

Outlook

Connecting Cortland 2020

A 20-page special section



A Record of Success

Quality economic and community development is the product of vision, leadership, courage, collaboration and hard work, and that's why the Cortland County Business Development Corporation is at the table whenever transformational opportunities come our way. We've played a key role in the city's Downtown Revitalization Initiative, the development of Gutchess Lumber Sports Complex, the development of Crescent Commons, the long-awaited revitalization of the former Jones Jewelry building in downtown Cortland, the ongoing redevelopment of the former Buckbee-Mears manufacturing facility, and so much more. We are the county's top resource for small business development, and we have advocated for and secured more than \$30 million in grants from the Central New York Regional Economic Development Council for a host of top municipal and private development projects. Our reach is far; the results are local. Here's to a successful 2020!



Cortland Main Street at Night

Todd R. McAdam/managing editor



THE MASKED SINGER

on Premiere



Filling the gaps:

Will rural NY ever get high speed broadband?

By **TRAVIS DUNN**
Staff Reporter
tdunn@cortlandstandard.net

Last year, the state legislature passed a bill, sponsored by Assembly Member Aileen Gunther, a Democrat from Forestburgh, that would have required New York to study providing rural areas with high speed broadband as a state-owned utility.

In December, Gov. Andrew Cuomo vetoed that bill.

"The bill is well-intentioned but would require a significant expenditure of funds and the procurement of outside expertise on a time frame that is unrealistic," Cuomo wrote in his veto message, which also references the efforts of his \$500 million Broadband for All program, which was intended to solve rural New York's broadband problem — limited access.

But despite the web site for that program claiming that it would provide broadband access to 99.9% of New Yorkers, critics of the program say the real numbers are nowhere close to that.

In other words, rural New York's broadband problem has a long way to go before it is solved, according to Jen Gregory, executive director of the Southern Tier 8, a regional planning board based in Binghamton.

Gunther's bill, she said, was a step in the right direction. Cuomo's veto, however, was not.

"It's been very, very frustrating," Gregory said. "I think it's another slap in the face to upstate New York."

Gregory testified about the problems Sept. 17 at a joint state Senate and Assembly hearing. According to Gregory, here is why many rural residents and business don't have high-speed inter-

net:

- The state, following federal guidelines, defines downward what is considered high speed. Actual high-speed service is at least 25 megabytes per second download and 3 Mbps upload, yet the state and federal governments accept 10 Mbps download and 1 mbps upload speeds as high speed.

- Satellite internet is considered high speed, even though it doesn't deliver. HughesNet, the main provider of this type of service for about \$80 per month, "is grossly inadequate and not scalable for future growth," she said.

- Building the fiber optic infrastructure necessary for high speed broadband would be incredibly expensive, and private companies don't want to make that investment because the cost outweighs the return.

- Current high-speed service to rural

areas is expensive where it is available. Spectrum or Charter customers can spend more than \$200 per month for combined phone, internet and TV packages, but in other areas of the country, with more competition, the same combined services cost less than \$70 per month.

- The state and federal governments use a flawed Federal Communication Commission method to map access to high-speed broadband. This method counts according to census block. If just one house in a census block has high-speed access (again, according to the flawed measure), it is counted as served.

"In addition," Gregory testified, "if an area has a false claim of being 'served,' this may disqualify the area for federal

See **BROADBAND**, page A6



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Connections of the past and present

By **GARRY VAN GORDER**
Contributing Writer

When I think of a "connected" community, I think of one that has come to understand what it is and what it offers to its residents as a unifying attribute.

An obvious example for Cortland County would be in its heritage as an agricultural community. A preponderance of farms and farm families and the related businesses they supported was once the source of great pride here, perhaps best showcased in the June Dairy Parade that drew thousands of people to Main Street each year to celebrate the industry and its impact on the local economy.

The agriculture community also stayed connected through social gatherings at the local Grange Hall, meetings of the Home Bureau, 4-H clubs, or by participating in cattle breeding or other competitions at the county fair and, for the best, the state fair.

Cortland County was agriculture and many stayed connected to one another through it. These days it's not such an easy case to make as family farms give way to large operations better suited to handle the unpredictability of the



VanGorder

See **CONNECTIONS**, page A3

The Chamber Connecting Cortland

The Chamber connects high school students to local businesses

By **BOB HAIGHT**
Contributing Writer

On Oct. 4, The Cortland Area Chamber of Commerce hosted 13 neighboring high schools at Pyrotek to showcase what Pyrotek manufactures and the opportunities for employment there.

We have many great local jobs not requiring a college education and many of them can lead to fulfilling careers. If high school students were interested in a job right out of school, maybe as a career track or because of postponing college, we showed them available jobs.



Haight

The idea of our Manufacturing Day began several years ago. Manufacturers had been working with us to assist them recruiting entry level employees. Since then the need has grown to most local businesses hiring entry level.

What connections did they previously have with our high schools?

"Very little," said chamber President, Bob Haight. "They may have had a casual connection, knew someone at the school, but nothing formal existed."

The chamber set out to make that connection. In addition to seeing Pyrotek first hand, there were 10 other manufacturers on hand to display what they do and what opportunities they have.

Many positions are entry level but the chance for advancement exists and benefits include health insurance, paid time off, tuition reimbursement and more.

Manufacturing Day is an annual celebration of modern manufacturing during which manufacturers invite their communities to their facilities in a collective effort to educate visitors about manufacturing career opportunities and improve public perceptions of manufacturing.

In the past, we hosted high school guidance staff and school administration to introduce the event and to be our partners to



Cortland Standard file photo

Pyrotek on Route 13 in South Cortland.

get the correct students to the future events. Our 2019 event included those students sincerely interested in these jobs.

The chamber has also created a manufacturing catalog and our first edition includes 13 local businesses currently hiring. We asked our businesses to tell their story, or tell the story of their employees and to not have the catalog look like a collection of help wanted ads.

We're very pleased with the results of the catalogs. Eighteen high school guidance of-

ices now have our manufacturing catalog on hand and the catalog is also available on line.

School staff are encouraged to have students take the catalogs home and we'll keep them supplied throughout the year. We're planning a second edition to be printed this spring because there are more businesses who want to be involved.

Any businesses wishing to be in the catalog can feel free to give our office a call. Work on the 2020 Manufacturing Day is al-

ready under way. Intertek will be our host on Oct. 9 and we look forward to having even more high school students attend.

Always feel free to call our office at 756-2814 with questions about any of our programs, or about businesses in our area.

The Cortland Area Chamber of Commerce Vision: To be the premiere business resource in Cortland County and beyond.

Bob Haight is president and CEO of the Cortland Area Chamber of Commerce.

CONNECTIONS

continued from page A2

marketplace and as social media and other technological advances suppress the need to get together with friends and neighbors.

Cortland's rich manufacturing history is also relevant, with work and social connections once intertwined at major employers like Smith Corona, Brockway Motors, Durkee Bakery, Brewer Ticheners and so many more. Those companies drove small business in the neighborhoods, and provided for still more connectivity through the local bars and restaurants catering to their employees.

As with agriculture, manufacturing's decline tore at the community's social fabric, leaving many now to merely reminisce about how much fun they had at the company clambake and the annual Christmas party.

Today our challenge is to reig-

nite community connectivity that seemed so effortless in years past. Who are we? What do we rally around? What makes us unique? What gives us pride?

Arts and entertainment might be a good place to start. After all, how many communities our size can boast a musical heritage featuring the likes of Ronnie Dio, Spiegle Wilcox, Arnald Gabriel, Danny D'Imperio, Bobby Comstock and Elf, to name a few, with a new generation of artists and top venues like the Center for the Arts and Rose Hall setting us up to be a top regional destination for artists and music lovers alike?

Is it a vibrant downtown perfect for living, working, and an evening out? Could it be Greek Peak? Is it our four seasons, which connect residents and visitors alike to the natural beauty all around us? How

about being a leading sports tourism community? We're already the home of the New York State Senior Games, countless high school and collegiate championships and Gutchess Lumber Sports Park, quickly rising as one of the Northeast's top baseball facilities. Can we do a better job of promoting ourselves as a college town?

All of these are in play, and all are the focus of an effort by so many people and organizations who believe in Cortland County and do not accept that our best days are behind us.

If we can all connect on that, then we've really got something going.

Garry VanGorder is executive director of the Cortland County Business Development Corp. and Industrial Development Agency.

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Rural Transportation

What is being done for those who don't have a car to get around?



Collin Spencer/staff reporter

By COLIN SPENCER
Staff Reporter

cspencer@cortlandstandard.net

Getting around Cortland and Tompkins counties means driving for most people. Not everybody owns a car or can drive.

Bus and taxi services are available, but most frequent only the urban cores of Cortland and Ithaca, and the community offers only a limited number of Lyft and Uber drivers.

