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cafe offers
oasis of
tranquility
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at literary
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BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE *monthly*

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DECEMBER 2016

Allegrone wraps up redevelopment of Onota Building

Downtown landmark makes transition from office space to upscale rental apartments

BY JOHN TOWNES

The Onota Building, a familiar commercial landmark in the streetscape of downtown Pittsfield, has reopened after a major renovation with a new identity as Onota 74 Residences.

The six-story, 55,000-square-foot building at 74 North St. was originally constructed in 1928 on the site of an old Baptist Church. For most of its history it was

"It was a total redevelopment in which every square foot was renovated."

an office building, with storefronts on the street level.

In its new incarnation, the storefronts remain and have been expanded. However, the upper floors have been

converted from office space into 25 upscale market-rate rental apartments.

The \$9 million project was undertaken by Allegrone Companies, which acquired the building in 2011. Allegrone Companies is a Lenox-based group of family-owned businesses that include construction, real estate, custom home building and masonry divisions (see related story on page 16).

The redevelopment project was funded as a public-private initiative. The requirements included preservation of its original external architectural features.

The interior was totally stripped down, redesigned and rebuilt. New energy-efficient and green technologies were also incorporated into the building.

"It was a total redevelopment in which every square foot was renovated," said Louis

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Hot glass at Ozzie's



With torch blazing in the background, Michael Ozner demonstrates some of his glass-blowing techniques at his studio on Pleasant Street (Route 102) in South Lee.

Longtime artist achieves goal of combined gallery/studio

BY BRAD JOHNSON

Ever since his first introduction to the art of glass blowing at the age of 16, Michael Ozner has been hooked.

"I felt such a strong connection to it," said the now 36-year-old resident of Becket. "It was the first thing that really inspired me and captured my interest."

In the years since then, Ozner has pursued his passion and honed his skills in a variety of settings and studios – including the one he set up in his rural home, which he purchased specifically because it matched his needs for a glass-blowing workshop.

While able to make a living selling his glasswork to wholesale clients and to retail customers at craft shows and other venues, Ozner also

dreamed of having a more permanent showcase for his work – a place that could serve as both a gallery for retail sales and a studio for on-site production and live demonstrations of glass-blowing techniques.

"I had wanted my own gallery for a long time," said Ozner, noting that the ideal location would be "on a busy road, a place I could afford, and where I would be allowed to blow glass."

That dream finally came to full realization this summer with the opening of Ozzie's Glass Gallery at 1670 Pleasant St. (Route 102) in South Lee. There Ozner (whose lifelong nickname is "Ozzie") has set up a bright and attractive showroom featuring a wide range of his work – from ear rings, pendants and other jewelry

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ON THE *job*



Spin instructor Aimee Sinopoli has expanded her Adams business beyond its cycling roots to include a wide range of fitness programs for all ages. Among these are martial arts classes led by her husband, David. The couple are joined here by their son, Brandon, alongside the boxing ring at Cutting Edge Fitness.

BEYOND SPIN TO CUTTING EDGE

Adams business grows into multifaceted fitness facility with programs for all ages

BY BRAD JOHNSON

Someone said to be spinning their wheels is, idiomatically, putting in lots of effort without really accomplishing anything. For Aimee Sinopoli, however, spinning wheels are a clear sign of forward progress for her clients and her business.

Sinopoli is the owner of Cutting Edge Fitness & Martial Arts Center in Adams, which has become the go-to place in northern Berkshire County for popular indoor cycling – or "spin" – classes involving the use of compact stationary equipment with a weighted flywheel that provides varying levels of pedaling resistance.

The business has also grown well be-

yond its cycling origins into a multifaceted fitness facility with programs and classes for all ages.

While indoor cycling is something that has long been done by individuals either with their own home equipment or at their

"We had a lot more room to work with, and began looking at ways to put it to use."

local fitness facility, the concept of group indoor cycling classes is still relatively new – offering a more engaging and motivational alternative to grinding through a lone workout.

"It's a fitness class where we're in charge of providing the fitness workout and coordinating the music," said Sinopoli. "People like it because it's a way for them to feel more

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FRONTpages

New cafe provides oasis of tranquility on South Street

BY JOHN TOWNES

Michelle Hazzard Artioli has brought a taste of the Middle East to downtown Pittsfield with her new business, Cafe Namaste. Located in a street-level storefront in the Berkshire Common complex at 2 South St., Cafe Namaste is open daily for breakfast, lunch and snacks. Its menu is eclectic, with a diverse mix that includes sandwiches, wraps, salads, soup, pastries and specialty coffee drinks.

“It’s a little bit different,” said Artioli. “It’s familiar food with a twist. I call it Lebanese fusion.”

She explained that, while its culinary focus is eclectic, one of the influences is her Lebanese heritage. The fare includes items available with tabbouleh, humus and other culinary influences and ingredients from that part of the world.

She noted that one specialty is homemade tabbouleh (a salad of cracked wheat or bulgur mixed with finely chopped ingredients such as tomatoes, onions, and parsley) based on a recipe from her Lebanese grandfather, which is available with sandwiches or on its own.

The other emphasis is on fresh, healthy homemade food. Many ingredients are organic. There are also gluten-free options.

Artioli said her goal is also to create an environment that is friendly, inviting and rejuvenating. While its downtown location attracts busy professionals and office workers seeking fast service, the cafe is also intended to provide a relaxing getaway where people can linger and unwind, she explained.

“I wanted to give it a peaceful, Zen-like feeling,” she said. “We do a lot of take-out business, but we also have customers who want to sit down and relax. I wanted this to be somewhat like a spa, as a little oasis where people can unwind and refresh themselves.”



Owner Michelle Hazzard Artioli (front) and her friend Tricia Chalifoux have created a calm and relaxing environment for customers to enjoy the eclectic fare at Cafe Namaste on Berkshire Common in Pittsfield.

The name of the cafe reflects this. “Namaste is a Buddhist term that represents the phrase ‘The divine in me honors and serves the divine in you,’” Artioli explained.

The decor and atmosphere, and names of items on the menu, also reflect her interest in health and wellness, yoga, meditation and spiritual development.

The menu board features a large chalk rendering of the Buddha. The interior design is open and airy, and the walls are decorated with artwork with positive messages.

The environment and fare are not ascetic, however. Among the cafe’s more popular items, for example, are Black Bottom Muffins that are notably rich in chocolate.

The opening of Cafe Namaste represents a personal rejuvenation and a significant career shift for Artioli, who lives in Pittsfield and is a native of Berkshire County. She previously worked in financial services and money management.

“I needed a change from working 9 to 5 for other people, and wanted to do something completely different,” she said.

She decided to focus on operating a business of her own that represented her personal and culinary interests.

She recruited a lifelong friend, Tricia Chalifoux, to work with her. Currently the two of them operate the business, although Artioli said they plan to hire additional help as the business becomes established.

Cafe Namaste, which opened in early October, occupies a space that formerly housed Juice ‘n Java, a cafe that closed earlier this year.

“We were looking at all of the spots that

were available when we found this space,” said Artioli. “This site is accessible to the offices of lawyers, bankers and other people who work downtown. The closing of Juice ‘n Java had created a void here. And the space was perfect for what we wanted to do.”

They renovated the 990-square-foot space, including refurbishing the kitchen, reconfiguring the serving counter, and opening up the dining area. They also added new furnishings and repainted the interior. Artioli noted that the artwork in the cafe was created by Hannah Supranowicz, a local student.

The interior has seating for 20. In warm weather, outside seating is also available on the adjacent sidewalk.

Cafe Namaste (413-446-9069 or on Facebook) is open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturdays.

