the disease and draws hundreds of people. Other organizations hold fundraiser events there, and now that the northern extension has been built, we're starting to hear from more people and organizations who also want to host events on it such as walks, bike rides, 5k's and 10k's.

Q: How challenging was it to get that extension built?

Bardell: It took a lot of work and years of planning. Many of the original and previous members along with Jim Wheling had countless hours in laying the groundwork for this trail and getting it done. Attorney Bill Snyder worked pro bono work to help us secure easements from private landowners and public entities. Getting landowners on board and letting them know it's a



positive thing sometimes takes some education, but they saw the benefit. We also had to contend with things like wetlands and flood zones, crossing multiple waterways, we have to know if the trail will impact any endangered species, can you build it in a way that will benefit wildlife, it's a lot of interesting things to think about and work through. The north section cost about \$2.5 million dollars to complete and was paid for by PennDot funds.

Q: What kind of amenities does the trail provide?

Bardell: We have bike racks and a bike repair station, and benches along the entire trail that are sponsored by individual people and businesses in the community. The benches are great places to sit down, relax, enjoy the scenic views and watch wildlife. There is such a wide variety of views along the way, beautiful Evitts mountain, fields, trout streams, a golf course, downtown landscapes, and historic properties. The Bedford County Library has also installed a storybook walk at each end of the trail for children, and there are different markers along the trail that highlight wildlife and the area's history.

Q: How much use does the trail get?

Bardell: At last count we registered 15,000 users annually, but that was just for the southern end. We haven't conducted an official count for the northern extension yet but you can see the use growing.

Q: Are you considering any other improvements for the future?

Bardell: We're always doing trail enhancements, refreshing trail surfaces, adding different species of newly planted trees, and we're still adding benches and other amenities

to the new extension. We've undergone two phases of construction, but we're not done yet. We're in the early stages of a new plan to add more distance, we'd like to extend the trail to the north and provide some more trailhead parking in the future. It's a long way off, but there's a vision on our website that considers the possibility of connecting with the H&BT Trail, or even the C&O Canal Trail in Cumberland and the Great American Passage.

Q: Who deserves the credit?

Bardell: We're thankful for the landowners who worked with us, because without them this trail wouldn't exist. Jim Wehling's plan and vision for this trail. Bedford Township and Bedford Borough allowed us to create the Bedford Joint Municipal Authority to operate and helped with funding. All the previous and current board members of this authority who have volunteered their time and efforts, and former Congressman Bill Shuster was a huge supporter who got funds to start the southern section. State Representative Jesse Topper, State Senator Patrick Stefano, and the Bedford County Commissioners also helped us secure funding and grants. Borough Manager Barb Diehl and Mayor Bill Leibfried and The Bedford Township Supervisors and Janie McMillian also saw the community benefit and economic impact of the trail and have been wonderful supporters. The individuals and businesses that have donated funds to this project through sponsorships. Volunteers and other people in the community who work behind the scenes without recognition that have been and are major contributors. It really takes the backing of a community for an amenity that improves the quality of life of our residents and our visitors.

H&BT Trail continues to expand

By **George Berkheimer**
For the Bedford Gazette

The Huntingdon & Broad Top Rail Trail stretches 13.4 miles to connect Batesville with Warriors Path State Park near Saxton. Owned and maintained by Broad Top Township, its first phase opened in 2012.

State and local dignitaries joined Broad Top Township Supervisors in October to celebrate the official opening of the 1.7 mile extension that made the final connection from Riddlesburg to the state park.

Donnie Hedge, chairman of the Broad Top Township Supervisors, said the ultimate goal is continue development with the eventual goal of extending the trail with Everett to the south and Saxton to the north.

"It was important to establish a link with Warriors Path State Park because that opens up the corridor with a Share the Road venture so trail users can bike right into Saxton to get to shops and dining," Hedge said. "If we can establish Saxton as a rail trail hub, there's a possibility to establish more trails to Broad Top City or Raystown Lake and other destinations. It opens up a lot of possibilities."

Economic benefit

The trail follows a railroad that was abandoned in phases after the H&BT Railroad ceased to exist in 1954 and precipitated a period of economic decline for the area. It's not lost on the supervisors that this corridor now has the potential to bring some economic life back.

"We're seeing that happening with businesses like The Grind Coffee shop opening up in Saxton and other improvements being made in that town, that's going to be quite a significant impact financially that we'd like to help promote," Hedge said. "Warriors Path State Park was a beautiful fancy park that fell by the wayside, but they've already noticed a 47% increase in park usage since the trail opened."

The township's last study in 2020 showed 8,400 users during the study period.



"We're working with the Southern Alleghenies Planning Commission to order some new counters for the new section and get an accurate count," Hedge said.

Amenities continue to be added to the trail and include bike work stations donated by REI, picnic tables provided by Leadership Bedford County, and sponsored benches that cost \$750 and provide funding to Rail Trails of Bedford County.

One amenity exclusive to H&BT will be an emergency shelter for extreme weather being constructed as an Eagle Scout project roughly midway between Warriors Path State Park and Riddlesburg.

"Unexpected storms frequently come up the river from Raystown Lake and can be dangerous for people on the trail who don't expect them," Hedge said. "We visited the area around the end of September to mark the site and hope to see construction start soon."

The township is also studying scenarios for adding bathrooms in Riddlesburg, he acknowledged, and would also like to add more informational signage with historical information along the trail.

Community asset

Extending the trail required some significant challenges that included eminent domain proceedings.

"We really didn't want to go that route, but after three or four

years of negotiations that's what we ended up doing. We paid the property owners for the land and it's been taken care of," Hedge said. "I think we actually improved their usage and property access in some cases."

The trail serves as a venue for events throughout the year, including the Batesville United Methodist Church's annual Harvest Hayride and Fall Event, in addition to a nighttime Glow Walk and bonfire, and the Everett American Legion Post's Spring 5K Color Run/Walk.

Funding for the 2.5 mile extension included a \$504,924 PennDOT Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Grant, a \$200,748 DCNR grant, and donations from the Nason Foundation and private individuals.

"The trail draws tourists and economic impact, and it provides outdoor recreation benefits to the people that live here, and we greatly appreciate how much volunteerism we get to help us maintain it," Hedge said. "REI sends workers here once a year to do maintenance work for us. We budget \$20,000 a year to mow and maintain it, but the trail users and people who live nearby help out by mowing sections of it themselves and taking care of what they can. It's a community asset, and the community recognizes that and takes pride in it. It's really nice to have their support."



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Quality of Life

Bloody Run Canoe & Kayak Classic combines fun with a charitable investment

By **George Berkheimer**
For the Bedford Gazette

When a group of friends hatched a crazy scheme to hold a canoe race through Everett on the Juniata River in 1981, they weren't sure if anybody would actually show up for the event.

The Bloody Run Canoe & Kayak Classic is still going strong 43 years later and is now a nonprofit tourist attraction that raises funds for local causes.

"In 2026 we'll be raising money for Everett Warriors Youth Football and Cheer to help them with new helmets, shoulder pads and other equipment, and new uniforms for the cheerleaders," said Kaci Batzel, president of the Everett Area Better Business Association, who heads up the race committee.

In previous years the Classic has supported Everett Area Youth Baseball and Softball and the youth rifle league at the Everett Sportsmen's Club. The Raystown Canoe Club owns and organizes the event.