"It's a large problem that many areas throughout the United States are trying to address," said Matt Yarrow, an assistant manager of Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit.

The answer, though, is to solving this issue is still being worked on.

The bus stops

Cortland Transit, the county's main bus op-

erator, runs seven routes. Routes one to four run through the city, Cortlandville and the village of Homer. Route five runs through McGraw, Solon, Cinnцинatus, Willet and Marathon, but operates only twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon.

For Cortland County residents looking to go to Tompkins County, specifically Dryden and Ithaca, the

Routes six and seven buses can people to Tompkins County, specifically Dryden and Ithaca, but run only a couple of trips a day.

But the complications of a rural bus route go beyond the number of runs. Getting to the bus stop may be farther than people with mobility issues can manage.

In Tompkins County, TCAT is unveiling a pilot program in Dryden, Tconnect, which would offer bus riders a trip between their home and the bus stop.

The program, which will start testing this spring, will allow Dryden residents to request via app a ride via from stops on the route 43 bus line, which travels between Dryden and Ithaca with limited service to Groton.

"We want to be on the forefront of new models and trying to reach people that have been hard to reach due to rural and low density areas," Yarrow said.

The pilot will be limited to that route, but if it works, Yarrow hopes it can bring more riders. They, in turn, can support more routes and more runs.

Temporary solutions

In Cortland County, the Seven Valleys Health Coalition runs a program called Supports for Health, which can provide transportation for low-income recipients for trips not covered by Medicaid.

The transportation has helped people in the past by taking them to disability hearings, Department of Social Services appointments, and physical activity classes to name

a few, said Seven Valleys Mobility Manager Catherine Wilde.

"The goal of the program is to help people get or stay healthy by connecting them with resources they need and providing a way to get them there if they have no other means for transportation," she said.

The service, though, is only meant to be a temporary solution.

Cortland Transit also offers a program where riders can get picked up and dropped off at direct locations, but the rider must contact the bus company at least two days in advance and is only offered for routes one to four — not the more rural routes.

Ride sharing

Issues persist for Cortland County residents who work in Tompkins County and vice versa.

"It's a bureaucratic nightmare to get across county lines," said Fernando de Aragon,

See RURAL, page A5

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RURAL

continued from page A4

a staff director at Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council and who helps with transportation planning for Fingerlakes Rideshare Coalition.

That's because TCAT is funded by Tompkins County for transportation within the county, but not funded to go outside it, he said. TCAT, though, does work with groups like Cortland Transit to organize cross-county travel, including routes to Tompkins Cortland Community College.

The coalition is uses Zimride, a ride-share program that allows people to find and carpool with others who are traveling to the same destination.

In Tompkins County, this has been useful for people traveling to Ithaca and Cornell University, de Aragon said. But he wasn't sure of the program's effectiveness across counties.

Local businesses

Businesses are working with Cortland Transit to run buses right to their front doors. Cortland Transit extended route 5 to stop at Square Deal Machining, Inc. in Marathon, said Stephen Donnelly, a public relations representative with Square Deal.

"We're really just trying to incentivize people to get out in the work force and provide reliable methods of transportation they may not have," Donnelly said.

He also said having more transportation options can help reduce the number of people unemployed because of a lack of transportation.

JM Murray in Cortlandville gets stops from routes two, three and four. Many of its employees need assistance for a disability, so the bus company offers a service that can pick up employees at their homes in the morning and return them again in the afternoon, Wilde said.

Serving those with disabilities

But people with disabilities need to do more than work, and they cannot always use a car, said Aaron Baier, the executive director of Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

It can be a struggle for people with a disability who need a bus that is wheelchair accessible, but can't find one going to the location they need to get to.

"A lot of times, people with disabilities in Cortland end up kind of isolated," Baier said.

The organization has been advocating for more federal funding for public transportation and expanding rural bus routes, like route five, six and seven on Cortland Transit, he said.

It's also working with Cortland Transit on solutions.

He likes that businesses such as Square Deal and JM Murray help their employees get to work, but still wants to see more done.

"There's a lot that could be done to make sure that all municipalities in our county have at least some coverage," he said.



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BROADBAND

continued from page A2

investment opportunities to build affordable adequate service.

These, then, are the problems. What are the solutions?

Dryden

The town of Dryden, tired of waiting for the state or federal government to ride to the rescue, began making plans last year to build its own fiber-to-the-home broadband service. The town intends to be its own internet service provider as a municipal utility.

If Dryden succeeds, it could become the first municipality in the state with its own municipal fiber optic broadband utility, joining 63 other such utilities across the country, including those run by the cities of Longmont, Colorado and Chattanooga, Tennessee, as well as those run by smaller municipalities, such as Fairlawn, Ohio (population 7,500), and Sebawaing, Michigan (population 1,643).

The estimated cost is \$14.53 million, and Hunt Engineering, the consulting company the town hired to help get things started, said extending high-speed broadband service to everyone in town will take five or six years.

The town aims to provide residential service of 300 to 400 Mbps for \$50 per month as well as:

- \$75 for basic business service.
- \$100 per month for 1 Gbps residential service.
- \$150 for 1 Gbps business services.

So far, Dryden has taken only preliminary steps, but a broadband committee meets for the first time at noon Feb. 21.

The town plans to apply for state and federal grants and loans to help with the project but will likely finance the bulk of the cost through a municipal bond, said Supervisor Jason Leifer.

Southern Tier Network

But not all rural upstate towns have Dryden's activist spirit or tax base, and setting up municipal broadband elsewhere would be more of a challenge.

Several Southern Tier communities sought to address these issues years ago. The result: The Southern Tier Network, a nonprofit fiber optic network, founded in 2011, that has extended fiber optic lines into eight New York counties — Schuyler, Steuben, Chemung, Yates, Tioga, Tompkins, Broome and Alleghany, said Steve Manning, the network's chief operating officer.

The aim of the network is to provide so-called "middle mile" fiber optic access to rural areas. This is the crucial part of the fiber optic network that extends from a main trunk line, which, much like a major power line, brings broadband capability into a general area.

Building these "middle mile" connector lines would encourage other groups — such as private companies or municipal utility companies, like the one Dryden proposes — to run fiber optic lines to homes and businesses, he said.

STN provides an example that the rest of upstate New York could follow to solve its broadband access problems, Gregory said.

"It's a solid model," she said. "It reaches the areas where no one wanted to invest."

Homer and Cortland

Darren "Hal" McCabe, the mayor of village of Homer and one of Cortland's three representatives

to the Southern Tier 8, said he would like to see high-speed fiber optic broadband come to Homer, but so far there are no solid plans to make this happen.

McCabe, who, in his day job, is also an executive director of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, is not very hopeful that rural New York's broadband problems will be solved at the legislative level.

The governor, he said, "is very much sticking with the message that they have pretty much done what they need to do."

But McCabe sees a potential future solution with STN, which is looking to expand its reach in Tompkins County. According to Manning, STN runs a fiber optic line to Cornell University and is trying to get grants to build a fiber optic ring beyond that.

McCabe said he hopes he can find a way to connect Homer to that line.

Cortland Mayor Brian Tobin said he too would like to have high-speed fiber optic broadband, but right now the city is only considering that in the context of its Downtown Revitalization Initiative and details have yet to be worked out.

Tobin said the city is not considering a municipally owned system like Dryden's, but looking at the more limited installation of fiber optic cable downtown through a public-private partnership.

The future

Rep. Anthony Brindisi (D-Utica) inserted into the Save the Internet Act of 2019 an amendment that would direct the Government Accounting Office to research ways to increase broadband access.

In the meantime, he's following the advice of a Federal Communications Commission and polling his constituents on their broadband — if they have it.

His website also offers an internet speed test. The idea, he said, is to point out where broadband is available, regardless of census block borders. With that data, perhaps he can wrangle money to address the problem.

"The money isn't going to the right places because they don't know where the right places are," Brindisi said.

Gregory would like to see rural New York go further. She was a supporter of Gunther's bill, and she still thinks state-owned broadband is the way to go.

"I think the state has to look at owning the infrastructure of some of these municipalities," she said. "I don't know what other options we have."

In her September testimony, Gregory suggested that the Upstate Cellular Coverage Task Force join forces with the Department of Transportation and Department of State to pursue ways of making this happen. She suggested that the department of transportation might "benefit in owning additional broadband infrastructure," while the department of state "may be able to identify areas for shared services that cross municipal boundaries and plan for logical state-owned buildouts to deliver service to the most challenged areas."

"No one's going to invest in these areas," she said. "We're here alone. It's very discouraging, but that's the reality of the situation."

Managing Editor Todd R. McAdam contributed to this report.

Connecting Cortland through the arts

By **KAT MCCARTHY**
Contributing Writer

At a recent exhibit opening, I heard an artist proclaim that we are living in one of the best times to be an artist — there are many ways to reach an audience and more venues in which to display work.