“We’re working out the exact schedule to see what works best, and we may adjust our hours,” Artioli noted.

Also subject to occasional revision is the cafe’s extensive menu. Artioli noted that they are open to suggestions and requests from customers.

Among the breakfast choices are bagels (from Bagels Too) with various toppings. Also offered are Sun Salutation breakfast sandwiches on bagels, wraps and croissants.

Salads include Enlightenment, made with hummus, greens, tomato, cucumber, and avocado, served with pita; and Zen-Sational Tuna, with albacore tuna, avocado, tomato, sprouts greens and house dressing, among others.

A wide range sandwiches and wraps are available. A sampling includes the Full Moon, made with mozzarella, tomato,



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news & notes from the region

greens, basil, and balsamic dressing on a ciabatta roll; the Lotus Wrap, with hummus, tabbouleh, greens and tzatziki dressing; the Buddha Baguette, made with pastrami, cheddar, red onion and mustard on a baguette; and Simplicity, with ham, Swiss cheese and brown mustard on wheat bread.

Beverages include a variety of smoothies and juices. Cafe Namste also has a selection of tea and coffee, espresso, lattes and other specialty drinks.

Artioli noted that they have installed an automated barista machine, one of the first in the Berkshires. "It's great because it creates drinks with exactly the right mixes automatically," she said.

The initial response from customers has been encouraging, according to Artioli. "Business is steady, and we've gotten great reviews online," she said. "People are coming back regularly, which is always a good sign."◆

Practices consolidated at BMC north county campus

BY JOHN TOWNES

To achieve greater operating efficiencies, and allow for additional services in northern Berkshire County, Berkshire Health Systems (BHS) has relocated and consolidated several existing medical practices which are associated with Berkshire Medical Center (BMC), the hospital that BHS operates in Pittsfield.

Northern Berkshire Specialty Practices of Berkshire Medical Center opened on Nov. 1 on the first floor of the North Adams Campus of Berkshire Medical Center, with access through the main lobby at 71 Hospital Ave.

"The consolidation of these practices is intended to serve several basic goals," said Ruth Blodgett, vice president of physician services at BHS. "It makes it more convenient for patients, and it allows us to better coordinate and expand our services."

The practices include Cardiology Professional Services of BMC; Endocrinology &

Metabolism of BMC and BHS Diabetes Education; Hematology Oncology Services of BMC; the Pain Diagnosis and Treatment Center of BMC; and Urology Professional Services of BMC.

The practitioners include Drs. Henry Lyle, Kristen Currie and Teresa Menendez and Physician Assistant Brandon Gilvey (Cardiology); Nurse Practitioner Roberta Mansen (Endocrinology & Metabolism); Drs. Paul Rosenthal and Trevor Bayliss (Hematology Oncology); Dr. Robin Burns Lambert (The Pain Diagnosis and Treatment Center); and Drs. Stephen St. Clair and Kevin Killeen (Urology).

Most of the practices previously had separate offices in the Ambulatory Care Center adjacent to the North Adams Campus.

Under the new arrangement, the practices will share common facilities and staff in a newly renovated space.

The campus is the former site of North Adams Regional Hospital, which closed suddenly in 2014, along with its parent, Northern Berkshire Healthcare (NBH). The property was acquired shortly after that by BHS, which has been working to rebuild the healthcare system in northern Berkshire County following the closing of NBH.

Blodgett said that the consolidating of the practices is part of that overall effort.

"Our mission has been to provide essential services and continue to add others in the northern Berkshires," she said. "Part of that strategy is paying attention to those services that benefit the most people. These practices provide that, so bringing them together is an important step."

She explained that each practice had previously operated separately, with individual staffs and facilities.

"Many of the patients of these practices have health issues that go across multiple specialties," she said. "This allows them to access these services in one well-designed, comfortable and healing environment."

It is also more efficient from an operational perspective, she said.

She explained that some physicians in the practices also have responsibilities at BMC in Pittsfield or elsewhere, and are not at the site full time. "In terms of logistics, it was not efficient for a practice to only be open one or two days a week, and have separate support systems," she said. "This new arrangement allows the practices to share facilities, assistants and other support staff and resources that are always available."

Blodgett said this will also allow for other specialties to be added to the services available there.

"Before, it was more difficult for a new provider to set up the support system a practice requires," she said. "Now, additional specialists and providers can be brought in, with those resources already in place. That will make it possible to add specialists and expertise that were not available before."

Blodgett emphasized that each practice will continue to maintain an autonomous identity within this larger structure.

"The individual support necessary for each specialty has been preserved, and patients will continue to set appointments and work directly with the practice that is serving them," she said.◆

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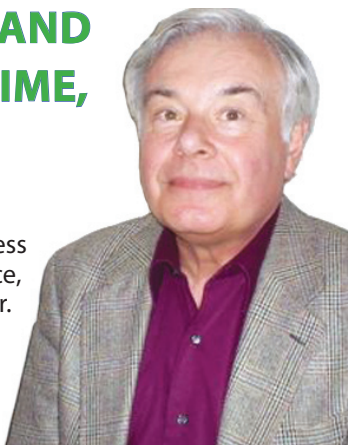
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FRONTpages

WRITERS IN RESIDENCE

‘Mastheads’ project takes creative look at literary heritage

BY JOHN TOWNES

A unique cultural project that is intended to take a fresh look at Pittsfield’s literary heritage, and relate it to the region’s modern identity, is moving towards its public launch next year.

Know as The Mastheads the project will combine a writers’ residency program with related public activities, including school programs, community readings and discussions to promote a larger community dialogue.

It will also feature the unusual component of

five 100-square-foot writers’ studios that will be placed temporarily at different locations.

The Mastheads is inspired by five writers in the mid-19th century literary movement known as the American Renaissance, who had connections to Pittsfield. They include Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes.

The project was created and is being directed by Tessa Kelly and Chris Parkinson. The couple live in Becket and operate the firm CPTK Architecture, which is based in an office in the Beacon Cinema building on North Street in downtown Pittsfield.

“The areas around Concord and Boston are generally thought of as the most important place for American Renaissance writers, but Pittsfield also had a role,” explained Kelly. “These five authors all either lived in or visited Pittsfield and wrote about the region.”

Kelly and Parkinson designed the studios as contemporary, symbolic representations of those historic writers and their original workspaces. Each studio will be dedicated to one of the authors.

Kelly said The Mastheads is intended to connect this era of local history with the present. “We really want to get the community engaged in this project by using these historic authors to provide a platform for new voices to engage with the contemporary city through the written word,” she said.

The name, The Mastheads, refers specifically to Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, which includes a ship’s masthead as an element of the novel. It also refers metaphorically to the concept of a high solitary perch where one can survey the surrounding area.

The Mastheads will include a residency program for five writers next July. They will work on individual writing projects in the studios in the daytime and stay at Hotel on North in the evening. They will also participate in related public activities.

“One of the things we find exciting about The Mastheads is the opportunity for young creative people to reinterpret the Berkshires.”

rary standpoint. A committee of writers will select the five finalists.

There is also a broader public component. Plans are being organized for related community activities including readings, presentations and school programs.

While the writers will work in the solitude of their studios during the day, they will also participate in several public receptions and programs while they are here.

Laurence Buell of Harvard University, a leading scholar of the American Renaissance, will also give a presentation.

The project is funded by a \$75,000 Our Town grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and an additional \$140,000 from other sources.

The Pittsfield Office of Cultural Development is a lead co-sponsor of the project. Other sponsors include the Massachusetts Cultural Council, Berkshire Historical Society, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield Public Schools, the Upper Housatonic Valley and other organizations.