Last year, the Leadership Bedford County Class of 2025 got involved, helping to rebuild launch sites on the river to improve access for the event to ensure its continued success.

The "original culprits" who started the tradition — George England, Tom Zimmerman, Edward Milward, Dennis Drenning, and Dan Whetstone — had no idea they had stumbled onto something that would become ingrained in the town's identity.

Growing popularity

Named for one of Everett's earlier identities, the Bloody Run Canoe and Kayak Classic evolved over the years and has included a five mile race, a nine mile race, a triathlon, and a float festival.

"We have to limit ourselves to the five mile race next year because work to remove the dams in Bedford will interfere with access," Batzel said. "We'll be adding a poker float in 2026, though. People who register can collect a playing card at five spots along the river and we'll have prizes for the best poker hands at the finish."



The racing will take place on the morning of May 16, followed by afternoon festivities on Main Street that will feature live music, DJs, food trucks, craft vendors, a Strongman Competition sponsored by Black Valley Barbell, and games for children.

"We had to cancel the canoe portion in 2025 because of flooding, but we had more than 50 entrants in 2024, many of them coming from Harrisburg and Philadelphia and out of state, Batzel said. "I think a big part of the appeal is that people who are drawn to events like this aren't interested in large scale overdevelopment and want to see things being preserved so that it doesn't pull away from the small town charm. We see it as an acknowledgement and appreciation of the natural assets and beauty that surrounds this little community."

Celebrating natural beauty

Batzel, who owns and operates the Timber Ridge Chiropractic practice in Everett, said the Juniata River provides a natural, appropriate setting for the Classic.

"The Raystown Branch is actually part of Pennsylvania's designated State Water Trail system," she said, beginning at Bedford and ending at Saxton. "So many people have really taken to this waterway, especially with the push to get outside again after the pandemic."

Outdoor recreation in general is

enjoying a period of growth in the region, with improvements planned for The Old PA Pike Trail that follows a nearby stretch of abandoned turnpike roadway.

There's also an effort underway to link up the Mid State Trail that runs through Everett with the Standing Stone Trail, Tuscarora Trail, Great Eastern Trail and the C&O Canal Path with BCDA leading the charge with the trail authorities to promote the 300-mile backpacking loop.

"I moved halfway across the country to go to school, but I always knew I was going to come back because my roots are here," Batzel said, noting that part of the appeal for her was having access to outdoor activities in her own backyard.

"You hear about all the recreation opportunities out west, but no matter where it is you have to fly in and then drive five or six hours to get there," she said. "We don't have that problem here."

The dozen or so people who sit on the Bloody Run Canoe and Kayak Classic committee are all business owners who recognize that, Batzel said.

"They have careers here and are very involved in the community, and they're willing to jump in and pull their weight to make events like this happen," she said. "It's a true community effort that keeps the focus local and invests in the next generation in the process. That's what makes it worthwhile."

Q&A with Lindsay Salas, Downtown Bedford Inc.'s Main Street Manager

By **George Berkheimer**
For the Bedford Gazette

Lindsay Salas began working with Downtown Bedford Inc. in 2018. She stepped into the role of Main Street Manager in 2022, leading and supporting projects that bring popular community events to Bedford and contribute to the quality of life downtown.

Q: How long have you had a connection to Bedford?

Salas: I've lived here since I was four years old. I graduated from Bedford High School and earned my Associate's Degree in Business Management from Allegany College of Maryland. I'm now happily married with three wonderful boys. I spend much of my free time with my family here and at my kids' sporting events, and I enjoy helping my sister with our dog rescue, Abby's Angels Animal Haven.

Q: What are some of the highlights of your work with DBI?

Salas: We've secured some significant grants for downtown improvements, and we grew the Bedford Farmers Market from just eight or 10 vendors in 2018 to anywhere from 25 to 40 vendors weekly now. DBI distributed more than \$12,000 in market vouchers to youth, seniors, veterans and others in the community in 2024, and increased that to \$16,000 in 2025.

Q: How have events here changed and grown?

Salas: We transformed the one-day Chili & Soup Cookoff into a three-day Spice & Ice Crawl which now features ice sculptures, the cookoff, and a hot chocolate crawl. We introduced the Flower Crawl, a small and intimate "friendraising" event that brings people together in a meaningful way, and we coordinated the replacement of all of downtown Bedford's Christmas lights, which were more than 25 years old.

Q: What other milestones has DBI achieved?

Salas: We're celebrating recognition at the state and local level, including two 2025 Townie Awards (for Physical Improvement & Design and Organizational Excellence in Community Partnerships) from the PA Downtown Center, as well as the 2025 John Anderson Award from the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce. Each of



these milestones represents collaboration, dedication, and a community that truly cares about its downtown.

Q: What events are coming up?

Salas: We're especially excited for our Holiday Open House, November 14-16, when downtown Bedford will be beautifully decorated for the season, with storefronts and public spaces reflecting the charm of a classic Hallmark-style town. Following that, our Shop Small Crawl promotion runs from November 29 through December 20, encourages residents and visitors to support our local businesses while enjoying the festive ambiance downtown.

Q: What opportunities will the removal of the dams from the Raystown Branch provide?

Salas: That will allow DBI to reimagine and expand programming along the riverfront and make it a more vibrant destination. The dams created flooding, safety concerns and an unattractive first impression for visitors traveling along Route 30. We're already planning to leverage this valuable space to its full potential, with new outdoor recreation programs like guided kayaking, nature walks, and ecological education events. We'll be holding riverfront cleanup and stewardship initiatives to engage community members. We'll also be able to expand festivals and events because we'll have more space for live music, 4th of July Fireworks, the Bedford Fall Foliage Festival, Jeep Infestation and other community celebrations. It will also improve parking and accessibility.

Q: What successes have you seen in DBI's programming?

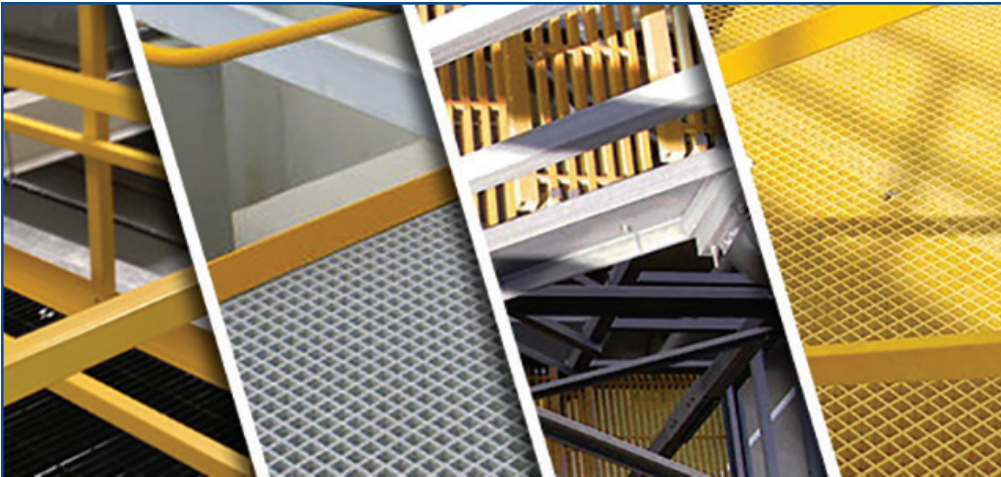
Salas: Response to our programs is overwhelmingly positive, we've seen steady growth across nearly every area. The Farmers Market and community initiatives draw more participants each year, and the Ticket Tournament fundraisers and Spice & Ice Crawl have become highly anticipated traditions. We see creativity and collaboration emerging within the community itself, with volunteers, business owners and local organizations constantly pitching new ideas for events, promotions and beautification projects.