The response from another attendee was that we're living in one of the more challenging times for the arts — funding is a struggle and there is so much competition for an audience's attention.

As an optimist and a realist, I would agree with both assessments.

Looking into 2020, we are faced with challenges and opportunities in the world of arts and entertainment. One of the biggest changes we're facing is being too connected.

With the internet at our fingertips, there are many ways to be entertained without leaving the comforts of home. And with our busy pace of life, staying in is tempting.

As a result, our organization is focusing more on experiential offerings. For those who have attended one of the cultural council's live story slams, you'll understand what I'm talking about. There is something about sitting in the audience as our friends and neighbors relay an experience that has shaped who they are today. Listening to someone else's adventure provides an opportunity to walk in their shoes, or just to laugh with a group.

As a long-standing community organization in its 20th year, the cultural council hosts several annual activities. Looking ahead, we are eager to offer these well-loved events while bringing in new elements.

For example, at this year's Arts & Wine Festival, folks entering the wine tent will find spirits in addition to wine. This may sound like a small change, but with other enhancements being made, the result is an annual event with a fresh spin.

Another exciting change is that with the relocation of our offices to Main Street, we now curate a gallery on the first floor of the McNeil Building. We are so excited for this new change as one opportunity to bring to downtown a stronger focus on the arts in our community.

And with broad attention toward the arts and entertainment in this area, we see more potential in the community for job creation, economic development, increased tourism, and enhanced quality of life through the arts.

We are fortunate to live in an area with many cultural and arts organizations — representing live performances, visual arts, local history and more. These entities are doing wonderful things, and with limited financial resources, we see potential for increased collaboration.

One example of this is the planning of the second Gears to Corsets Steampunk Festival, which is coordinated by representatives from local organizations in order to highlight our community's rich history of Victorian-era industry and invention.

As we move into 2020, we recognize challenges, but we also see great potential. Arts meet-up events, First Fridays, the Community Arts Challenge, and other activities all offer the potential to connect around and celebrate the arts in our community.

And we see plenty to celebrate.

Kat McCarthy is executive director of the Cultural Council of Cortland County.



Cortland Standard file photos
The Cultural Council of Cortland strengthens the bonds the community shares through art and cultural events.

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Putting Cortland on the map

How a dress shop, music fest and dairy work their connections

By **KATIE KEYSER**
Living and Leisure Editor
 living@cortlandstandard.net

Nancy Elster still has people coming to her shop who say they didn't even know there's a dress shop on Main Street in Cortland. She doesn't let it bother her.

"Thanks to Google, they find me," said the owner of Nancy's Bridal, a shop she's owned for about 13 years.

Elster is one of the few clothing stores left on Main Street. She sells wedding gowns and evening wear and is busy beyond belief, despite vying with shops on the internet, in Syracuse and big box stores.

The dress shop owner, a music festival organizer and a milk producer talked connection in their roles. Connecting the greater Cortland area to the world, to them, means calling attention here.

The internet connection, in particular, is a double-edged sword, Elster said. It brings customers, but higher expectations, too.

"The biggest and hardest change is the idea that the product comes faster and faster," she said. "It doesn't. You are so used to ordering online and getting it to you in a few days. Women come in and expect to have a dress that week. With brides you need to start a year before your wedding."

Most seamstresses need four to six weeks to make a dress perfect, she said. "Thank God for stock."

Customers come from Marathon, McGraw, Binghamton, Potsdam and Watertown.

"They come down here but they have family here. That's what brings them back: family," she said. "It's just word of mouth. It's the best advertising ever. If you service your customer, they are going to tell others. If you sit and ignore your customers, they are going to walk out the door."

Planting the seed

Chris Merkley, a musician and owner of the Orchard, a new recording studio/bowling alley planned for Main Street, works with Tyler Coakley, a local music lover, overseeing a host of volunteers to put on a three-day music festival, Seedstock. It's looking at its 12th year this summer.

The event started as a house party with eight bands and has turned into a three-day event of 24 acts — about 100 musicians — that includes overnight camping, food concessions, a space for art and kids activities.

"It was actually a pretty big house party. Maybe 200-250 people," said Merkley, of Cortlandville, of that first year. Now the event brings in about 1,000 people over the three days.

"It started with a local group of people: first degree of separation from guys in the house. Every year now, you have the word of mouth that has spread from that initial group. There's some people that have been at every Seedstock. Some who have been to almost all of them. Every year, there are people that have never been there."

Merkley said organizers feel like they can't expand any further. The hours available to play music and parking have their limits.

"I don't remember any specific goal like, 'how can we grow this thing.' I think the growth has been very organic," Merkley said. "How do we improve the experience?"

"Introducing new music has been important to us," he said. "Steve Lewis and the Big Band of Fun," for instance. From Connecticut — the Balkun Brothers. Bands come from Philadelphia and New York City as well as Cortland.

Logistics are always an issue, but with experience, organizers get better, Merkley said.

"There are things you have to do to be in compliance with local laws, codes and regulations. Like a permit with the Town of Cortlandville," he said. "There's a certain liability involved ... you are going to want an insurance policy."

Merkley said his emphasis is on how organizers can be helpful and the event beneficial.

"If your intention is to do good and you are proactive in considering all the people in play — you might miss something, but you make up for it with an intent to do right."

Besides, he said, music is an agent that connects people.

Milking it

Branden Brown, a co-owner of Trinity Valley Dairy of East Homer, is trucking milk all over New York.

The milk, which uses a low-temperature pasteurization process, is in P&C and Tops, SUNY Cortland, Guthrie Cortland Medical Center, pizza parlors. It's in Syracuse, Ithaca and Binghamton. It's even trucked to New York City on Saturdays.

"We just picked up 10 Price Chopper stores as well," Brown said. "Every time a Wegman's opens, we go into that store."

"We process about, right now, on a low time, 3,500 to 4,000 gallons a week," he said. "During a high time, like at Christmas time, it's 6,000 gallons a week."

The company started in 2013, selling just 300 gallons of white and chocolate milk a

See MAP, page B2



Seedstock in full swing.

Photo provided by Chris Park

Country Peddler

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Nancy Elster, owner of Nancy's Bridal, talks about music, sewing, her business and her life.

Cortland Standard file photo

MAP

continued from page B1

week.

"To us, our belief is we are blessed with opportunity, Brown said. "Like Wegman's, we got an email out of the blue. There was a free event at Rochester Institute of Technology. Wegman's was going to be there. This was four or five years ago. We wanted to see how we could get this product in their store."

Brown happened to park right next to Wegman's executives outside the college. "We were the first people to talk to the Wegman's representatives."

A phone call to Manhattan Milk and now Trinity Valley is in Manhattan. The store was featured in the New York Post in January and recently in the New York Times. People have asked the business to deliver to them.

Cornell University tested its milk and ranked it the highest quality in New York last year among dairies that size; the American Cheese Society gave its cheese curds a score of 97 out of 100.



Photo provided by Gene Rinas

An aerial view of Seedstock.

"There's not really a secret to it. We believe in the product," Brown said. "We are passionate about the dairy industry."

service. Sometimes it's starting small, or reaching out. Growing a business is about making a connection.

"Go into a big box store and watch the employees. A lot of them look the other way or walk the other way," Elster said. "But you get your home town store that has the same product — they walk in the door, the first thing you say is, 'Good morning.' They connect with you."

Still, Merkley isn't trying to put Cortland on the map with Seedstock.

"To me, this doesn't do that. It has to be in the context of a larger scene. This could be one component," he said. "Think of the Center for the Arts. Not only are they bringing in high quality musicians, but now they have these music icons coming to the area. They put Homer on the map ... Ronnie James Dio put Cortland on the map."

"I think there's plenty of other things that put Cortland on the map," Merkley said. "Cortland's getting out of the way of Cortland, and putting Cortland on the map."

Getting Cortland on the map
Sometimes the connection is customer



Brandon Brown, co-owner of Trinity Valley Dairy Farms, in East Homer, moves dairy products out of a cooler on Tuesday.

Cortland Standard file photo



Connecting Cortland — JM Murray

By **MATT TONER**
Contributing Writer

In 1966, John M. Murray and a small group of concerned citizens created a place where adults with disabilities could find work opportunities.

It was John Murray's dream to create a first-rate vocational rehabilitation facility where individuals could not only obtain employment, but also obtain the skills needed to achieve greater independence in their everyday lives.

JM Murray now provides services to approximately 800 individuals and family members with disabilities annually, with 135 working in our community-based integrated manufacturing facility. Throughout our growth, we have strived to continue to maintain an individualized, person-centered approach to all the services we provide, offering the individuals we serve the opportunity to achieve greater self-sufficiency.

One way JM Murray helps to connect Cortland is by providing work opportunities for the individuals that we serve either within our fully integrated production and manufacturing operations at 823 Route 13 or other community-based employers.