Jen Glockner, director of the Office of Cultural Development, said that NEA’s Our Town grant is funding the content of the program, including a payment to Kelly and Parkinson for their services and other expenses.

Construction of the writers’ studios is being funded separately, with two local foundations providing lead grants. The Fitzpatrick Foundation donated a \$65,000 matching grant, and the Feigenbaum Foundation contributed \$30,000 of the match. The balance has been raised through contributions from the Berkshire Bank Foundation and other donors.

In September, the city-operated Lichtenstein Center for the Arts held a month-long exhibit that introduced the studio designs and other elements of the project.

According to Glockner, the studios will serve several purposes. They will be work-

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news & notes from the region



In their downtown Pittsfield office, Chris Parkinson and Tessa Kelly of CPTK Architecture display models of two of the five writers studios they designed as part of The Mastheads project. The five studios - each 100 square feet - will be constructed and positioned at various locations throughout the city.

spaces for the participating writers, and will also be visual representations of the project. “The studios will be installed like pieces of public art,” said Glockner. “Hopefully, people driving by will notice them and say ‘Wow!’ and be inspired to learn more about them.”

Past and present

Kelly is a native of Pittsfield and Parkinson is from Williamstown.

Kelly said they have an ongoing interest in how history relates to the present. They previously created an exhibit at the Lichtenstein that looked at historic workers’ housing in Pittsfield, and how that helped to shape the city (*November 2014 BT&C*).

The idea for The Mastheads grew out of an academic project Kelly did while in architecture school at Harvard University.

“I wanted to explore how to create buildings that tell about an area’s history with new interpretations,” she explained. “I looked at Pittsfield, and came up with the idea to create physical relics in the landscape that inform people about local history.”

She said she selected four turning points as subjects for theoretical building designs, including the era of the Mohicans, the early paper industry, the American Renaissance and the establishment of General Electric.

In 2012, she gave a presentation of her project at the Berkshire Museum.

Megan Whilden, the city’s former cultural development director, suggested that Kelly and Parkinson apply for an NEA Our Town Grant to pursue it further. They decided to focus on the American Renaissance period.

Melville lived in Pittsfield, and wrote *Moby Dick* and other works here. Holmes and Longfellow also had homes here. Hawthorne lived in Stockbridge for two years and

was friends with Melville. Thoreau wrote a chapter in one of his books describing spending a night on Mount Greylock overlooking Pittsfield, and then travelling through the town to catch a train.

Kelly said that the idea of a program that brings writers into the Berkshires reflects the relationship those earlier writers had with the area. “It’s an opportunity for writers from many places to get a new perspective on their work through the lens of the Berkshires,” she said. “Just as the American Renaissance writers came here from other places, the writers in this program will bring their own backgrounds to this area.”

Annual program

The Mastheads is intended to become an annual program.

Glockner noted that a public fund-raising campaign will continue on an ongoing basis to generate financial support for the program

beyond its first year. (For information and to make a donation, visit themastheads.org.)

The writing studios will be dispersed across the city at five new sites each summer, then de-installed for the remainder of the year. The locations for the inaugural year of the project are the Melville and Hawthorne studios at Arrowhead, Holmes at Canoe Meadows, Thoreau at Springside Park and Longfellow at Pittsfield High School.

The studios are being constructed with a new technology of panelized cross-laminated timber that has been developed by a New Hampshire company called Bensonwood.

“It was a challenge to figure out a way to create structures that can be moved and stored,” said Kelly. “There were a lot of logistical issues, and this method is well suited to it.”

She said they send the company their designs, and the company manufactures the components to their specifications. The completed elements of the buildings will be delivered as kits to be assembled here.

Kelly noted that several members the construction industry here have assisted with

continued on page 7



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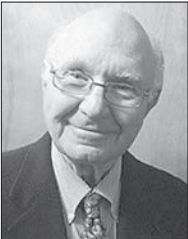
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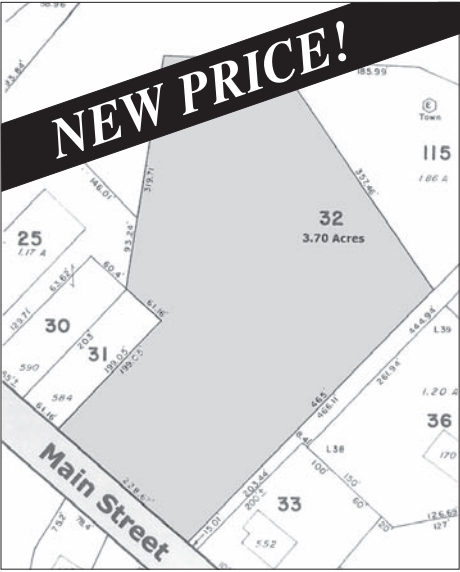
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FRONT pages

BUSINESS

Update

Community Access to the Arts (CATA) will exhibit at MountainOne Gallery, located at 93 Main Street, North Adams, through June 17, 2017, with artwork rotating every three months. The show includes framed paintings, drawings and pastels created by artists with disabilities in CATA visual arts workshops throughout the year. All artwork is for sale, with CATA artists receiving a commission on all artworks sold. This exhibit is a part of CATA's Art on Tour program, where original works of art created by CATA artists travel throughout the year to museums, galleries, community centers, and other venues in Berkshire County. To learn more about CATA programs and events, visit communityaccesstothearts.org.

Berkshire HorseWorks Inc., which provides EAGALA Model Equine Assisted Learning and Equine Assisted Psychotherapy sessions to at-risk youth, veterans, families and individuals, has secured a \$5,000 grant from the Berkshire Life Charitable Foundation. This grant will help extend the "Family Integration" program to five more families throughout the county. The eight-week curriculum addresses core disabilities within the context of the larger family structure. Families referred to this program include at least one member with a documented disability and who is currently in traditional treatment; the entire family will then be integrated into the EAP work to maximize healing through reinforcing the relevant support network. Berkshire HorseWorks is currently identifying eligible individuals/families to partake in this program.

The Lenox Zoning Boards of Appeals has unanimously approved plans by Miraval Group to enlarge the Cranwell Spa and Golf Resort. The approval also fulfilled a major condition of the sale of the resort to Miraval by CampGroup LLC, which purchased the property in 2015. The board approved the sale following an agreement between the resort and members of condominium associations regarding access to its recreational facilities, among other issues. In addition to a \$20 million purchase price, Miraval plans to invest some \$60 million on renovations that will increase the number of rooms and add new facilities.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, the lead partner for the Berkshire Early Learning Lab Improving Teacher Quality (ITQ) program, has extended its ITQ grant for another two years. The grant, which began in 2013, serves Berkshire County preschool through second grade teachers by providing opportunities for them to learn about and implement the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) education model. Sites presently being served include North Adams Public Schools, Adams-Cheshire Regional School District, Northern Berkshire School Union, Head Start and Child Care of the Berkshires. With the grant extension, educators from Pittsfield Public Schools will join them. Preschool through second grade teachers participate in this program by attending STEAM-themed evening workshops hosted both by MCLA faculty and museum educators from the Clark Art Institute, MASS MoCA and the Berkshire Museum. These educators go on to develop STEAM lesson plans and implement those lessons in their classrooms. To date, about 800 Berkshire County students have experienced STEAM education through the ITQ grant. With the additional of Pittsfield Public Schools, approximately 800 more students will benefit.

Volunteers in Medicine Berkshires (VIM) has received a \$6,000 Quality of Life grant from the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation. The award will be used to help pay for an electric wheelchair lift to provide access to disabled patients at the newly expanded VIM clinic in Great Barrington. VIM's award was one of 79 grants by the Reeve Foundation to nonprofit organizations nationwide that provide more opportunities, access, and daily quality of life for individuals living with paralysis, their families, and caregivers. "Providing access to all offices in the clinic was a necessary element, and the wheelchair lift is the single largest equipment cost of our renovation and expansion of the VIM clinic," said Jeff Bliss, director of development at VIM Berkshires.