Q: How's the vacancy rate downtown?

Salas: The vacancy rate has declined noticeably in recent years. Marketing is relatively easy because we have a story of revitalization, community pride, and ongoing investment to tell. The arrival of Rebellion Books has enhanced downtown by providing another welcoming gathering space for the community. Ultimately, businesses want to be here because downtown Bedford is more than a location, it's a place where entrepreneurship, culture and community spirit create a thriving, welcoming environment for everybody.

Q: What makes it all possible?

Salas: Our volunteers, committee members, board of directors, and Bedford Borough play outsized roles in making everything DBI does possible. Their dedication and creativity are the backbone of our success. It's not about our grants or programs, the community's spirit and collaboration drive downtown Bedford's growth and we're grateful for that.



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Quality of Life

Myers View Farm breeds success in goat genetics

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

Visit any county fair in the region, and even some neighboring states, and there's a good chance the Junior Market Goat champions have ties to Myers View Farms.

"We have 15 head of beef cows and 100 head of goats, and the focus is on genetics," said co-owner Scott Myers. "Most of the stock that we sell are for 4H and Future Farmers of America members."

Myers served as the Bedford County Technical Center's agriscience and biotechnology instructor for 17 years until his recent retirement. His wife, Leslie, works in medical device sales. Originally from Rhode Island, she graduated from Delaware Valley College with a degree in animal and dairy science and also plays an instrumental role in the Myers family business.

Family focus

Scott and Leslie both grew up showing livestock, and that passion was handed down to their sons, Trey and Lane. The family has now found a niche that allows them to support the same passion in the next generation of farmers by selling baby goats to 4H and FFA members looking for potential show animals. They also sell breeding stock to other breeders and start-up operations in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia.

"The story really revolves around Trey, who's the reason we're so competitive now and the reason why we are all-in on goat breeding," Leslie Myers said. "He was the brains behind starting this operation."

Their son's interest prompted a family decision to shift its focus from sheep to goats, she explained.

In the intervening years, Trey worked with his father and other contacts to understand genetics at a high level, make good breeding decisions, and continue improving the results each year. He's currently an animal science major at Morehead State University in Kentucky, and hopes to follow up with veterinary school.

"It was a good decision that worked out in our favor," Leslie



Myers said.

Scott's retirement helped the family continue the focus on breeding and sales after Trey left for college, he said.

"I still volunteer with 4H and FFA, and I was recently elected to the board of directors at the Bedford County Fair, so I'm helping out in some different aspects than I've been accustomed to in the past," Myers said. "I'm also involved as a high school soccer coach. It's a juggling schedule."

Sharing success

Myers View's goat herd is predominantly Boer goats, a popular South African breed known for the muscle and carcass characteristics that show market animals are judged on at county and state fairs. The breed was introduced to the United States in 1993.

Kiko/Spanish goats make up the remainder of the herd, a hardy cross that combines many of the positive attributes of both breeds.

"Our main production focuses on the Boers," Scott Myers said. "We do a lot of embryo transfer with the system we're using, to spread and preserve genetics."

The focus on showing helps with the marketing aspect, he explained, with show results driving word-of-mouth and social media advertising.

The Cumberland Valley farm

was originally owned by Myers's parents since the 1960s, before he took over operations in the mid-1990s and bought the current property in 2003.

"I grew up a mile and a half from where we currently live, so it's always been home for me, but it's also been a great location from a business aspect," Scott Myers said. "I believe the Bedford County Fair is one of the most competitive fairs in the state, or at least in the southwestern corner."

Proximity to the Turnpike, I-70, I-68 and I-81 also has its benefits.

"You always feel safe in Bedford, but you're also not far from Baltimore or Pittsburgh or Washington DC," Leslie Myers said.

"It's easy traveling to get here for our customers, and that also makes it easy to distribute our products through multiple states," Scott Myers added.

Not that there haven't been a few hurdles and challenges along the way.

"Every year it seems like there's something else we have to figure out, whether it's a disease or breeding issue, but it's been a good process for us," Leslie Myers said. "It's led to a lot of really great relationships and new friendships. There's been success for our animals and the families we've sold to. Seeing kids establish goals and trying to help them achieve them has really been rewarding."

There's something for everybody at the Bedford County Fair

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

The Bedford County Fair has been promoting the science of agriculture, horticulture, household arts and family living since 1873.

"In all that time the fair was only cancelled twice, once for COVID in 2020 and once during World War II," said Bill Hoover, president of the Bedford County Fair's board of directors.

Although a lot has changed in the field of agriculture in 151 years, the attractions that drew people in the beginning are still those sought out by visitors today: livestock, agricultural exhibits, amusements, entertainment, good food, and a chance to celebrate the joys of country living as a community.

Hoover's tenure on the board goes back 15 years, but he's been involved with the event since his childhood.

"I grew up working at the fairgrounds mowing grass, cleaning barns, painting etc. in the summer," he said. "My family has been involved with the fairgrounds as long as I can remember going back to my grandfather who maintained the grounds and lived on the grounds."

Today his focus with the help of the Senior Fair Board and the Junior Fair Board is on the ins and outs of business and operations. "Our Junior Fair Board consists of youth ages 14-21 and has been a tremendous help for the fair," Hoover said.

"I have a degree in business accounting and worked for a local manufacturing company for 40 years," he added. "I had the opportunity to work in strategic planning with an entrepreneur in a startup company, and that experience has helped a lot with my responsibilities here."

Unique tradition

There's something that each visitor looks forward to each year at the fair, whether it's the grilled sausage, funnel cakes, gyros or fun carnival games and rides on the midway, the creativity on display in the exhibition hall, the exciting events and entertainment, or the fireworks, but everybody loves the animals.

"I tallied the number of dairy cattle, beef cattle, sheep, goats, swine, horses, rabbits, poultry, and other animals before delivering a talk at an event and I was really surprised to discover we had over 900 animals," Hoover said. "I think that volume is something that sets us apart from other fairs."

One unusual attraction is the harness races, a long-standing tradition that requires selection through an application process managed by the Pennsylvania Harness Horsemen's Association and the State Harness Racing Commission.

"Two of the biggest names in harness racing are from Bedford County, Sam Beegle and Roger Hammer," Hoover said. "They've been racing for a long time with a lot of success, and I think their presence helps attract a lot of talent from across the state and even out of state to race here."

Entertainment is always a good draw, Hoover said, especially the grandstand events.

"The demolition derby is always well attended, and our rodeo, truck and tractor pulls and auto racing are always popular, too," he said.

It was easier to attract big name stars in the past – Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton performed at the Great Bedford Fair in 1970 – but music is still a big part of the mix.

"We have entertainment on the grandstand side and we also have a variety of music at the picnic pavilion every night," Hoover said.



Economic asset

Maintaining 100 acres of grounds and putting on the fair each year is a logistical challenge, and one that doesn't happen without a great team of staff and volunteers.