JM Murray has an extensive list of partnering employers and organizations within Cortland County.

Some of the businesses include Lowe's, Walmart, Walden Place, Marshall's & Doug's Powersports Unlimited to name a few. JM Murray also offers the opportunity for



Cortland Standard file photos

TOP LEFT: J.M. Murray client Scott Albro applies stain to a wooden bottle and can redemption bin. **TOP RIGHT:** Geoff West, of Cortland, packages plastic garbage bags. **ABOVE:** Mary Newton packages dental kits. **BOTTOM LEFT:** J.M. Murray client Marylou Martin. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Ken Woodman packages toothpaste tubes.

employment and training within the 823 Route 13 facility. We strongly believe that everyone, regardless of their disability has a right to work and should be afforded an opportunity to work so that they may realize the pride and dignity of earning a paycheck.

Employment Connection, JM Murray's employment services division, is a community-based service that embraces an "employment first" philosophy to assist people of all abilities towards obtaining and maintaining employment.

Job seekers are guided through the employment process, from resume development to person-centered job matches in competitive, integrated employment. Vocational evaluation, job development and situational assessments are among our areas

of expertise.

Wrap-around services such as case management, job-search workshops, and disability analysts are offered to provide the most comprehensive of approaches.

Our 240 employees, individuals we serve and their family members are all valuable contributors to the Cortland County community. The JM Murray logo is prominently displayed on all our company vehicles to proudly identify our presence in the community.

We have a partnership with Cortland Transit, which not only benefits our consumers and employees but also every commuter of the public transportation service. We have a significant positive impact of the economics of the Cortland area.

For more than 50 years, JM Murray has been connecting Cortland as the premier provider of person-centered support for individuals with disabilities, or other barriers to independence, in Cortland and the Central New York region. JM Murray believes that all people have the potential for continued development.

Through our work in combination with other local businesses and organizations Cortland County will continue to provide opportunities for ongoing personal, social, and professional growth for the people we serve for many years to come.

Matt Toner is the public relations coordinator for J.M Murray.



Hemp industry blossoms



Randy Allen cares for juvenile hemp plants at Ithaca Organics in Dryden. Hemp sales have seen exponential growth since 2015, according to Hemp Industries Association.

Cortland Standard file photo

Editor's note: This report was initially published Feb. 16, 2019.

By JACOB DeROCHIE Staff Reporter

In October 2017, Trevor Sherman of Dryden began growing a small amount of hemp for a friend at the Ithaca Farmer's Market to use for juicing.

In 2018, he increased his crop to one acre after attending a seminar at Cornell University.

By 2019, he had planted 50 acres and is considering up to 200 acres this year.

Over the past three years, hemp went from being almost nothing in Cortland to a planned 80 acres — or more — expected this year.

Sherman, the owner of Ithaca Organics, will continue growing vegetables and continue his market. He'll also continue going to farmers markets and selling at his food stand.

However, the farm will no longer have a community-supported agriculture program, in which members pay for their share of vegetables up front and receive their share of the vegetables over the course of the season. Sherman was considering dropping the CSA even as he started growing hemp.

Sherman's plan runs alongside a recent boom in the industry following the legalization of the plant across the nation.

In Broome County, a company plans to open a processing plant for hemp.

Hemp sales have seen exponential growth since 2015, according to Hemp Industries Association. In 2015, hemp sales totaled around \$500,000, increasing to \$47.6 million in the first 11 months of 2018.

For now however, it's too early to estimate the economic effect hemp will have on Central New York and the country, said Janice Degni, the field crop specialist with Cortland County Cornell Cooperative Extension

of Cortland County. "It's a new crop and offers a new opportunity," Degni said.

Grain, fiber and oil

Hemp, or cannabis sativa L., is in the same family as marijuana, but has less than 0.3 percent of THC, the chemical that causes the high.

Under the new Farm Bill, the Hemp Farming Act opens up the industry. Three types of industrial hemp exist:

- Grain, which is grown for the seeds to use in food products and hempseed oil.

- Fiber used for fabric and clothing.

- CBD, or cannabidiol, oil used to treat certain pain and inflammation.

The plant can be used for thousands of products. The seeds are used in industrial products, personal-care products and nutritious food products, according to the Cortland County Soil and Water Conservation District.

The stalk fiber can be used in paper, building materials and both personal and industrial textiles. The CBD oil is used in several medical and therapeutic applications.

While the plant has been legalized, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has the authority still to regulate products containing cannabis or cannabis-derived compounds under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

A few plants to 50 acres

Since beginning to grow the plant in 2017, Sherman has expanded his operations.

In February 2018, after speaking with an old friend and visiting a renovated facility in Spencer used for processing the plant, he added an additional four acres to the already established one that month.

He partnered then with the High End Group in Spencer, Tioga County, to process his plants.

"The first year, we hit some bumps," Sherman said with the cost of equipment and the equipment breaking down — hemp can be hard on equipment.

To begin, Sherman began making CBD oil. "Eventually we'll have half a dozen different oils," Sherman said. Each oil will target different ailments.

Hemp is claimed to have positive health effects on the brain and heart; as well as reducing inflammation; relieving rheumatoid arthritis; and improving skin condition, according to a report from Medical News Today.

To make the different types of oil Sherman needs to extract different cannabinoids for the hemp plants.

Down the road, Sherman looks to open his market more. He hopes to offer infused beverages, infused food products, ointments and balms.

"It helps with being legal," he said. It opens grant opportunities.

Recently, he said, he's talking with a partner near

Erie County and may plant up to 200 acres this year, although he hasn't decided, yet.

Expanding industry

Sherman isn't the only one in the Cortland area to begin growing hemp.

In 2017, Allan Gandelman, an owner of Main Street Farms, looked into growing the plant following a case of Lyme disease. The farm now grows 10 varieties of the CBD oil hemp.

Gandelman is expanding his hemp production — doubling the acreage. "We are adding another 30 acres of hemp for CBD," he wrote in an email.

Along with growth from farmers, the industry has seen announcements in the expansion of hemp processing.

Southern Tier Hemp, a hemp processing company, announced last year that it would be turning a former printing plant in Johnson City into a hemp-processing plant to produce CBD oil and other hemp products.

The processing plant would employ 100 to 120 people, early projections indicate.

Developing a market

State Sen. James Seward (R-Milford) is a big supporter of industrial hemp in New York. "It will be a big plus for the economy," Seward said. "You can utilize industrial hemp in such a wide variety of products." Even before the passage of the Farm Bill, the state has been working toward a hemp market.

In 2015, the state passed the Industrial Hemp Agricultural Research Pilot, which allowed a number of educational institutions to grow and research the plant, Seward said. Two years later, the cap on the number of sites was eliminated and the places that could grow and research the crop expanded to farms and businesses as well.

"It threw the door wide open," Seward said.

In 2017, the plant was also established as an agricultural commodity, giving it legal standing, Seward said.

Since 2015, the state has also invested \$10 million into research and capital grants to aid in the product development and establishing facilities to process it.

"This presents exciting prospects for the state," Seward said.

Included in highlights from Gov. Andrew Cuomo's 2019 state budget New York would import thousands of pounds of industrial hemp seed to ensure farmers have access to a high-quality product and ease the administrative burden on farmers. Further, the state would invest an additional \$2 million in a seed certification and breeding program to begin producing unique New York seed.

For now, it's too early to tell the economic effect that hemp will have on the state, Degni said. "The products and markets have to develop together."

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Guthrie Welcomes Oncology Team in Cortland

Michael Fallon, MD, and Margaret Boufal, DO, have joined the Guthrie Oncology team and are continuing to provide outstanding care to patients in Cortland. Together they offer seamless treatment for all types of cancers.

Dr. Fallon received his medical degree from Stony Brook University, The State University of New York, Stony Brook, N.Y., and completed his radiation oncology residency at Emory University in Atlanta, Ga. He was the medical director for radiation oncology at Radiation Oncology Services for over 15 years.

Dr. Boufal received her medical degree from Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in Philadelphia, Pa. and completed her Internal Medicine residency at Pennsylvania Hospital. She is also fellowship-trained in Hematology/Oncology at the Hahnemann University Medical College of Pennsylvania.

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Marathon Boat Group launches new product

Editor's note: This report was initially published Feb. 4.



Todd R. McAdam/managing editor

Dylan Winters welds a rail as employees of Marathon Boat Group finish fabricating and assembling their first pontoon boat for sale.

V-bottomed row boats sat clustered — these welded.

The pontoon boats are the company's a new entry to the watercraft industry, and something the Marathon Boat Group, Grumman's successor, has never done before.

Dylan Winters let out a cry of pain as he welded a rail, "That's hot!" he called, as an older mentor reminded him steel holds a lot more heat than the aluminum Winters typically welds.

The boats aren't a typical platform set on a couple of aluminum pontoons. Three pontoons lets them accommodate more space and larger engines. This particular model has bar tables that extend over the motors, creating more entertainment space in a configuration designer Anthony Kalil is proud of.