In October, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued its final decision on its Rest of River permit, which outlines a final cleanup plan for a 125-mile stretch of the Housatonic River from Pittsfield through Connecticut. The final cleanup plan is also referred to as the Final Permit Modification for Rest of River. The cleanup plan requires General Electric to address PCB contamination that poses a health risk to the river and the impacted communities. EPA estimates that the cleanup will cost \$613 million and will take two years for initial design activities and 13 years for implementation. Most of the sediment and floodplain cleanup is targeted within the first 11 miles in Pittsfield, Lee and Lenox, with the EPA's plan calling for contaminated material to be shipped off-site to existing licensed facilities for disposal. The cleanup plan was first proposed in June 2014. Following a four-month public comment period, EPA notified GE of its intention to finalize the Permit in 2015. In October 2015, GE initiated a formal dispute process regarding the cleanup of the river. On Oct. 13, a 10-page Final Administrative Decision was issued upholding the cleanup plan. For more information on the Housatonic River site, visit www.epa.gov/ge-housatonic.

Radiance Yoga at 401 North St. in downtown Pittsfield is offering free classes to veterans during the month of November. "Our military women and men provide a tremendous service to our country, upholding our safety and freedom," said Scott Moraes, co-owner of Radiance Yoga. According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, veterans are at a higher risk of developing health problems due to increased stress. National studies conducted by Harvard Health and the Mayo Clinic, among many others, demonstrate the positive effects yoga has on stress reduction. Gillian Gorman, co-owner and yoga teacher, noted how yoga directly helps with issues that veterans may experience, including muscle tension, chronic pain and anxiety, as well as providing other health benefits. For more information and a schedule of free classes for veterans, visit www.radiance-yoga.com.

Learning Sites Inc., a Williamstown-based pioneer in the field of virtual heritage (January 2016 BT&C), has won the 2017 Excellence and Innovation Award for "Best in Virtual Learning and Teaching Software," as voted by Corporate LiveWire. The firm's work has also been recognized as "Best Interactive 3D Archaeological Computer Models 2016" and "Most Innovative Virtual Heritage Solutions 2016" by Corporate AmericaNews in their Small Cap category. Learning Sites and its principal, Donald Sanders, were also recognized by Corporate Vision magazine as the "Most Pioneering Virtual Heritage Expert (USA)" and for "Excellence in Interactive History" in its 2016 Executive Awards. Sanders also served as a panelist for the symposium "Protecting Cultural Heritage in an Uncertain Time," held in New York and Washington, D.C., on Oct. 26.

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news & notes from the region

Lee Audio ‘N Security Inc. was awarded the Diamond Distributor Award for outstanding service and sales at the Notifier Leadership Conference, held Oct. 9-12 in Orlando. “I am excited to receive this honor on behalf of all of our professional team who worked so hard to achieve it,” said company president Rick Gore. Established in 1970, Lee Audio ‘N Security is family owned and operated by the Gore family, including third-generation members Ricky Gore and Justin Mooney. As a Notifier Premier Distributor they install and service fire and security alarms, closed circuit TV, access control systems, and sound systems throughout western Massachusetts, southern Vermont and the Capital District of New York. In addition to its home office is in Lee, the company has a branch office in Clifton Park, N.Y.

The **Northern Berkshire Community Coalition’s** Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service Committee is seeking nominations for the Peacemaker Award, given annually to persons or groups in the region who have a history of working with people and/or neighborhoods and communities to provide for greater tolerance, understanding and caring. To nominate a Peacemaker, pick up a form at the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition office at 61 Main St., Suite 218, North Adams or nominate online at www.nbcoalition.org/peacemaker.html. Nominations must be received by Dec. 1. The Day of Service Committee is also seeking new members interested in helping to plan the January 2017 event. For information on joining the committee, call Liz Boland at 413-663-7588 ext. 19.

The **Berkshire Athenaeum** in Pittsfield will offer a modified fines amnesty through Nov. 30, during which the library will accept non-perishable food items in lieu of paying fines for overdue books. All donated food will be presented to the **Rotary Club of Pittsfield** as part of the organization’s annual food collection drive. The “Food for Fines” initiative has become an annual tradition at the Athenaeum during the month of November. Food will be collected in boxes located at the Adult Circulation Desk and at the Children’s Service Desk. In addition to food accepted in lieu of fines, the Athenaeum encourages general donations of food not associated with overdue library books.

The **Clark Art Institute** will recognize the service of Francis Oakley, who served as interim director from September 2015 to August 2016, by naming the bridge between its Manton Research Center and Museum Building in his honor. “The bridge marks a symbolic connection between the Clark’s art spaces and its research center, and is a particularly apt metaphor for the important role Frank Oakley has played in the life of the Clark,” said Robert Scott, vice chairman of the Clark’s board of trustees. “His service in bridging the Clark’s leadership during the recent directorial transition was tremendously important in ensuring continuity and momentum.” Oakley is a longtime member of the Clark’s board of trustees and served as board president from 1998-2005. Members of the Clark’s board of trustees donated \$1 million to recognize Oakley’s many contributions by naming the enclosed walkway the Francis Oakley Bridge. A dedication ceremony will take place in this space on Nov. 12 as part of the celebration of the reopening of the Manton Research Center.

Community Health Programs (CHP) employees will be able to contribute to their patients’ care while saving on auto and home insurance under a new arrangement. Whenever a CHP employee buys insurance through **GoodWorks Insurance**, the insurance agency will deposit 20 percent of its commissions in the CHP Special Fund, which will be donated annually to CHP and used for patient care. Full-time, part-time and seasonal employees are eligible to participate in the group auto and home insurance program developed by GoodWorks Insurance for CHP, which operates health centers in Adams, Great Barrington, Lee, North Adams and Pittsfield. GoodWorks Insurance, an independent insurance agency with a local office in Great Barrington, donates half of its profits to charity.

Carr Hardware held the grand opening of its new 11,000-square-foot hardware store in Enfield, Conn., on Oct. 15-16. Known as **Carr Brightwood**, the Enfield store emerged through a partnership between **Brightwood Hardware**, formally in Longmeadow, and Pittsfield-based Carr. Offering more than double the space of the former store in Longmeadow, this new, ground-up hardware store was designed based on the Destination True Value model that Carr used for its North Adams store and a newly opened Avon, Conn., location. ♦

The Mastheads
continued from page 5

expertise. “Perri Petricca has been especially helpful in serving as an advisor,” she said, referring to the president of Unistress. After leaving the area for college, and living and working in New Haven for five years, Kelly and Parkinson returned to the Berkshires to pursue the project and also to launch their architectural firm. “We came back as young architects because we see it as a good place to launch our business,” she said. “One of the things we find exciting about The Mastheads is the opportunity for young creative people to reinterpret the Berkshires. We often hear about how young people are leaving because there are no good jobs here. But we’ve met a lot of creative young people here who have come to the Berkshires to start new ventures and projects, because of the flexibility and lower expenses. I believe that looking at the past and present in new ways can help move the Berkshires into the future.” ♦

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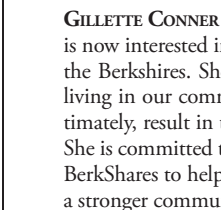
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Introducing: Board of BerkShares, Inc.