"We're so grateful for our volunteers, sponsors, employees, exhibitors, patrons, our youth and the whole community for pulling together to make it happen," Hoover said. "Behind the scenes we have 300 volunteers, at least 35 committees and 90 sponsors, and we couldn't do this without them."

And as it turns out, that hard work pays big dividends. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's December 2024 study titled "The Economic Impact and Benefits of Pennsylvania's Agricultural Fair Industry" confirmed that tourism tied to fairs generates revenue for nearby businesses, creates temporary employment opportunities, and helps local agricultural producers market their products.

According to the study, Bedford's 2024 fair attendance was 28,419. With an operating expenditure of \$394,000 and capital expenditures of \$60,000 in 2023, the Bedford County Fair accounted for 1% of the economic impact in the county with a direct output of \$5.54 million and a total output of \$10.68 million.

"Last year the livestock sale alone brought in \$550,000 for our county youth who do a tremendous job of raising and showing their animals. This is all possible due to the generosity of our businesses, friends and families," Hoover said.

Fair season packs a lot of activity and economic benefits into a week, but the fairgrounds also support events in the offseason. "We rent Jordan Hall, the fairgrounds, the barns with 4H events, Fall Foliage Parking, Christmas tree sales and auto races throughout the year," Hoover said. "We have a great partnership with the Bedford Chamber of Commerce, with the drive-in movie theater, Holiday Nights of Lights display and more." We want the fairgrounds to be available for our community.

Although the fair only lasts a week, it takes a year's worth of organization. Our board members are awesome and have a passion for the Bedford County Fair. They have already begun preparing for the annual State Fair Convention scheduled for January in Hershey.

It's an important networking event where next year's vendors and entertainers come to decide where they'll set up shop.

"They're looking at attendance and checking how large our livestock display is," Hoover said, both things that make the Bedford County Fair an attractive choice. "When they see our numbers and realize that we've been around for 150 years, they know we're doing something right."

Opportunity Meets Community

Perseverance has paid dividends for Hometown Bank president Beth Manges

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

Hometown Bank has grown steadily since its launch in Bedford and Everett in 2007, adding branches in Leesburg, Martinsburg, Woodbury, Saxton and Pleasantville in recent years.

As of the end of June, its portfolio includes assets of \$408.9 million, loans of \$286.3 million, and deposits of \$375.4 million. The full-service bank has maintained the No. 1 market share in deposits in Bedford County as reported by the FDIC for seven consecutive years.

Beth Manges, who has served as Hometown Bank's president and CEO since 2017, attributes the institution's growth and stability to its local ownership and management, and a low staff turnover rate thanks to a policy of management recruitment from within the ranks.

In fact, Manges started working at the bank when it opened and made that management journey herself, transitioning from branch manager to branch operations manager before arriving at her current position.

Outside the bank, she also serves on the Bedford County Development Authority board, the Bedford County Chamber Foundation board, the Bedford County Regional Education Foundation for Allegany College, as well as other organizations in the community.

"Looking back on my career journey, I never thought I could be in a position like this when I started," she said. "Hometown Bank's board of directors believed in me and my leadership and gave me this opportunity because they felt that I could do it."

Hometown Bank Board Chairman Merle Helsel has been an important mentor, Manges said.

Life lessons

Manges was born in Bedford County and raised in the Manns Choice area, where her grandparents operated a dairy farm. She still lives on property that was part of the farm.

She spent time away attending college in Cumberland at Allegany College of Maryland and then in Towson, Maryland, where she studied



journalism and broadcasting. In college she worked as a teller and realized that banking was her career path. She returned to Bedford County to raise a family and continue her banking career.

"Bedford County has been a wonderful area to raise a family," Manges said, although there have been some challenges along the way.

"I was married but divorced when my three sons were very young, which was very difficult to go through," she said. "My second husband was killed in a tragic accident 10 years into our marriage, and that was also very difficult. I've been happily married to my husband Lynn now for 12 years. Things have a way of working out."

Not many people realize that she's the mother of a disabled son, Brandon, who is 32.

There are, of course, demands on time, expenses, and medical concerns, Manges said, but also unexpected joys and learning to be gained from that experience.

"He has taught me so many lessons, beginning with patience and unconditional love," she said. "I realize now these are lessons that I can readily apply, both in my life and relations with family and friends, and also in the workplace and in my business life. We all encounter obstacles and challenges, and we all have times when we're down at our lowest point wondering how to deal with something, but you do deal with it, and you grow from it."

Faith and family support has always brought her through, Manges said. "Being able to remain positive

and have a positive attitude, being able to pick yourself up and move forward, that has helped me develop into the person that I am today."

Personal service

Despite the convenience of online banking, having a personal connection is still important for customers in Bedford County, Manges said, and continues to be important for the bank's managers.

"Knowing people and having ties throughout the community helps in understanding the economy and what businesses need and are looking for," she said. "We take time here to listen to our customers' needs and look at what their plans are for their businesses."

Being a local institution with a commitment to the communities it serves helps keep the focus where it should be, Manges said: helping businesses get started or advanced, helping people get their first house, and in other aspects of business development and supporting individual lives.

"We're serving those needs, but doing it on a very personal level," Manges said. "We see a lot of development opportunities that the Bedford County Development Association is working on and other opportunities within the county. Tourism is huge, outdoor recreation is bringing more people here to show them all the wonderful things we have to offer, and we're fortunate to have the different associations and organizations working together to promote that. It's helping to move things in a good direction."

Unexpected challenges sidelined Randy Shaw – to the fast track

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

Unexpected demands can weigh heavily on anybody's mind, but for Randy Shaw, president and CEO of Everett Cash Mutual, they've been a big part of his career progression and success. What he's learned, he says, is that overwhelming challenges sometimes conceal greater opportunity, if it can be recognized.

"I worked at Everett Cash Mutual one summer while I was in college, working in the mailroom, sending second requests to agents, filling in wherever they needed me," he said. "I was brash enough to tell the president to call me if he ever needed an accountant. Well, I got that call seven years later."

It came at a time when Shaw worked in public accounting, had just purchased a house outside of Washington, DC, and had no intention of returning to Bedford County.

Shaw recalled that he had made a promise to his uncle on his deathbed to take over the family farm, however, and the family had been renting the farm in the interim.

"In the back of my mind I knew I had to honor that commitment, and that provided the motivation to come back," he said.

Learning experiences

Shaw began working as ECM's treasurer, learning the ropes from Mary Dishong before she retired.

"All of our purchases were handwritten, and I was a computer guy, so I suggested automating the process," he said.

When the least expensive bid he received amounted to half of the company's capital, Shaw took a deep breath and drew on his own acquired knowledge of database design to develop a system that only cost \$30,000.

Implementing it was an educational experience.

"I interviewed every ECM employee to learn the processes that consume their time and was able to streamline operations and learn the ins and outs of insurance in the process," he said. "Six months later our expense ratio



dropped from 40% in our best days to 28%, which was a game changer."

Another surprise came when ECM's accountant suggested that other insurance clients might be interested in using the system.

"That prompted a whole new revenue stream for the company and we were licensing it to 10 other operations at one point," he said.

Tough decisions

After working his way up the ranks in the company, Shaw became president at a time when its financial condition was struggling.

"I began to wonder why we focused on homeowners insurance and competed with giants like Allstate when we could be really good selling something that had less competition," he said.

Knowing that ECM started as a farming insurance company in 1913, he made the difficult decision to sell agents on returning to the company's roots.