"I've got the patent on that," Kalil said. "Nobody else can do it."

"It lives like a 30-footer, but it builds and stores like a 25-footer," said Dave Porthouse, the company's

director of operations.

The boats aren't cheap — this model, the Vanderbilt, will retail for perhaps \$125,000 to \$135,000, a mid-range for the company. They're not meant to be assembly line products. "It's meant for someone who wants something special, something different," Thompson said.

Depending on the engines — a pair of 200-horsepower motors sit on the prototype in the garage — the boats can get up to 40, maybe 50 miles per hour on the water, Thompson said. They have sound systems, plus seating, configurable lighting schemes. Is there anything they don't have? Refrigeration? It's an option.

The company got \$870,000 in two state grants to create the expansion to make the new products. The award is contingent on creating the jobs. Marathon Boat Group recruited experienced designers and fabricators as a backbone to the company, Thompson said, but it will eventually need trained welders to

join the company, and eventually advance. That's why the company plans to work with Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services.

"We are absolutely thrilled about it," said Colleen Viggiano, the deputy superintendent, noting one student started an internship with the company recently and another is expected to start today. "The real world learning is the best kind of learning for our students."

The company also provided materials to one of the school's welding instructors so students could work on a project in which they weld aluminum stairs.

"Which is pretty cool," Viggiano said. "We're always looking for ways to connect with business partners."

Thompson also said the company is talking with other districts, including Homer Central School District and Marathon Central School District, about ways to get students involved with the company.

Marathon Superintendent Rebecca Stone said the company has talked to her about presenting awards, although she didn't give details on what they would be for, and that they are also looking to provide financial support for some student activities.

Stone also said Thompson discussed internships and tours for students.

"Students, especially those in smaller school districts, they don't see the opportunities that are in their own backyard," she said. "This is an opportunity for students to learn skills and become part of the work force here in our local community."

Homer Superintendent Thomas Turck said the company is helping refurbish a Grumman canoe, and the district is open to other opportunities.

"This is a huge win-win because we get people in, see their skill set, see their level and see who we might want to bring on permanently and students get real training outside of a classroom," Thompson said.

The company's location is ideal, Porthouse said, because Central New York and the Southern Tier are population by highly trained, underemployed manufacturers. They're the sort of workers who can build high-value, low-volume products instead of using cheaper assembly-line techniques.

"If you can do it in metal, it can be done here," Porthouse said.

But their real purpose Saturday isn't simply to build a boat. This is boat No. 1. The team is trying to understand how the fabrication and assembly process will work so they can get more efficient in the future. It'll be an ongoing effort, Thompson said as the crew returned to work. Parts are coming together, but they have only another two hours to finish.

But that's another reason the company stays in Marathon — people work hard.

"There's a hearty breed of people around here and it's almost representative of our boats — they're here for the long haul," Thompson said.

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Residency: University of Virginia Health Sciences Center and the University of Virginia School of Medicine, Division of Internal Medicine, Charlottesville Virginia

Fellowship: Division of Hematology-Oncology, University of Virginia Health Sciences Center and The University of Virginia School of Medicine, Charlottesville Virginia

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The real expertise of a Realtor

By JOANNE SWEENEY
Contributing Writer

The American dream of home ownership is not without its challenges. It is an exciting time but also can easily put a potential buyer into a tailspin. Making that decision to select a Realtor® is your best decision.

A Realtor® can guide you from “I am thinking of buying a house” to “Congratulations here are the keys to your new home!” He or she knows the local market conditions, the ins and outs of the local closing process and who can answer your questions or knows where to get the answers. They will advocate for you. This is something that social media sites cannot do for you.

Buyers are consumers and need to shop by reaching out to local lenders to see what programs they offer specific to their situations. In addition to the lender programs, there are other programs too that can assist buyers. There are partnership programs between businesses, organizations and local municipalities that have grants and assistance to make homeownership a reality.

Getting acquainted with the process and terminology used is key to the experience being successful and minimizing the



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confusion and fear that goes along with it. A Realtor® can be hands on to assist you every step of the way.

The reality of what a mortgage payment includes can be an eye opener. Principal and interest is only one component. Inter-

est rates have held at an incredible low level keeping the principal and interest portion of your mortgage payment low.

However, the other part of that monthly mortgage payment equation is the escrow account. The escrow portion (savings if you

will) is the money paid monthly for future property taxes and required insurances so the lender can make those payments from the escrow account on the buyer's behalf. That monthly escrow calculation often doubles the principal and interest portion of the mortgage payment.

Receiving that property tax bill can be a shock if it was not figured into the buyer's budget. The escrow account is a huge help with budgeting those future expenses. Then there is cash (needed) to close. It consists of the down payment, closing costs and prepaid items. Understanding all of these things is what a Realtor® can assist you with.

Do your homework and research, as a potential home buyer don't be afraid to ask questions. Above all, develop a relationship with a Realtor of your choice and visit the Cortland County Board of Realtor® website www.cortlandmls.com.

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Joanne M. Sweeney is president of the Cortland County Board of Realtors.



City DRI plans on track

Editor's note: This report was initially published Sept. 14.

By **TRAVIS DUNN**
Staff Reporter

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Nearly two years have passed since Gov. Andrew Cuomo came to Cortland to announce that the city had won \$10 million in state Downtown Revitalization Initiative funding. Since then, not much movement on the DRI has been visible.

What has been done already? What will be done, and when?

So far no state DRI money had been dispensed by September, said Garry VanGorder, executive director of the Cortland County Business Development Corp. But this is not unusual, he said, and in keeping with the slow pace of state government grant disbursement.

But some DRI projects have already started — one was completed almost a year ago — in anticipation of reimbursement when the DRI money becomes available.

Planning for the biggest DRI project, the total overhaul of Main Street, is steadily inching forward, with street reconstruction expected to begin in 2020.

The following is a status report on all the projects connected with the DRI.

Reimagine Main Street Infrastructure and Streetscape: \$5,089,248

About half of the \$10 million in DRI funds will go toward rebuilding and restructuring Main Street. The project will not only redo the surface of Main Street and turn it into a two-way street, but it will also reconfigure parking, add pedestrian improvements and replace aging stormwater, sewer and water pipes.

Workers from Ravi Engineering are mapping and surveying Main Street to determine “where public property ends and the private property begins,” said Chris Bistocchi, the city’s superintendent of public works.

That data will be analyzed by Fisher Associates, the consulting firm that prepared the two-way Main Street proposal. Fisher Associates will then work on “the initial draft of a design” to submit to the city, Bistocchi said.

Mayor Brian Tobin, Bistocchi, other officials in the Department of Public Works and the members of DRI-related committees will look over the design and offer comments and suggestions. Tobin said the city would also have public meetings to get community input on the proposed design.

“We want to make sure that we are living up to people’s expectations in terms of the final product,” he said.

Fisher Associates will alter its design taking these comments into account, and return with a final design, Bistocchi said.

Bistocchi said he would like construction to begin in June; that date, however, has not been set, and will require input from Fisher Associates.

“We’ve got to get moving on this,” he said. “It’s going to be a two-year project because we’re never going to be able to do it all in one year.”

Bistocchi said he wants to see Main Street between Groton Avenue and Court Street finished in 2020, so that workers could focus on finishing Court to Tompkins Street in 2021.

While all that work is being done, he said, his eye will be toward keeping downtown businesses accessible to the public, he said.



A crew prepares for the reconstruction next year of Main Street in Cortland as part of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative. *Kevin Conlon/city editor*



Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul tours downtown Cortland on Sept. 25 with Mayor Brian Tobin to see what progress has been made on projects funded by a \$10 million state Downtown Revitalization Initiative announced in 2017. *Photos by Todd R. McAdam/managing editor*

“We want to make sure that we keep these businesses in business,” he said.

Downtown Fiber Optic and High Speed Broadband: \$386,000

This project, still largely conceptual, would bring fiberoptic broadband to downtown and set up free WiFi areas on Main Street.

“We want to put in infrastructure that would allow for a connected downtown,” Tobin said.

Fisher Associates will do the initial engineering for creating the fiberoptic infrastructure, he said.

Tobin said the city would likely enter into a public-private partnership with an internet service provider to build out the fiberoptic cable, although the city might also buy the fiberoptic cable itself, although he said the expense made that less realistic.

“At this point we’re still flexible,” he said.

Advance the Crown City Artworks Project: \$200,000

This project will feature public art, including sculpture, murals or exhibitions, in the downtown area. A working group of artists and community members has met periodically to discuss locations and featured artist, VanGorder said.

“The public art component will be an important part of what we do,” Tobin said, but this will also come after Main

Street has been completed.

“We’ve got to deal with the stuff underground first,” he said. “For obvious reasons, the public art piece will most likely be a 2021 portion of the project.”