BERKSHARES, INC., a membership-directed non-profit organization, has worked in partnership with local businesses and community banks to issue BerkShares, a local currency for the Berkshire Region. At its Annual Meeting on October 20th, members elected the following five of their fellows to join the organization's Board of Trustees:



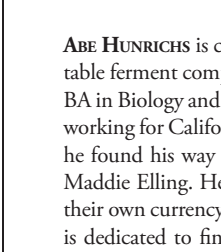
MIKE BLOOMBERG, a graduate of Pittsfield High School and the University of Massachusetts, is an advocate for the sustainable redevelopment of post-industrial cities in his home state. He is drawn to BerkShares because he sees them as an accurate and unique representation of our community. Using them, you engage principles of sustainability and local economies while also experiencing our region's history of manufacturing (embodied in the paper on which the currency is printed) and celebrating the creativity exemplified by the heroes and artists who are featured on each bill.



GILLETTE CONNER has worked extensively in international development, and is now interested in lending her expertise to encouraging local investment in the Berkshires. She believes that fostering people's ability to make a decent living in our community will help us build cohesion and resilience, and ultimately, result in the type of place in which we want to live, work and play. She is committed to playing her part, and she looks forward to working with BerkShares to help realize a vibrant and robust local economy that facilitates a stronger community.



JON GREENE has been a fan of local currencies since the days of "Deli Dollars." Now, in this time of "one click" Amazon orders, he thinks it is even more important to promote our local economy however we can. A recently retired computer engineer, he has begun exploring several local business ideas of his own. In that vein, he is particularly excited about BerkShares, Inc.'s Entry to Entrepreneurship program, which seeks to encourage young entrepreneurs. He looks forward to serving on the Board of this unique organization, which has been so beneficial to our local community over the past decade and promises to be even more so in the decades to come.



ABE HUNRICHS is co-founder of Hosta Hill, a Berkshire-based farm and vegetable ferment company. He was raised in Sacramento, CA. After receiving his BA in Biology and Outdoor Education, leading wilderness education courses, working for California Fish & Game, baking bread and learning how to farm, he found his way to the Berkshires and started Hosta Hill with his partner Maddie Elling. He still remembers when he learned that the Berkshires had their own currency. He took it as an indication that the Berkshire community is dedicated to finding creative ways to knit together a more resilient local economy, based on responsible production.



MICHAEL TESORO, owner and chef of Ooma Tesoro's, is passionate about expanding economic activity in the Berkshires and the presence of BerkShares in northern Berkshire County. Ooma Tesoro's marinara sauce, made using Michael's grandmother's recipe, is now available in over 250 fine food stores throughout New England and New York, but Michael remains committed to building a business that is rooted in the Berkshire Hills. With a background in political science, economics, and communications, he is extremely interested in the potential of BerkShares to serve as a tool for diversifying and deepening the Berkshire regional economy.

more stories like this one at www.berkshares.org

FRONTpages

the month in business

Through Nov. 30: **Free Yoga Classes for Veterans** for the month of November, offered by Radiance Yoga at 401 North St., Pittsfield. Schedule of free classes and other information available at www.radiance-yoga.com.

Through Dec. 31: **Festival of Holidays**, presented by Sheffield Historical Society at the Old Stone Store, 137 Main St., with a wide range of crafted items by local artisans for sale. Weekends from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. through Dec. 18. Also open the same hours on the day after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

Nov. 12 to Dec. 17: **World War II, The Greatest Generation**, exhibit sponsored by the Great Barrington Historic Society, at the Town Museum at the Truman Wheeler Farmstead, 817 South Main St. in Great Barrington. Information at gbhistory.org.

Nov. 14: **Northern Berkshire Community Coalition Open House** from 4:30 to 7 p.m. at 61 Main St., 2nd Floor in North Adams. For information, call Amber Besaw at 413-663-7588

Nov. 15, 29: **Strengths Training for Nonprofits**, two-part workshop led by consultant Ruth Pearce. Presented by The Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires. For time, location and registration information, visit npceberkshires.org.

Nov. 15, Dec. 20: **Pittsfield Green Drinks**, informal gathering of people interested in conservation and environmental issues on third Tuesday of each month. 5:15 p.m. at J. Allen's Clubhouse Grille. Sponsored by the Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT). For more information and meeting location, contact Jane Winn at jane@thebeatnews.org or 413-230-7321.

Nov. 16: **Chamber Nite at the Hilton Garden Inn** in Lenox for members of 1Berkshire. 6 p.m. 413-499-1600.

Nov. 17: **Returning North with the Spring**, a lecture on climate change by Dr. John Harris, executive director of the Monadnock Institute of Nature, Place and Culture at Franklin Pierce University. Presented by Elizabeth and Lawrence Vадnais Environmental Issues Lectures. 7 p.m. in Murdock Hall's Sammer Dennis Room (218) on the MCLA campus in North Adams. Free to public. Information at 413-662-5224.

Nov. 17: **Dick Macht** will discuss "The Wit and Wisdom of Jewish Humor" as part of Connecting with Community series sponsored by the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires. 10:45 a.m. at Congregation Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Rd. in Pittsfield. 413-442-4360 for information. Kosher lunch available, with advance reservation. Suggested donation for lunch \$7 or \$2 for seniors. 413-442-2200.

Nov. 17: **Multicultural BRIDGE Annual Awards Ceremony** honoring Natalie Shiras, Eugenie Sills and Marcia Savage. Keynote speaker Peggy McIntosh, former associate director of the Wellesley Centers for Women and the founder and senior associate of the National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum. Includes dinner and dancing. \$60 and \$100. 5 p.m. at Kripalu Center in Lenox. Information and registration 866-200-5203.

Nov. 17: **Williamstown Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting**, 5:30 p.m. at the Clark Art Institute 225 South St. in Williamstown. Information at williamstownchamber.com.

Nov. 18: **Festival of Trees Premiere Party** with views of movie-themed holiday trees decorated by area businesses and organizations in annual event and fund-raiser at Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield. Premier includes other family-friendly activities. \$50 adults, \$25 children; museum members \$30 adult, \$15 child; children 3 and under free. The Festival of Trees runs from Nov. 19 to Dec. 31. Information at berkshireremuseum.org.

Nov. 18: **Knosh & Knowledge** sponsored by Jewish Federation, with filmmaker Scott Sniffen, who will screen and discuss his documentary, Home of the Brave: When Southbury Said No to the Nazis. 10:45 a.m. at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire. \$5 for program. Information and registration 413-442-4360 ext. 10.

Nov. 18: **Western Massachusetts Health Equity Summit** for practitioners and community leaders from four counties. For information contact UMass Amherst Office for Public Health Practice and Outreach at the School of Public Health and Health Sciences at 413-545-2529.

Nov. 18: **Northern Berkshire Community Forum on Addiction and Recovery** featuring film of five local stories by videographer Joe Aidonidis, followed by discussion. 10 a.m. at the North Adams MoviePlex. Open to public. Information at 413-663-7588.

Nov. 18, Dec. 9: **Fall Fridays** open houses at Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School for parents of children entering pre-K through eighth grade. For parents of children who will be six by June 1, 2017, the school will hold an additional workshop, Next Steps: First Grade and Beyond, on Nov. 22. All programs start at 9 a.m. Register by emailing admissions@gbss.org or calling 413-528-4015 ext. 106.

Nov. 19: **Berkshire Grown Holiday Farmers Markets** with products from local farms, as well as crafts and gift items. 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at two locations: Monument Valley Middle School, 313 Monument Valley Rd. in Great Barrington; and Williams College Towne Field House, 82 Latham St. in Williamstown.

Nov. 19: **Free Seminar on Crowdfunding**, presented by Edward Insley with CrowdFundingSystems.net. 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield. For information or to register, call 413-441-7953 or email cfs@crowdfundingystems.net.