"I knew we had to expand geographically and write premiums in three or four states to equal the homeowner business we had in Pennsylvania," he said. "It was a tough sell, but we turned the company around and were one of only two insurance companies at the time that had managed to bounce back from a downgraded B credit rating back to an A rating."

Incredible journey

Business has remained solid for Everett Cash Mutual in the intervening years.

In the late 1990s, when he became president, the company had approximately \$20 million in written premiums and \$12 million in capital or surplus. Today, that has grown to nearly \$240 million in written premiums and more than \$140 million in capital and surplus, and ECM writes premiums in all 48 contiguous states.

Agricultural insurance accounts for about 95% of the company's premiums, and from Shaw's insider perspective, the local agriculture industry appears to be stable.

"I would say a lot of farmers are sitting well financially, though they are tremendously concerned about what impact tariffs might have on corn and wheat prices," he said.

Even so, he said, farmers continue to buy new farm equipment and add it to their insurance policies.

"I've had an incredible journey, and it's one that happened because I realized that an opportunity to come back to my hometown area that I loved wouldn't come along very often," he said. "As a result of a brief encounter with the president of this company I'm now the president and CEO. Whenever I talk to high school kids I emphasize the importance of never burning a bridge, because you never know where that bridge might lead."

Opportunity Meets Community

Q&A with Adrienne Ellis of Rebellion Books

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

Adrienne Ellis opened Bedford's only independent bookstore in June, combining a lifelong love of books with a venture that allows her and co-owner Drew Kondylas to become a part of the town they grew to love as visitors.

Q: What inspired you to establish a bookstore?

Ellis: I've loved books my entire life. As a little girl, I dreamed of being a librarian, but my first career was as an eighth grade English Language Arts teacher in Texas. I have also always loved bookstores. Whenever I visit small towns, I always try to find the local baker and the local bookstore. I never understood why Bedford didn't have a bookstore Drew and I were looking for our next adventure and a way to get more involved in the community, and owning a bookstore seemed like a perfect way to do just that. We are excited to make Rebellion Books another community space for Bedford locals and visitors.

Q: What did it take to get up and running?

Ellis: We did some research and talked to Jen Marsh at the Bedford County Development Association and the folks at Downtown Bedford Inc. to understand whether the town could support a bookstore. We eventually found a vacant building that was previously an antique store that we thought might be perfect. We bought it in January and spent the next few months renovating the building and putting together the bookstore business plan and inventory.

Q: What can customers expect at Rebellion Books?

Ellis: We sell all new books with more than 4,000 in-stock fiction and non-fiction titles, everything from board books for babies up through books for adults in all interest areas. We have a variety that includes small more niche sections, and large romance and mystery-thriller sections. We also have a large science, nature and history section, and large rooms for children and young adults. We sell comic books, too, as well as puzzles, journals, notebooks, and a



few other book-adjacent items.

Q: How has the response been?

Ellis: We've only been in business a couple of months, but everyone has been really supportive. We have grown our staff to two part-time employees. We're still getting a sense of what people want to read, so we'll make adjustments over time and respond to the needs of the local community.

Q: Do you host events?

Ellis: We can host small groups of 10 to 12 comfortably. Once construction of our new 600 sq.ft. deck for the backyard is complete, hopefully by next month, we'll be able to host events of 50 to 75 people, which will allow us to bring in authors and do book signings. We'll also be able to do more talks and fun mixers. We're hopeful the deck will open by spring once the weather gets warm.

Q: Why did you choose the name Rebellion Books?

Ellis: The name is a nod to the Whiskey Rebellion and Bedford's importance in that event, but there's more to it than that. The act of buying physical books is a bit of a rebellion to the technology that is ever present in our lives. Just in 2025 we're seeing a trend in young people distancing themselves from digital devices and returning to analog things like books and cameras, trading smart phones for flip phones. Printed book sales bear that out.

Q: Who's coming through the doors?

Ellis: There's definitely a pent up demand from local readers who don't want to drive to Altoona or order books online or read them on a device. Customers also tell us this is something they've been waiting for. And we have had great support from other local businesses recommending us to their guests and customers. Bedford is the perfect spot for a bookstore with all the foot traffic.

Q: How have you integrated yourself here?

Ellis: We're a member of the Chamber of Commerce and DBI, and just joined the Bedford County Visitors Bureau. I'm hoping to get involved with some nonprofit boards. We'll be looking into partnerships in the coming months to work on events with other local businesses and we're starting to provide display space for some local artists.

Q: What drew you to Bedford County?

Ellis: I grew up in Michigan and lived all over the country. Drew is from Virginia and spent most of his life in Philadelphia. On one visit to Bedford County, we found our farm in Hopewell and fell in love with it and its proximity to Bedford. I love taking advantage of the H&BT Trail that's right across the river from us, and we love to spend time kayaking and paddleboarding on the river when we have time.

The Grind breathes new life and purpose into a dormant Saxton property

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

Daniel and Jennifer Zimmerman grew up near Saxton, found love there, and have a long history of successful business endeavors.

It was a combination of those circumstances that drove them to take on the challenge of turning an eyesore in the town into something more attractive that could help foster the feeling of community that's been in decline there as industry has slowly left the area.

Since opening in May 2022, The Grind Coffee Company has become a popular stop offering drip coffee, teas, smoothies, specialty drinks and frozen lemonades, along with breakfast options, pastries and baked goods.

It attracted so many customers that the Zimmermans made the quick decision to expand into the next door storefront a year later and open a new space called The Lounge. "It turned out beautifully and has allowed us to host larger groups," said Jennifer Zimmerman. "We have people who use it regularly for Bible study, sports meetings, study groups and other purposes."

Reversing decay

The building they purchased dates back to the 1800s and housed other businesses in the past, including a barber shop, grocery store, and offices for The Daily News. "It truly was the ugliest building on Main Street and had been vacant for almost a decade," Jennifer Zimmerman said. "It offered no hope and pulled down our spirits." Tired of looking at the run-down, vandalized property, she and her husband eventually decided to buy it while they were both still employed as Southern Huntingdon County School District teachers and put their acquired knowledge and skills to use renovating it.

"My brain exploded with business ideas as a youngster," Dan Zimmerman recalled, and he established Zimmerman's Roofing and General Contracting after a few summers of working for other area contractors as a teenager.

He went on to establish Rustic DeZigns, a hand-crafted furniture business, while working in the natural gas industry in northern Pennsylvania from 2009-2011.

It was during that time that he and Jennifer rekindled a relationship that had been derailed by college pursuits,



with Jennifer assisting with Rustic DeZigns's business growth and learning woodworking herself.

"We had the pleasure of shipping furniture all over the country, and even delivering some larger orders to Staten Island and Chicago," Dan Zimmerman said.

Investing in community

Once a thriving employment center, Saxton lost the H&BT Railroad in 1954. The Saxton Bottling Company closed in 1990, and the Seton Leather Company closed its doors in 2011. "We chose to start our business in Saxton because we care about our community," Daniel Zimmerman said.

The couple was inspired to take action, he said, "because the timing of everything felt right and we had a solid knowledge base to take calculated risks. While completing my GIS capstone project in college, I had discovered an economic feasibility study conducted by S. Patz and Associates for the Saxton Borough in 2013 that proposed reinventing the town to counter the mass exodus of employers.