Vine Health and Fitness Gym at 20 N. Main St.: \$270,000

This was the first DRI project to get off the ground. Janine Franco opened the \$800,000 gym and physical therapy center in October 2018; \$270,000 of this will be reimbursed with state DRI funds. The 7,000 square-foot facility is located in the Bailey Place Insurance building at the northwest corner of Groton Avenue and Main Street, and it includes a 2,000-square-foot physical therapy center for patients from Guthrie Cortland Medical Center. The gym also has a massage therapist on staff.

Downtown Pocket Park between 10 and 16 Main St.: \$250,000

A small city-owned lot at this location will be turned into a pocket park, featuring seating, landscaping and lighting. Fisher Associates will do the design work, with input from city officials and committees, as part of its overall Main Street plan, according to VanGorder.

The Orchard at 28 Main St.: \$975,000

The old Mullen Office Outfitters building at 28 Main

St., which closed in 2017 and has been vacant since, will be transformed into The Orchard, a multi-use entertainment facility, that will feature an open-air deck on the roof, an upstairs performance space with recording equipment for capturing live shows and a downstairs food venue and four lanes of two-thirds scale bowling, according to Chris Merkley, the head of the project.

The project will cost a total of \$1.4 million: \$975,000 of that will be reimbursed by DRI funds, and Merkley said he will secure an additional \$500,000 in private financing. Merkley said he will lease the building from McNeil Development, the owner.

He said he hopes to start construction and open The Orchard for business in the spring or summer of 2021.

Create a Building Owner/Business Startup Loan and Grant Fund: \$600,000

This project would create a revolving loan and grant fund that would help renovate commercial and residential buildings downtown, including sign and façade improvements, upper story housing restoration and commercial space renovation, with an eye toward environmentally-friendly projects. The fund could also help pay for start-up expenses for new businesses.

VanGorder said the draft guidelines for this fund have been submitted to the state

Department of House and Community Renewal.

Cortland Business Innovation Center at 40 Main St.: \$484,000

Construction has advanced on an estimated \$1.9 million project at the Cortland Business Innovation Center at 40 Main St. The building, owned and run by the Cortland Downtown Partnership, was purchased for \$350,000 in 2011, and a \$650,000 elevator has already been installed, according to Evan Geibel, president of the Downtown Partnership and publisher of the *Cortland Standard*.

Geibel said the center had received a \$500,000 Restore NY Communities Initiative grant to renovate the first, second and third floors of the building.

The center will also be reimbursed \$484,000 in DRI funding, which will “get the project across the finish line (and which won’t be disbursed until the project is complete),” according to Geibel.

Demolition work was finished in 2018, said Geibel, and construction on the first floor is underway. Some work will also be done on the third floor, he said; that floor is currently being rented out to an “entrepreneur in residence.” The American Red Cross is renting out space on the second floor, he said.

Today, the BDC/IDA and the Cortland County Convention and Visitors Bureau now lease space there.

The SUNY Cortland Institute of Applied Geospatial and Drone Technology: \$100,000

Institute for Geospatial and Drone Technology would provide space and resources for startup companies and entrepreneurs, in an attempt to encourage GIS and drone company innovation in the city. The DRI funds would pay for drones, software, hardware and a space for the program on Main Street.

VanGorder said the project is a partnership with SUNY Cortland; faculty and staff there are developing a curriculum for classes that will be connected with the project.

Renovating four downtown properties for mixed commercial and residential use: \$1,345,000

- 13-15 Central Ave.: \$325,000. This building, owned by McNeil Development, will be renovated into 9,000 square feet of office and retail space.

- 73 Main St.: \$220,000. Owned by McNeil Development, this building will be converted into office space on the first two floors, and two apartments on the third floor.

- 37-39 Port Watson St.: \$300,000. The building, owned by Paul Galloway, will be remade into four apartments; the side alley will be rebuilt into a pedestrian walkway. Two of the apartments will be disabled-accessible.

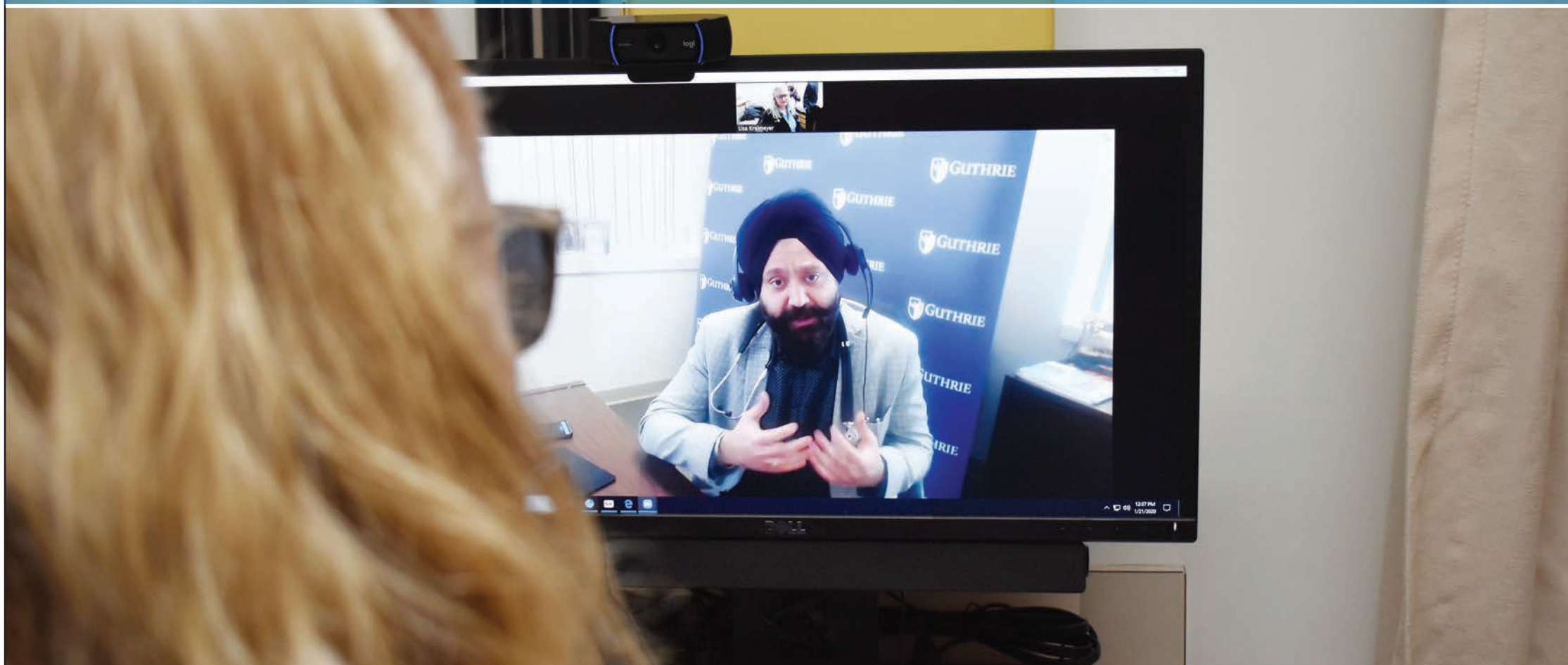
- 83-85 Main St.: \$500,000. A partnership of Jamie Yaman and Steve Franco owns this building, which will be renovated into 12 market-rate loft apartments on the second and third floors — six one-bedroom, and six two-bedroom, Yaman said.

“We really want this to be the standard for downtown living,” he said.

The first floor is occupied by Sacred Art, a tattoo parlor, which will be moving out. The future tenant for the first floor will also be commercial, Yaman said.

He said internal demolition and construction will begin this year.

TELEMEDICINE



IS IT THE NEW HOUSE CALL?

Todd R. McAdam/managing editor

Dr. Jagmeet Singh, a kidney specialist with Guthrie, chats via a telehealth system at the healthcare group's facility on Fisher Avenue in Cortlandville. Technology allows medical visits — by computer — in one's home, but insurance difficulties make reimbursement rare.

Technology connects rural areas to specialists, if insurance allows

By S.N. BRIERE
Staff Reporter

sbriere@cortlandstandard.net

Imagine this: Doctors — specialty doctors — making house calls. The technology exists right now to do that in people's homes, but insurance companies won't cover it.

"So one of the key elements about telemedicine is we need to make sure it's a financially feasible model of care for us and one of the barriers to that is CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) does not recognize the patients home as an originating site or billable location, so specialty visits we set it up in our primary care offices," said David Hall, the associate vice president of operations and virtual care at Guthrie health care system.

Two years ago, Guthrie launched clinic-to-clinic specialty care at its Fisher Avenue location in Cortlandville using telemedicine, offering neurology, nephrology, infectious disease and plastic surgery, which focused around dermatology.