Nov. 19: **Community Make Day** workshop on how to create garlands and wreaths out of recycled fabrics. 1 to 4 p.m. at Shire City Sanctuary, 40 Melville St. in downtown Pittsfield. Free. Information at Shirecitysanctuary.org.

Nov. 19: **Taste and Toast**, charity fund-raiser hosted by William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty, with stroll through downtown Great Barrington from 4 to 6 p.m. featuring food and cocktails at various restaurants. Tickets \$35 with all proceeds to benefit local charities. Tickets at William Pitt Sotheby's office at 308 Main St. or at www.tasteandtoast.org.



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news & notes from the region

Nov. 25-27 & Dec. 3-4, 10-11, 17-18: **The Tinseliner**, special Christmas-themed train ride presented by the Berkshire Scenic Railway Museum on its Hoosac Valley operation between North Adams and Adams. Departs for one-hour round trip at several scheduled times each day from BSRM's North Adams location at 98 Crowley Ave. \$18 adults, \$14 children 4-12, under 4 free. Tickets must be purchased in advance at www.hoosacvalleytrainride.com. For more information contact info@berkshirescenicrailroad.org or 413-637-2210.

Nov. 28-Dec. 8: **1Berkshire Holiday Auction** to benefit Berkshire Marketing Fund. For information on event and donating items, call Laura Brennan at 499-1600 or visit 1berkshire.com.

Nov. 29: **Shared Services for Nonprofit Training**, sponsored by 1Berkshire and Berkshire Nonprofit Solutions. Participants will explore shared service possibilities. For information, call Joshua Weatherwax at 413-499-1600.

Nov. 30: **3D Printing, Wow!**, part of Berkshire Athenaeum's fall training series. Two-hour session covers the foundations of 3D printing and printer management (no design instruction included). The class is a prerequisite for enrolling in advanced classes and using the library's new 3D printers. Offered 9:30-11:30 a.m. and 1:30-3:30 p.m. Registration at pittsfieldlibrary.org or by contacting the Reference Department at info@pittsfieldlibrary.org or 413-499-9480 ext. 202.

Dec. 1: **Inaugural 1Berkshire Annual Meeting** at The Berkshire Eagle Building, 75 South Church St., Pittsfield. Marketplace Expo begins at 4:30 p.m. followed by meeting at 5:30 p.m. \$40. For information on attending or participating in Expo, call 413-499-1600.

Dec. 1: **Great Barrington Green Drinks**, informal gathering of people interested in conservation and environmental issues on first Thursday of each month. 5:30 p.m. at the Prairie Whale, 178 Main St. For information, contact Natalie Narotzky at nnarotzky@gmail.com.

Dec. 1-15: **Introduction to Tinkercad**, part of Berkshire Athenaeum's fall training series, this five-part skill-based series uses a learner-centered approach on the Tinkercad program with the librarian instructor introducing assignments and tutorials that provide hands-on learning. Pre-requisites include computer competency with a mouse, keyboard and web-browser; established email account and password; familiarity with topics covered in 3D Printing, Wow! (see Nov. 30 listing). Classes are 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. on Dec. 1, 6, 8, 13 and 15. Registration at pittsfieldlibrary.org or by contacting the Reference Department at info@pittsfieldlibrary.org or 413-499-9480 ext. 202.

Dec. 2: **Berkshire County ARC Annual Meeting** 7:30 a.m. at ITAM Lodge in Pittsfield. 413-499-4241.

Dec. 5: **Annual Culinary Arts Celebration** presented by the Railroad Street Youth Project, featuring special five-course meal planned and prepared by participants in RSYP's culinary arts program. 5:30 at Crissey Farm in Great Barrington. For tickets, call 413-528-2475.

Dec. 7: **Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting & Holiday Party**, 5 p.m. at Ward's Nursery in Great Barrington. Information and reservations 413-528-4284.

Dec. 8: **Berkshire Young Professionals Social**, 5:30 p.m. at Hotel on North in Pittsfield. Free to BYP members, \$5 others. 413-499-1600.

Dec. 9: **The Challenges and Opportunities in Psychotherapeutic Work with Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders**, part of the Austen Riggs Center's Erikson Institute 2016-17 Friday Night Guest Lecture Series. Free. 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the Austen Riggs Center, 25 Main St., Stockbridge. For additional details, visit: www.austenriggs.org/events.

Dec. 10, 11: **Holiday Shindy** craft fair with vendors from throughout the region at Shire City Sanctuary, 40 Melville St. in downtown Pittsfield. Dec. 10 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Dec. 11 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. \$3 for the general public, children under 12 free. Shirecitysanctuary.org

Dec. 12: **Buy Local Full Circle** workshop on supporting locally owned businesses. Presented by BerkShares with Berkshire Young Professionals Development Series. 5:30 p.m. at Iredale Mineral Cosmetics in Great Barrington. Free to BYP members, \$5 others. 413-499-1600.

Dec. 17: **Berkshire Grown Holiday Farmers Market** with products from local farms, as well as crafts and gift items at two locations: Monument Valley Middle School, 313 Monument Valley Rd. in Great Barrington; and Williams College Towne Field House, 82 Latham St. in Williamstown. Markets also held Jan. 14, Feb. 18.

Dec. 20: **Know Thy Self First: Assessing Your Readiness for Affiliation**, workshop by 1Berkshire and Berkshire Nonprofit Solutions on how to assess an organization's readiness to merge or affiliate with another entity. 2 p.m. at the Crowne Plaza in Pittsfield. For information, call Joshua Weatherwax at 413-499-1600.

Ongoing: **Last Word Toastmasters** public speaking club in Pittsfield, meets from 6:30 to 8 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month at Reid Middle School, 950 North St., from September to May, and at Berkshire Medical Center, 725 North St., from June to August. Information at lastword.toastmastersclubs.org.

Ongoing: **Berkshire Business Builders** networking meeting every Thursday morning from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. at 55 Church Street in Pittsfield. All business people looking for an opportunity to network are invited. For information, call Kathy Hazelett at 413-442-8581. ♦

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HEALTH & fitness

Cutting Edge Fitness

continued from page 1

motivated by the instructor and music and people around them.”

Sinopoli, who acknowledged that she is “not a big fan of outdoor cycling,” explained that her own earlier participation in spin classes is what led her to establish her own business a handful of years ago.

“I had been taking spin classes at Berkshire Nautilus [in Pittsfield] for about a year, and decided to get certified as a spin instructor in 2012,” she said. From there she began teaching classes at Nautilus and the downtown YMCA, while also working as a paraprofessional in a local school system.

She said she was struck by the number of people traveling from north county to take spin classes in Pittsfield. “I could see there was a demand for spin classes in north county,” said Sinopoli, herself a northern Berkshire native.

Encouraged by her husband, David, who works as a full-time firefighter with the city of Pittsfield and a part-time officer with the Lanesboro Police Department, she began scouting out potential locations in north county where she could offer spin classes.

In early 2104 she found a small space on lower Park Street in downtown Adams, and in April of that year opened Hot Spot Spin. “We only did spin and cycling classes then,” said Sinopoli.

The classes quickly became popular and led to an expansion of the initial small fleet of indoor cycles. “Within a month we had to buy more bikes because of the demand,” she said.

However, only so much cycling equipment could be squeezed into the 700-square-foot space, and a few months later the Sinopolis were looking for larger quarters for their business. They came upon an ideal space a few blocks away on the upper floor of a commercial building at 73-1/2 Summer St.

“We found this space over T&A Tool that had 3,500 square feet that was just right for what we wanted to do,” said Sinopoli.