"Most people don't even know [this study] was done, and even fewer have taken the time to read it," Daniel Zimmerman said. "In it we saw the opportunity to help revitalize our hometown. We think that dream has been realized, as it has inspired more growth up and down Main Street that has been wonderful for the town."

The Zimmermans now employ 10 people at The Grind, but the return on their investment goes further.

"We donate regularly to local youth sports and other nonprofit organizations," Daniel Zimmerman said, and both are active in their church, where Dan is the superintendent and board chairman and Jennifer teaches Sunday School.

"Much of our time is devoted to entrepreneurship," he said, and spending time with their children, Grace, Jake, and Ava, who have become the driving force in the family's business decisions.

Saxton and Bedford County have a lot to offer, he added, which is a big part of the reason the Zimmermans made the decision to stay here and become more involved in the community.

"We have beautiful landscapes and the changing of the seasons is incredible here," Jennifer Zimmerman said. "We have great water trails and the township is continually developing the trail systems. The focus on recreation and the great outdoors is great for natives and tourists alike."

The job market is strong, she added, and poised for growth in the manufacturing sector with the continued development of the Bedford County Business Park.

"It's wonderful to get to live in 'Small Town USA' but also be readily connected through the Interstate system," Jennifer Zimmerman said. "Overall, people here have strong Biblical morals and practice those principles. That's such an important thing to us when raising our children. It gives understanding of all things, and a strong foundation to build your life upon."

North Spring Ballroom brings all-inclusive event service to Everett

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

In 2023, Jessica and Gerry Leader bought a fire-ravaged church in Everett with the aim of turning it into apartments. The couple already owned some rental properties and thought they could expand their portfolio.

"It turned out to be an engineering nightmare," Jessica Leader said. "With the height of the ceilings and the quirks of the building itself, it was going to cost a fortune to try to separate the space into units."

That's when Jessica recalled the time she spent in high school working at the Ramada Inn in Altoona.

"To this day that has been the most fun job I've ever had," she said. "I've always enjoyed planning parties and events for my kids and family over the years, so when we were trying to decide what to do with this building, I kept circling back to that."

Instead of apartments, the couple is now putting the finishing touches on what is set to become the North Spring Ballroom, an all-inclusive wedding and event venue.

It's a new entrepreneurial leap for them, but entrepreneurship is common ground in the family.

Gerry's father, Gary, established Leader's Farm Equipment in 1968.

"It grew quickly, and it grew even more when Gerry took it over in 2009," Jessica Leader said – so much so that she eventually gave up her 15-year medical career in ultrasound to join him in managing the business in 2023.

"Our businesses are members of the Everett area Better Business Bureau, and I sit on the board of Reimagined Everett to restore the Everett theater," Leader said. She also serves on the board of the Raystown Ambulance and the Everett Elementary PTA.

Finishing touches

In late September, Jessica Leader calculated that she and her husband had worked four straight weeks without a break getting ready to open the doors for the Ballroom's first event on October 25.

"We still need to pave the parking lot, put the finishing touches on things and get inspections squared away," she said.

Initially, North Spring Ballroom



will rely on casual staff of 10 to 15 employees between bartenders, kitchen staff, security and cleaning personnel before moving on to a more permanent employment arrangement.

"We're full service, so anytime someone rents the space they'll have a full-time venue attendant making sure the lights and WiFi are operating properly, tables and chairs are properly arranged, and somebody is attending to their needs," Jessica Leader said. "We include linens in the rental, use of our kitchen, and our sound system. We'll have absolutely everything they need."

Although North Spring Ballroom doesn't offer full-scale catering, it will have a licensed kitchen that can provide food options that include luncheons, hors d'oeuvres, or a grazing table.

The location on North Spring Street in Everett has turned out to be an opportune one for the venue, Jessica Leader said.

"We have coffee shops, two barber shops and numerous salons nearby, a massage therapist and a gym – you name it, we have it covered in Everett, so guests coming to an event here aren't far from what they might need," she said.

For lodging, the Union Hotel only two blocks away on Everett's Main Street features beautifully restored rooms, she added.

"We're just a short drive in either direction from Breezewood and Bedford, so we're close to other lodging options, not to mention a few Airbnb's

that are within walking distance."

Venue capacity is 150, Leader said.

Community effort

Preparing to open the North Spring Ballroom has felt like a community effort because of the support the couple has received from their construction team and lending partners, Jessica Leader said.

"Garman Brothers Construction is my main contractor and we wouldn't have been able to pull this off without them," she said. "I said 'Let's do this,' and they said 'Okay,' and made it happen. Their vision alongside me was incredible and matched the expectations we had."

Hometown Bank and the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission provided the funding that made the renovations possible, Leader added.

"They really made me feel like they had my back and made this happen for us," she said.

Establishing the event venue has been the realization of a personal goal, but Leader said it's also important to reciprocate on the support she and her husband have received.

"I'm proud of the strides we've made together as a community in Everett in the last five or 10 years," Leader said. "I have a lot of colleagues and friends who are working very hard to make this town something really special, so I'm happy to be adding something that will draw people here to see how wonderful this town is."

Q&A with Jessica Frye, owner of Wholesome Living Marketplace

By George Berkheimer
For the Bedford Gazette

Wholesome Living Marketplace is a family-owned business specializing in natural, organic grocery items with an emphasis on health and wellness. The store carries a wide variety of farm fresh products, from local-raised beef, lamb and pork to eggs, raw milk and fresh produce. Owner Jessica Frye sources items as close to the store as possible to help the local economy, support other local businesses, and encourage more sustainable, healthy lifestyles.

Q: How did Wholesome Living Marketplace get its start?

Frye: This business started after my mother visited a Sprouts Market during her travels out west. She liked the idea of fresh, wholesome products that were better for you and thought it was something Bedford needed. I had been the manager of a bookstore in Everett, and she asked if I wanted to manage the store when it opened in 2008. How do you tell your mom no?

Q: What can your customers expect?

Frye: A lot of people don't realize that we're a full grocery. We don't just carry food, but also household items, cleaning supplies, personal hygiene, health and beauty products, and a full line of supplements as well. People sometimes get an idea about what we are when they hear the name, and tell us they're surprised at the variety of our products we carry when they actually visit.

Q: How do you decide what to sell?

Frye: We focus on natural and organic, meaning 99% of our products do not contain high fructose corn syrup, genetically modified organisms, artificial flavors or colors, chemical preservatives and that sort of thing. We try to support small startup entrepreneurs and products from Pennsylvania.



Q: Do you source a lot of products locally?

Frye: Most of our meats are local. We work with Faith and Fortitude Farms in Everett, Hospitality Spring Farm in Bedford and Savage Mountain Farm in Somerset County. We get honey from Huckle Bee Farms in Bedford. Fritz Family Farm in Everett, and Daisy Meats in Everett and Breezewood. We've carried Clover Creek Cheese Cellar's raw milk and cheese products from Williamsburg since the first year we opened. We just started working with a farmer in Juniata County who sells his own braided garlic, which makes a beautiful gift for home cooks.

Q: Is it challenging to operate a store like this in a rural area?

Frye: We definitely have a core of customers who have been with us from the beginning. I do feel we are needed, and our customers tell us that, especially people who travel here every year and visit similar stores where they live, people who have cabins or camp, or who visit Omni Bedford Springs Resort. They're a good bump to our morale.

Q: Do you carry anything unique that's harder to find?