The site became one of 13 across New York and Pennsylvania, with the next closest in Ithaca.

Here's how it works: If patients need to see a neurologist, they would go to the Fisher Avenue lo-



Pexels.com

cation, where a nurse would connect them to the specialist via a computer equipped with a camera and microphones. The tools the nurses and doctors use are also bluetooth-equipped, meaning when the nurse holds the stetho-

scope to a patient's heart, the doctor can hear it miles away.

"So, if that patient would have typically driven down to Sayre, Pennsylvania, they could stay here local at the Fisher Avenue practice and see their neurologist," Hall

said. "We're trying to expand those services to include all specialty care and offer telemedicine here five days a week here at the Fisher Avenue location."

The Groton Community Health Center provides both telemedicine

and telepsych services to its nursing home patients.

"We are in a rural setting and psych services are very difficult in our neck of the woods to find," said Nasar Khan, the president and CEO of the center.

The telehealth setup can be used for both telehealth consults and telepsych services, although the center goes through two different companies for the physicians.

However, Khan said he was nervous that the patients, who are senior citizens, may not like the system because it was technology-based.

"When they grew up they didn't have these things available," he said.

He was gladly wrong.

Without the telepsych services, the center would need to send people at least 20 to 30 minutes away to places like Cortland for those services.

"For us maybe perhaps a half-hour, 20-minute commute doesn't mean anything, but somebody who is 80 years old, 85 years old, 90 years old, I think this add more on their plate, which could be avoided," Khan said.

See **TELEMEDICINE**, page C4



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College looks to connect families, communities and the future

By **ORINTHIA MONTAGUE**
Contributing Writer

DRYDEN — When Tompkins Cortland Community College embarked on a new strategic planning Process in 2018, our goal was to reconnect with our students, our communities, our local business partners and even ourselves to craft a vision for the future of the college that took into account changing dynamics in all of those sectors and higher education at large.

After conducting a comprehensive survey process, what we discovered was that people really want something essentially simple — they want to connect with the college, and they want the college to connect with them.

They want academic programs that are responsive to community needs. They want deeper connections with our diverse student body. They want to see the college, literally, be more present in community activities and throughout the communities themselves.

They value and want more of our help in work force development, concurrent enrollment of high school students and placement of qualified graduates in skilled positions.

We are already in the process of further strengthening these connections. We are connecting with employers by offering micro-credentials — these are for-credit programs that are shorter than certificates and targeted to specific skills — to make sure existing and future employees get in-demand skills to fill jobs that are available right now.

We're also running Career Connections events on campus at which local employers meet 100 or more high school students



Cortland Standard file photo

at a time to tell them about jobs and education tracks to get those jobs.

We're connecting with our communities by helping families. We built a new child-care center that triples our capacity and offers much-needed infant care — it's available to our students but also

community members. Not only does it fill a need for child care, but it makes education a possibility for adults in need of flexible scheduling options.

We've also continued to expand our CollegeNow concurrent enrollment program for high school students. This past year, 5,569 stu-

dents enrolled in 37,865 college credits at no cost to them for a tuition savings of \$7.19 million for local families.

While our strategic plan itself is complete, the work has just begun. Despite our challenges, we see a bright future for the college in which we support the ever-

changing needs of our communities and also draw from their strength to continue to play an essential role in educating and supporting our citizens.

Orinthia Montague is president of Tompkins Cortland Community College.

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Mighty Molar is caught in between Dottie Decay, with a handful of candy, left, and Murray The Brush.

Cortland Standard file photo

A mission for a healthier Cortland

By **SUSAN NEWTON WILLIAMS**
Contributing Writer

Seven Valleys Health Coalition has been serving Cortland County since 1995. Our commitment to this rural community guides everything we do: improving access to health care; prevention, education and management of chronic health conditions; promoting good oral health; creating an environment that fosters physical activity and healthy eating; expanding transportation options and more.

Simply, Seven Valleys' defining mission is to connect Cortland to improve community health.

If you aren't sure what we do at Seven Valleys Health Coalition, you aren't alone. We keep trying but still don't have our elevator speech down because systems level projects, which are our bread and butter, are fairly intangible. We work closely with the Community Assessment Team to identify and address challenges to improving or maintaining community health.

The team includes Seven Valleys, Cortland County Health Department, United Way for Cortland County, Guthrie Cortland Medical Center and the SUNY Cortland Institute for Civic Engagement. The interventions we pursue and the work we perform is all about tackling these challenges that have been identified.

We are the home of Mighty Molar, Cortland County's giant, happy tooth who goes into schools to teach kids good oral hygiene and marches in the Dairy Parade handing out toothbrushes because most of the county doesn't have fluoridated water and has poor dental health outcomes.

Our community suffers from high rates of obesity and related diseases such as diabetes, so we offer lifestyle change classes and cooking classes where people can learn tasty recipes with local produce in an effort to prevent and manage chronic diseases.

We offer fun activities like Winter Challenge and Summer Challenge bingos to try to encourage residents to get out and explore all of the active options we have available to us in this community.

Transportation on its own is a huge challenge in rural communities like Cortland County. Way2Go Cortland, our mobility management arm, helps fund transportation for those in need and partners closely with Cortland Transit to support the local bus system.

For every challenge and program we offer, we are actively working on corresponding systems change. We partner with the state Association for Rural Health to help promote issues such as the role broadband still plays in meeting health care needs in rural areas.

We work with the National Rural Health Association to educate on the impact that cuts to federal programs such as SNAP will have on hungry families.

We help to convene our local food policy council, and its Hunger Coalition subcommittee to address more comprehensive food systems work. We also work collaboratively on projects like the Complete Streets Policy passed by the City of Cortland and the Peacemaker Bike Trail being planned from Homer to Cortland.

We participate in statewide transportation efforts such as the NY Public Transit Association to support advancements and investment in public transportation. For every area Seven Valleys Health Coalition is working in it is to address a challenge that has been identified in the community.

Two fundamental way the CAT evaluates and prioritizes community needs are the annual Cortland Counts Report Card and Community Forum. The 20th annual community forum will be March 4.

The report cards and information about the forum and the other work of Seven Valleys Health Coalition can be found at www.sevenvalleyshealth.org or you can call us at 607-756-4198. We hope you will attend this year's forum and help us keep connecting Cortland.

Susan Newton Williams is assistant director of the Seven Valleys Health Coalition.



Cortland Standard file photo

The Local Food Market on Main Street in Cortland is one of many sellers of locally produced goods that is taking part in a countywide food trail map through Seven Valleys Health Coalition.



Sarah McCulloch of Homer does research in the Cortland Free Library.

Travis Dunn/staff reporter

Library reaches past the book shelves into rural Cortland

By JEN GRANEY
Contributing Writer

You enter the library. It's morning, midweek. A few people lounge on couches reading newspapers and magazines, while others type away on public computers.

Someone finds and connects a few pieces in the community puzzle. A woman browses new books as a volunteer shelves them. Another patron uses the microfilm machine. Two others pick up books being held for them at the front desk. Yet another just needs the bathroom key.

A few excited shouts punctuate the quiet: it's storytime downstairs with Miss Tammy. (It's true, libraries aren't always silent anymore).

Throughout the day the scene changes, yet it's the same: People seek entertainment, refuge, education, wonder, an activity to fill some time, a simple interaction with another human being.

It's inherent in our nature as the Cortland Free Library to connect Cortland. We strive to help you connect with myriad resources, each other and the world. We do this by offering books, of course. But books are just the beginning.

First, there's the space itself. The library is uniquely a "third space," which is to say a place — other than work, other than home —



Reading in the children's room at the Cortland Free Library.

Cortland Standard file photo

where you can go to connect with yourself and others. Here, you have time and opportunity to dream, to research and to accomplish. You can meet with others and grow ideas, build community.

Then there are our resources,

materials, and programs. These include public computers and wifi (with the 2020 Census looming and going digital, you can come here to make sure you're counted). We also offer audiobooks, eBooks, DVDs, blu-rays, even VHS tapes.

We connect you to each other through a variety of programs, including those geared toward young adults, those who are home-schooled, those interested in the arts (see the art gallery and our First Friday programs, which

will be picking back up after we get through some construction), and much more.

If you can't make it in-person to the library, you can also access many resources online through Overdrive or with the Libby app.

In some instances we come to you: Anyone who has difficulty getting to the library due to a disability or special circumstance may be eligible for our "Mail-It" Library Service — all you have to do is fill out an application and you can get large-print books, books on CD and Playaway audiobooks by mail. We also provide outreach, including to schools, assisted living facilities, rehabilitation centers and nursing homes.

As we enter this brand-new decade with all its challenges and opportunities, think about how you want to and need to be connected, especially right here in our community. Then let us know.

There's almost certainly a resource, whatever its format may be, to meet your need or desire. If we don't have it here, we will connect you to it elsewhere. We're here to help.