In the summer of 2014 they moved the still-new business there, and renamed it Hot Spot Fitness. That change, Sinopoli explained, reflected both legal restrictions regarding use of the branded “Spin” equipment, and a goal of expanding the range of fitness classes that would be offered there.

“We had a lot more room to work with, and began looking at ways to put it to use,” she said.

With cycling classes still at its core, the business began adding programs such as yoga, boxing, martial arts, boot camp and Ugi. The lattermost, Sinopoli explained, is a little-known exercise program that combines strength, cardio and core training in a fun and



Aimee Sinopoli (above) says that the spin classes continue to be a prominent part of her operations at Cutting Edge Fitness. However, the Adams business has added a wide range of fitness programs and classes for all ages, such as martial arts instruction for children led by her husband, David Sinopoli (below).

varied 30-minute workout. “We’re the only ones in the region to offer this,” she said, noting that she had to travel to Virginia to get certified as a Ugi instructor.

This range of classes and programs led to another name change for the business – to Cutting Edge Fitness & Martial Arts Center. “Adding the martial arts component is what really led to that,” said Sinopoli. She noted that her husband, David, who has over 40 years of martial arts training and has black belts in multiple martial arts disciplines, leads classes in this category as well as in boxing and FightFIT.

Sinopoli said she serves as instructor for spinning and group fitness classes, and leads Cutting Edge’s Ugi and FightFIT programs. In addition, about a half-dozen certified instructors from throughout the region lead classes in spinning, yoga and hoop, among others.

The addition of these programs has also expanded the demographic range for Cutting Edge Fitness. For example, the martial arts program offers instruction for all ages, starting with those as young as 5, and offers popular after-school group classes for children in grade and middle school.

Other classes and programs are generally geared toward ages 12 and up. Sinopoli noted that her most senior client to date has been an 87-year-old spin class participant.



While programs at Cutting Edge (413-841-0494 or on Facebook) are still attracting more women than men, the gender gap has been narrowing with the growth of its classes and offerings. “Right now, our clients are about 75 percent women,” she said, adding that the classes were almost entirely women when the business first opened with spinning instruction only.

Sinopoli noted that her own commitment to better fitness was prompted by her desire to lose weight after the birth of her son, Brandon, in 2009. “I knew the only way I was going to lose the weight was to exercise and eat healthier, and for me, that also included a plan to start running,” she said, adding that she worked her way up to her first half-marathon in 2010.

As she continued to pursue her running regimen, she learned that spinning could help with her overall training and conditioning. That led to the spinning classes and her eventual instructor certification and business venture.

From her own personal experience, Sinopoli said she is aware of the challenges many people face in starting and sticking with any new fitness program. “Too many people wait too long to take care of themselves,” she said.

Whether a client is just beginning or well advanced, Sinopoli said making sure they get a workout that’s right for their goals is a key part of her role at Cutting Edge Fitness. “I’m here to make sure that people do it right, don’t get hurt and have a good workout,” she said. ♦

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RETURN TO RETAIL ROOTS

Longtime Lenox businessman opens town-centered shop

BY JOHN TOWNES

Bob Romeo has returned to his business roots in a new form with the recent opening of Lenoxology, a clothing and gift shop at 26 Church St. in central Lenox.

In the 1980s and '90s, Romeo had operated a large home-furnishing store in the same space before going into the real estate business on a full-time basis.

"I guess you could say I'm returning to the scene of where I started, in a different form," he said.

As its name implies, Lenoxology has a distinctly local orientation. "Almost everything we sell has some focus on Lenox or Berkshire County," said Romeo.

He explained that his primary goal for the shop is to offer items that are practical, yet also foster and express community identity and pride.

"The idea is to promote Lenox and the Berkshires, and to have fun doing it, with items that are useful and different," he said.

The 1,700-square-foot store, which opened in July, carries a wide range of men's and women's apparel, including T-shirts and polo shirts, sweat suits, jackets, yoga outfits and other items. "It is primarily what I'd call casual or social attire," noted Romeo.

There is also a section of clothing for toddlers.

In addition, the store carries jewelry, tote bags and other items.

The common denominator is that most of the merchandise includes logos, artwork or other elements that refer to Lenox or the Berkshires and activities associated with the town and region. Among the themes are music, recreation, wellness, history and other aspects of local life.

For example, one shirt has the saying "Run, Walk, Bike" in homage to the annual Josh Billings triathlon. A broach is shaped in the form of a G Clef connoting Tanglewood and the area's musical culture. There is also a contemporary drawing of the original Lenox schoolhouse that was done by a local student.

There is a section of creative Berkshire County posters designed and produced by Judy Bates.

Romeo is quick to point out one thing he does not want the store or its inventory to be described as.

"This isn't a souvenir shop," he said. "We

don't just buy canned items with the name of Lenox slapped on them. Rather than souvenirs, what we sell are remembrances. We work hard to stock the store with quality products that are unique and well made."

Also, while the store's village location is at the center of activity in the tourist seasons, Romeo sees visitors as a secondary source of business.

"We're mainly oriented to the local community," he said. "We do attract tourists who purchase items, but that is just the gravy. I'd say 90 percent of our business so far has been with local customers."

One inspiration for the shop, said Romeo, is the upcoming 250th anniversary celebration of the 1767 incorporation of Lenox, which is slated to take place in 2017. He said the store will be carrying items marking that event and the town's history.

While much of the focus is on Lenox, the store is also regionally oriented.

"We also include items about the Berkshires," said Romeo. "After all, Lenox is part of the Berkshires, and many of the qualities associated with the town are also common to the Berkshires as a whole. That's what we want to celebrate."

Romeo operates the store with his daughter, Tara. Most of the graphics on the clothing are designed by them. They purchase wholesale attire which is customized with the designs by the manufacturers.

"We come up with ideas, and Tara refines them and creates the designs on Photoshop and Illustrator," Romeo explained. Those designs are sent to the manufacturers, who silk-screen, embroider or print them onto the products.

Romeo said he is selective about the quality of items he carries. He explained that they strive to find clothing and other items that are well made, but are also moderately priced. He noted that almost everything is priced under \$50.

"It's not easy to find inventory that matches those criteria," he said. "It also takes some time to have them customized. So, we've been building the inventory and adding new items gradually."

He said they have many ideas for items they want to add, including clothing related to Lenox schools and athletics.

Lenoxology (413-637-9135) is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekends. Romeo said they are planning a website but have not launched it yet.

Familiar name

The name "Lenoxology" will have a familiar ring to those familiar with local affairs. That was the motto of an ill-fated marketing campaign the town sponsored about five years ago. The campaign was quickly scuttled because of public controversy over the concept,

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spotlight on new business ventures



Bob Romeo has returned to his retail roots – and recycled the motto of a well-intended but ill-fated town marketing campaign – with the opening of Lenoxology.

retired shortly after that, leaving the building vacant. Romeo moved his own shop into the space, and created a new expanded home furnishing store, Lenox Wholesale.

Romeo ran that business while continuing to work as a Lenox police officer until he retired from the force in 1984. He operated Lenox Wholesale full time until the early 1990s, when he closed that business and leased the space to Nejaime’s Wine Cellar.

“I was going to retire, but that lasted about three months and I got bored,” he said.

Instead, he turned his attention to real estate and operating Century 21 Franklin Street Associates as owner/broker.

When Nejaime’s relocated to Main Street several years ago, Romeo divided the ground floor into two storefronts occupied by various tenants over the years.

Romeo decided to open Lenoxology this summer after Steilmann European Fashion left the space it had leased there, which created a vacancy.