Frye: We have Keystone Cultures kombucha on tap all the

time. We often have customers tell us they've discovered something they've never seen before or have had a hard time finding. It's usually something we consider an everyday item because we always stock it. That always makes us feel good.

Q: How do you get involved with the community?

Frye: We belong to the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Bedford Inc. I also serve on the Bedford County Library Board. We get occasional requests from restaurants who are looking for special ingredients. We also place special orders for customers. We donate when we can to all sorts of local fundraisers.

Q: Why did you choose a Bedford location?

Frye: This is where we were born and raised, so we really didn't think of trying it anywhere else. Bedford has a comfortable small town feel that brings people back. I love that we have all four seasons here. I think there's something beautiful about each season for people to come and see and experience. You still see trees and fields and backroads. That's all part of the charm and hopefully it stays that way for a long time.

Opportunity Meets Community

Fisher’s Pharmacy celebrates its independence

By **George Berkheimer**
For the Bedford Gazette

Fisher’s Pharmacy is one of Bedford’s keystone businesses, serving the community since 1894. Founded by Frank Jordan as Jordan’s Pharmacy, the name changed to Fishers when James Fisher acquired the business in the 1920s and has continued through a series of owners to the present day. Misty Nicodemus and Jennifer Leibfried now operate the pharmacy and purchased it in 2017.

It’s one of the few independent pharmacies still operating in Pennsylvania’s rural settings.

“Fisher’s has had a long period of stability here, operated by local people who knew the people they served, and that’s something we’re very proud to continue,” said Leibfried.

With a staff of eight employees, Fisher’s Pharmacy is still committed to providing a level of customer service that’s rarely found at bigger retail pharmacy chains.

“We offer 24-hour on-call service, free delivery, and we also do packaging service,” Leibfried said. “Even in this day and age, we still make house calls.”

Unique services

While other independent pharmacies were feeling the pinch from larger national competitors, Fisher’s last owner, David Whysong, made a shrewd decision to relocate from the pharmacy’s historic downtown Pitt Street location to a larger stand-alone building that he constructed on the eastern edge of town.

“There was no handicapped accessibility and no parking at the old location,” Leibfried said. “There was also no room for a laboratory, so Dave built a modern lab in the new building and we have since remodeled it. We now have a negative pressure room and ventilation which allows us to meet federal standards. We have a pretty high tech facility here.”

That decision resulted in the ability for Fisher’s to do compounding, which can create custom medications with tailored dosing for patients’ medical conditions, decreasing the occurrence of side effects and increasing the medication’s efficacy.

“We do a lot of compounding, and we’re able to compound things for our customers who have been discharged from the UPMC Children’s Hospital



and need medications that aren’t commercially available,” Leibfried said. “We also compound for veterinarians and for hormone treatments. That’s something very unique for this area, the closest compounders are located in Tyrone and Chambersburg.”

Staying independent

As more small Pennsylvania towns continue to lose independent pharmacies, their future isn’t exactly guaranteed.

“It’s difficult because reimbursements are below what small pharmacies are able to pay for medications,” Leibfried said, something that chain pharmacies have more easily been able to counteract with front end sales of other products. “We’re hoping for some change from government regulations and policies, but that hasn’t happened yet. Everett lost all of its pharmacies, so we are picking up some of that business, but it’s a juggling act. More business doesn’t necessarily mean more revenue.”

So far, Fisher’s has been able to price check and negotiate beneficial prices from wholesalers to continue serving Bedford County.

“Our wholesaler is in Altoona and is a co-operative of independent pharmacies and they advocate very hard for us,” Leibfried said. “If we want to remain independent and strong, we need to support each other.”

Fisher’s Pharmacy also provides a lot of vaccinations, which helps to bring in revenue.

“We get to see and meet new

people that way, and we go out into the community to the homebound and provide vaccinations at assisted living facilities,” she said.

Medication-Assisted Treatment therapy to treat opioid abuse disorder is another area that Fisher’s Pharmacy assists with, partnering with local physicians to provide help for those caught up in the opioid crisis.

“We pride ourselves on being respectful and caring for our entire population, not picking and choosing who we help,” Leibfried said. “It’s a multi-faceted problem that requires management, and we’re happy to be able to help and see some of the success stories.”

Running a pharmacy doesn’t leave a lot of time for involvement after work, but Leibfried and Nicodemus engage in fundraising for Abby’s Angels Animal Haven.

“We support local sports teams at the schools, too,” Leibfried said.

Bedford has always been a good location for the pharmacy, she said, and the influx of new shops and restaurants continues to bring new people and potential customers to the area.

“The continued development of trail systems and outdoor facilities in the area is fabulous and something you don’t see in a lot of other places we visit,” Leibfried said. “I was born and raised here, but I also think that people who move here also appreciate the unique small town vibe, and how clean and pretty the town looks. There’s a strong sense of wanting to maintain that.”

Q&A with Kathleen Claar, owner of From Blossoms

By **George Berkheimer**
For the Bedford Gazette

Kathleen Claar lived in Philadelphia for 14 years, where she combined a love of flowers and her natural creativity to develop a unique artistic style that’s part conventional floral arranging, part abstract sculpture, and entirely eye catching.

She recently moved to New Enterprise with her husband and operates From Blossoms on the family farm where her father grew up.

Q: How did you get interested in flowers as a business?

Claar: I learned design aspects from some floral designers I met while working on a flower farm in 2013. I was running a flower CSA subscription service and staging events as a side hustle. That led to an opportunity to design an installation in the Garden Tea Room at the Philadelphia Flower Show in 2017. I was invited back to make something for the main floor the next year and I’ve been back every year since.

Q: How did you develop your signature style?

Claar: Having my own studio space gave me permission to play around with flowers for my own enjoyment, exploring color and incorporating more of myself into the pieces I create rather than sticking to basic botanical design. Somebody commissioned me to create a design and their description prompted me to incorporate painted paper shapes and sculpture. Everything clicked and it evolved into the art practice that I now pursue. The intention is for the artwork installation to be fleeting, the same way flowers are.

Q: How big is your garden operation?

Claar: I have 17 beds that are about three feet wide and 40 feet long, and I’d like to add more beds each season. I’m also using a Natural Resources Conservation Service grant to work on a high tunnel. It’s similar to an unheated greenhouse and doesn’t have electricity, but it will let me start planting earlier and extend the growing season.

Q: What kind of flowers do you grow?

Claar: I grow a nice variety of cut flowers. I tend to choose



varieties based on my favorite flowers and colors. I also like to grow something new every season. This past year I tried xeranthemum and tithonia for the first time. One of the things I’ve enjoyed growing the past two years are edible flowers including pansies, violets, nasturtium and borage. I sell them in small containers at the farmer’s market and to local bakeries and restaurants. One of the unique things about my garden is that as I keep making more annual flower beds, I also transition previous annual beds into mixed perennial beds. In this way, I’m able to add more cut flower varieties to the garden while cultivating a longer-term plan of erosion control and perennial food for birds and pollinators.

Q: Where can customers buy your flowers?

Claar: I sell at the farmers market in Martinsburg, and from my roadside stand in New Enterprise. The farm is also open for U-Pick customers from July through September. I also do pop-ups in Bedford and Blair County throughout the season.

Q: Is there an educational aspect to your business?