Visit Cortland Free Library at 32 Church Street or online at cortlandfreelibrary.org.

Jen Graney is director of the Cortland Free Library.

TELEMEDICINE

continued from page C1

"It is utilized tremendously and there's a huge amount of benefit our residents have obtained," he said, although he didn't have specific data.

Patients in Cortland also love that they don't need to travel far to see a specialist, said Dr. Jagmeet Singh, who specializes in nephrology, kidney disorders, with the Guthrie telemedicine system.

Technology is even advancing to have these tools and other tools available for people at home, but one of the biggest problems lies with insurance providers allowing homes to be considered a billable site.

"The goal is to see you at your bedside, maybe in five or 10 years we can see you at home," Singh said.

Hall said Guthrie is just one institution lobbying for the change to insurance companies.

It's a change Rep. Anthony Brindisi (D-Utica) sees on the horizon. Some insurance companies are already warming to the idea, he said recently in a meeting with the *Cortland Standard* editorial board.

"And the Veterans Administration is getting very into telehealth," he said.

But telemedicine in the home — when it gets there — may not be the answer for everyone; some people may

still want to see their doctor in person or go to the office. Still, telemedicine offers another option.

It's especially important, Hall said, in a climate where there is shortage of physicians across the country, particularly those in specialty fields, difficulties in recruiting people and an increase in medical services.

Hall said about 800 specialty visits have been made via telemedicine at the Fisher Avenue location since it opened.

"So for us that's pretty significant," he said. "That's a big number in over a year and a half of being live. It's a new model of care both our patients and our physicians have to adapt to."

One reason for the large number of visits is because of word of mouth by people who have used the services and also primary physicians telling their patients, Hall said.

Hall also said that with the millennial generation — those between the ages of 23 and 38 — are the biggest users of medical services and are "focused on access and convenience."

"We need as a health care system to evolve as well, he said. "We need to evolve new models of care and telemedicine is really poised to do that for us."

Access adapts to change

By **AARON T. BAIER**
Contributing Writer

At Access To Independence, our mission is to empower people with disabilities to lead independent lives in their community. The main challenge is that our community and the wider-world around us, continues to evolve and change.

The key, for Access to Independence, is to adapt and evolve along with our community. Change is inevitable and it is often the reason people reach out to our Agency.

The best way to empower people is to offer them effective tools that they can use to accomplish the goals they have set for themselves. The issues of broadband (internet) access, public transit, healthcare and entertainment are rapidly changing and they are important tools for people with disabilities.

Access To Independence works to connect with local, state and national resources that help to address the challenges presented by these issues. Our agency works to connect people with disabilities to these resources so that they have choice and freedom to live independently in their community.

Broadband access in Cortland County is nowhere near all-inclusive. Cost and lack of rural infrastructure are prime reason why nearly half of our community do not have easy access to the internet. Access To Independence works to overcome this challenge by offering an on-site computer lab and also has mobile internet access available when we provide services in rural areas.

While this does not solve the



Cortland Standard file photo

A beach party at Access For Independence in Cortland.

problem, it does offer people with disabilities more access than they would normally have. We also provide staff to assist people with learning the technology and navigating the online world.

Public transit is an issue that continues to challenge our community. Limited bus service, especially to the rural areas, limits people access to our physical community. While Access To Independence continues to advocate for expanded bus ser-

vice, we also connect with partners in rural areas to bring our resources and tools to the people directly.

Until our community can support a more all-encompassing public transit system, our agency will seek partners that allow us to meet people where they are at in our community.

Healthcare and access to health services is always a challenge for people. Finding insurance, medical providers and other long-term

services and supports can be confusing and complicated. Access To Independence helps people with disabilities to navigate this world.

Our staff work with service providers and social workers to find solutions unique to each individual. Our Agency partners with the Tompkins County Human Services Coalition to offer healthcare navigation services at our site every Wednesday. There are so many factors to healthcare, that connections

and partnerships are essential.

Entertainment might seem like a luxury or unnecessary for independence, but it is just as important as the other issues. All people need access to the types of entertainment they enjoy, movies, theater, sports, music or just being able to take a walk in the park.

Sometimes this requires broadband access, sometimes it requires public transit for people to participate. Most importantly, entertainment is essential for people's mental health. Life can be stressful with all of the change, and entertainment helps people to find peace in the chaos.

Access To Independence supports accessible entertainment options and offers social events for the community to participate in. Our staff value socialization and enjoy being able to provide craft classes, movie events, social nights, a Sunday Strikers bowling league and other fun, family friendly activities for people with disabilities and our community at large.

Access To Independence is grateful to all of our partners and supporters who help us to keep up with change and who help us change our community to be more accessible. Our agency is hopeful for a more inclusive future, where the barriers we face no longer exist.

For more information on any of our programs and services, please give our office a call at 607-753-7363.

Aaron T. Baier is executive director of Access To Independence.

Cortland Standard

SPOTLIGHT on business & community

We are recognizing businesses and organizations, both large and small. What makes each unique and sets it apart from others? What contributes to their staying power?

First National Bank of Dryden

2020 is an exciting year as the First National Bank of Dryden recently purchased the property that houses the Homer Office. Continuing to serve customers in Cortland and Dryden as well, the bank provides the same level of excellence in customer service that the community has counted on for over a century.

Friendly and familiar staff are always available to lend a helping hand with any financial need. Whether it be personal or commercial loans, mortgages or refinancing options, the First National Bank of Dryden can be counted on as a trusted partner. Genuine, in-person relationships with customers remain a top priority and a founding principle that holds true now and will continue for years to come.

Visit our website to learn more at www.drydenbank.com, or call 607-753-0392. You can also simply stop by and experience first-hand why your local, independently owned bank is the right bank for you.



Royal Nissan Subaru

The New Royal Nissan Subaru has been open for over 7 months, and business is booming. The final product exceeded even the highest of expectations. The first 25 years in Cortland, N.Y., for the Royal Auto Group were great, and we look forward to being part of this great community for



the next 25 years in our "New Home of No Hassle, No Razzle Dazzle".

The Service Departments for both brands have enclosed Service Drives, Additional Lifts and Technicians, as well as numerous additional support staff. The Service Capacity has doubled as has Parts storage and availability. Larger modernized customer reception areas are separated from the Service drive and walk into a lounge that includes an array of seating options, Free Wifi, Complimentary Snacks and Beverages as well as all the digital amenities you could ask for. Feel free to stop in and ask for a tour. We will be happy to oblige.

Thanks again to all the local help we had along the way:

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Ligas Plumbing and Heating, Builder's Best, Creative Kitchens and Baths, Fuller Construction, JB Smith Plumbing and Heating, Red Armor LLC, Haynes Backhoe Services, Heider Construction, Plan First, Pro Audio, Van Dee Plumbing, Bernard's Custom Logo, The Rock Company, Homer Iron Works, Cortland Wholesale Electric, Osborne Floor Covering, B&B Flooring, Robbins Vending, NBT Bank, First Choice Asphalt and Paving, The GlassSmith, Young & Sons, Resource Associates, D&D Striping, Thoma Development, Town of Cortlandville, Pat Finney Painting, Carbon Copies, Graph-Tex, American Sign and Engraving.



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A little over a year ago we opened our doors in Cortland to offer a next-level experience to those in need of storage. When we were formulating a plan for this new venture, we did extensive research. We quickly realized that the trend is moving toward unstaffed locations with kiosks replacing humans. That was NOT what we wanted to offer and doesn't fit the small-town feel that makes Cortland special.



Here at Valley Self-

Storage we deliver all the modern technology and the finest amenities paired with an on-site manager 6 days-a-week. Our focus is to go above and beyond and separate ourselves from our local competitors. We are the only storage facility in the area with our entire site blacktopped which was a huge undertaking but is proving invaluable to our customers. We also designed our buildings with movable walls so we can customize specific sizing needs and accommodate rentals up to 10x30 feet. We offer around-the-clock, state-of-the-art security unrivaled in the area, including dozens of cameras, and code readers on our exterior doors. Our parking areas, driveways, interior corridors and non-climate units exhibit the best lighting possible. Whether you're moving in at 11am or 11pm, you'll have all the illumination you need.

All these features are designed to bring you the feeling of ease that someone is taking care of your belongings – because we are. This facility includes 228 storage units, over 65% of which are climate-controlled, protecting your valuables from fluctuations in temperature and humidity, offering better air quality and acting as an additional barrier from dust.

It's added peace of mind for the items that mean the most. Customers can access their units 24/7 and rent or man-

age their accounts completely online if they choose. Storage units can simplify your world in so many ways. We can all benefit from added space at home or in the office. Beyond that, it can serve as housing for your grown-up toys in the off-season, a place for belongings between semesters, a warehouse for extra inventory or just a safe, dry spot for valuables. Here at Valley we have a size and price that can fit every need. Stop in for a tour or check us out online.



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