Claar: From meeting people at the Martinsburg Farmer’s Market this past year, I learned there are a lot of home gardeners in the area, and a standard part of home gardening is the practice of seed-saving at the end of the season. I currently have a free workshop scheduled at the end of October to share information on the practice of seed-saving: when and how

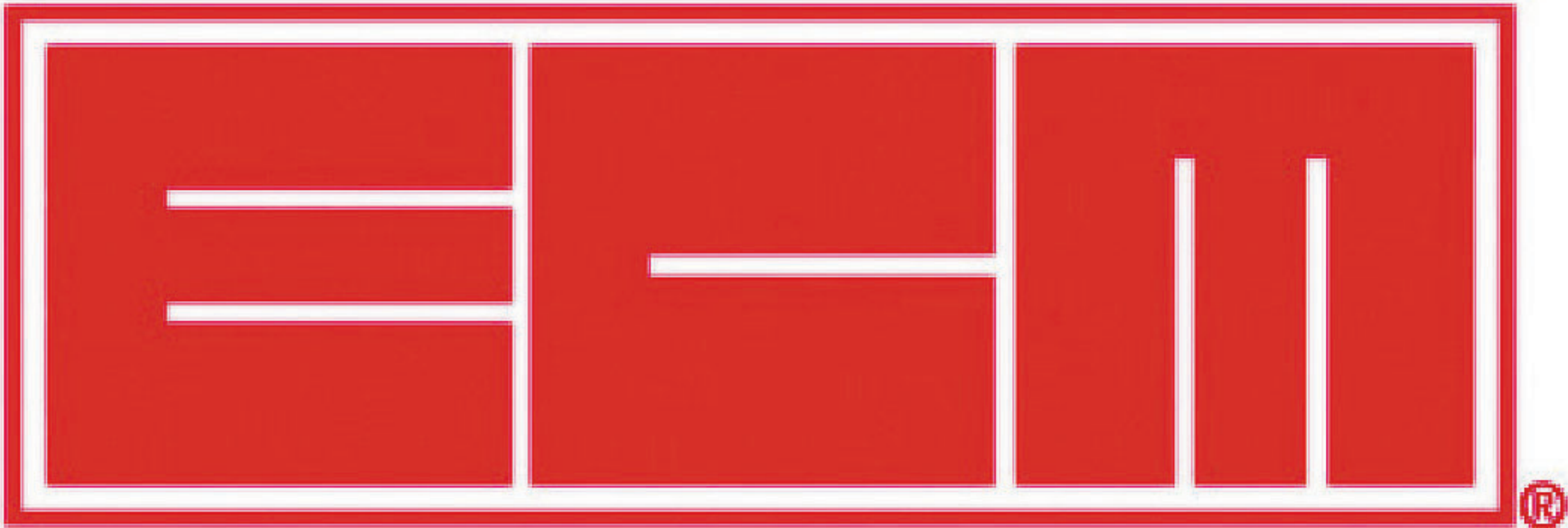
to do it. I’ve hosted floral design workshops here in the past, and hope to do a variety of classes and workshops here in the future. To learn more, sign up for my newsletter and visit my website at www.fromblossoms.com.

Q: What do you do in the off season?

Claar: I sell calendars that feature a collection of my artwork, and I also design notecards, they’re both popular gift items and available on my website. I’m adding fresh wreaths this year, which will keep me busy through December. The seasons force me to take a natural break in January and February, but that’s when I’ll be reflecting on what worked and what didn’t work, and planning my seed order for the next season. I also use that time to prepare my installation for the Flower Show.

Q: How has the move to Bedford County worked out for you?

Claar: Comparing life in the city to life in the country, there are pros and cons of having a business in either place. It hasn’t been difficult to find other people and businesses to connect and partner with here, it’s easier to make those connections in a smaller community. There are a lot of small businesses here, and the people I’ve met have been friendly and open and very helpful. Nearby towns are easily accessible, and with all the retail and restaurants they have there are a lot of different avenues for my flowers and artwork. I like having a new space to explore as a new business. It’s a great place to keep trying new things and see what sticks.



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Opportunity Meets Community

Q&A with Brittany Reid, owner of Encore 814 Pilates

By **George Berkheimer**
For the Bedford Gazette

Brittany Reid was a professional ballerina for the Pacific Northwest Ballet in Seattle, Wash., for 15 years, accustomed to a regimen of Pilates exercises to strengthen and condition her body.

After suffering an ankle injury, Pilates became part of her rehabilitation after surgery, helping her return to dancing months quicker than predicted. That experience inspired Reid to get her Pilates certification, and now provides a new career after retiring from ballet and moving to Bedford nearly a decade ago.

Q: How long have you been in business?

Reid: Encore 814 Pilates opened at the beginning of 2025, and I'm the owner and principal instructor. We're the only Pilates studio in Bedford County. As we expand our class offerings in the coming months, we will look to add additional instructors.

Q: What can your customers expect?

Reid: We offer a friendly, welcoming, inclusive environment that provides community and a support system to help people commit to a healthy lifestyle. Our studio was designed not only for performance, but also with modern comforts and stylish amenities. It features six Pilates reformers as well as a group class space. We have group and private classes, mat classes, group exercise classes, and senior chair exercise classes.

Q: What drew you to this career?

Reid: It came from my love of Pilates and wanting to share its benefits with the community. It helps build strength, increase flexibility, and prevent injuries. Bedford and the immediate surrounding areas didn't offer a certified Pilates experience, and I was thankful to have the opportunity to fill that need.

Q: Who are your clients?

Reid: We have developed a family of return clients ranging from teens



to seniors, and we see people who are looking to support their healthy lifestyle, stay mobile as they age, or who are looking to gain flexibility or prevent injuries. Women make up a large portion of Pilates clientele across the nation, and we see that here too, but a number of men have joined us as well. It's not uncommon for NFL players and other professional athletes to do Pilates regularly, and it has been recommended in professions such as police and fire departments for many years. Some of our clients come as far away as Johnstown and Cumberland, and we also see tourists looking to continue their Pilates practice while visiting here.

Q: What attracted you to Bedford?

Reid: After ballet I was looking for a change of pace and scene from big city living. Bedford offered the perfect mix of a small, close-knit community, beautiful outdoor spaces, and safe neighborhoods while still being close to Pittsburgh and Washington, DC.

Q: Why do you like it here?

Reid: I chose to raise my family and run my studio here in part due to its history of supporting small businesses. I'm encouraged by all the other women-owned businesses that already exist and have success here. Our location in the heart of downtown is surrounded by other small businesses and heavy foot traffic,

with a larger community network of small businesses working to support one another. There's a strong sense of development happening right now, many people are coming from other parts of the country to call Bedford home as new businesses and industries continue to open their doors here. My children go to school here, and my parents live here as well.

Q: How are you involved with the community?

Reid: Encore 814 is a member of Downtown Bedford Inc. and participates in supporting various community activities throughout the year.

Q: What else should people know about your business?

Reid: The quality of our studio space, classes, equipment, and chiefly our Reformers, is equal to that of any professional studio in any major city. Our location offers the personal support aspect and top-notch customer service with faces you recognize and live in the community with. You don't need experience to give Pilates a try, and you don't need to feel nervous or anxious. We're here to help you feel comfortable on your health and wellness journey in a local setting. Book with us on the Vagaro app and keep a look out for our freshly revamped website coming soon. We can't wait to see you here!



Ryan Braman



Laura Cook



Abigail Williams

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