“My daughter suggested this, and I thought ‘Why not?’” recalled Romeo. He said it also coincided with his plans to gradually phase out of his real estate brokerage.

While Romeo hopes Lenoxology succeeds as a business, he said profit is not his primary motivation for the venture.

“It’s a chance to do something nice for the town, and we’re having a lot of fun,” he said. “Operating a business like this is one of those bucket list things I wanted to do. If the store can at least pay the bills, it’s a worthwhile and enjoyable way to spend my time at this point in my life.”◆

as well as objections to the fact that it was conceived by a New York City advertising agency hired by the town.

Romeo, who supported the idea at the time, said he chose the name for his shop because he likes the sound of it, and he believe it does covey the town’s positive qualities.

“I was a believer in Lenoxology, and I was disappointed when the town dropped it, because I thought it was a good tool to market Lenox,” he said. “I think the objections people had at the time had more to do with local politics than the word itself.”

He added that the reaction to his use of the name for the shop has been favorable overall. “We’ve gotten a lot of compliments, and no one has objected to the name,” he said.

For Romeo, the shop combines several of his long-time business and personal interests. A resident of Lenox for 50 years, he has long been a local booster and has been active in town politics. “I’m also a local history buff,” he noted. “The early history of Lenox is especially interesting to me.”

In his early career, Romeo was a Lenox Police officer. In the 1970s he also began investing in commercial properties, and operated a small shop on East Street.

He purchased the two-story commercial building that now houses Lenoxology in 1980. At the time, it was occupied by Herrick Furniture, a longtime business whose owner



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David DeLoria, the new owner of Cakewalk in Lee, shows his mother Joan DeLoria the shop for the first time since he bought it, Wednesday, 10/26/2016. Ben Garver - The Berkshire Eagle
By Dick Lindsay rlindsay@berkshireeagle.com

LEE - David DeLoria is starting a new career from scratch. After nearly 25 years working in the biotechnology industry in eastern Massachusetts, the Pittsfield native has traded in a laboratory coat for bakers garb, recently buying the widely popular Cakewalk Bakery & Cafe on Main Street.

Cakewalk is the third Main Street business to change hands this year. They have all remained under local ownership. Earlier this month, Tracy and Sean Stephen of Stockbridge bought Ben's clothing and footwear store. In May, Vern Kennedy of Canaan, N.Y. acquired the 163-year-old Morgan House Restaurant & Inn.



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The upper five floors of the Onota Building have been converted into 25 upscale one- and two-bedroom apartments, known as Onota 74 Residences. The street-level space is being leased for commercial use.

Onota Building
continued from page 1

Allegrone, principal of Allegrone Companies. “All that has remained is the original structure and shell and the historic features. Everything else is new.”

Allegrone marked the completion of the construction project with an open house in

late October. It is slated to open for occupancy in mid-November.

The apartments in Onota 74 include 10 one-bedroom units and 15 two-bedroom units, ranging from 800 to 1,400 square feet. They are renting for \$1,100 to \$1,500 depending on size and other characteristics, such as location within the building and the views. “The upper floors have spectacular views,” noted Allegrone.

One of the features at Onota 74 is a newly created rooftop deck, which is available for all tenants to use. “That’s a great spot, and an important amenity in the warmer months,” said Allegrone.

Arrangements have been made for designated parking spaces for tenants in the nearby McKay Street parking lot.

The Onota Building, which is on the corner of North and School streets, also contains five street-level storefronts. These include a large space directly on North Street and four others along School Street (a one-way sidestreet that connects North and Allen streets near City Hall and the Pittsfield Police headquarters).

Allegrone said those commercial spaces do not have tenants yet, but negotiations are in progress with some prospects.

He said their goal is to include a restaurant as an anchor tenant in the large North Street space, and shops or other consumer-oriented businesses in the others.

“Downtown needs more eateries and other attractions that will draw people, and that will be our priority for those spaces,” he said.

Phase Two

Onota 74 is the second phase of a combined \$14 million initiative by Allegrone Companies that also included the redevelopment of the Howard Building, a three-story structure on the corner of First and Fenn streets (two blocks east of Onota 74).

Both projects are based on a similar concept and goal of preserving and redeveloping historic structures to create new market-rate rental housing and street-level commercial space in the city center.

They received comparable public funding packages through historic preservation and housing development programs.

In 2014, Allegrone opened the redeveloped Howard Building, which is also a mixed-use building with street-level storefronts and 14 market rate rental apartments on the upper two floors.

“We handled the Howard and Onota separately, but we also see them as two aspects of one combined project,” said Allegrone. “The Howard Building is smaller, and we did that first to test the market before starting construction on the Onota Building.”

The two projects were among the first in the state to receive partial funding through

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Interior view of an apartment in the newly redeveloped Onota Building. (Allegrone Companies photo)

a new Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development.

HDIP provides tax credits to support construction of new market-rate housing in urban centers. The HDIP program’s goal is to increase the diversity of housing to stimulate overall economic development and neighborhood stability in designated “Gateway” cities such a Pittsfield, which are working to revitalize their economies and communities. The Onota received \$800,000 in HDIP tax credits.

The state program also calls for support from local government. The City of Pittsfield provided that through a new tax incremental exemption. That agreement provides complete city tax relief on the residential value of the property in the first year, with taxes phased in annually by 10 percent, until reaching 100 percent in 10 years.

In addition, the Onota Building, which is listed on the National Register of History Places, received historic tax credits of \$4 million.

Despite the economic difficulties and population declines Pittsfield has experienced, Allegrone said his company felt confident in making a substantial investment in downtown market-rate housing for several reasons.

“The city had done studies, and we also did our own study of the market,” he said. “They indicated that there is a need for all types of rental housing in the city, including more options in the higher end of the market.”

While acknowledging that there is also a need for more moderately priced rental housing throughout the city, Allegrone said the availability of market-rate housing, such as the Howard Building and Onota 74, can be an important element of overall revitalization.

“All sections of Pittsfield are important, and there need to be initiatives for all types of housing,” he said. “However, to have a vibrant community, it’s important to have a full-time downtown with people living there to stimulate more business and activity. That requires diverse housing options.”

He said that the demand for market-rate housing includes a mix of younger professionals and older residents who are downsizing from single-family homes when their families have grown.

“There is also a trend of people wanting to live in urban centers for the convenience and the activity,” he continued. “So we took a leap of faith that people will want to come.”

Allegrone said the response to the two projects has justified that faith. “We’ve already seen that with the Howard, and now we’re seeing it in the Onota,” he said.

The Howard Building filled up and had a waiting list within two weeks of when it opened. The Onota had pre-leased 75 percent of its units by late October, and it is expected to quickly reach full occupancy when it formally opens in November.

Allegrone added that, while the apartments in the two buildings are very contemporary and have similar modern amenities, they complement each other and offer alternatives within their category.

“Each has a different design flair based on their historic features and characteristics, which we incorporated into the units,” he said. “The Howard apartments have more of a loft style. The Onota is more industrial.”

continued on page 16



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Allegrone relocates to new Lenox HQ

BY JOHN TOWNES

In addition to completing its redevelopment of the Onota Building in downtown Pittsfield (see related story on page 1), Allegrone Companies recently marked another milestone in its corporate history.

This past summer, after five years of planning and construction, Allegrone Companies completed the move of its corporate headquarters from a site on Newell Street in Pittsfield to a new office complex has developed at 150 Pittsfield Rd. (Route 7/20) in Lenox.

The site is named the Berkshire Design Center (www.berkshiredesign-center.com). In addition to housing the headquarters of Allegrone's own 75-member corporate staff, the 35,000-square-foot facility has space for about 15 other office suites to be occupied by tenants.

"We're all moved in here, and we're now recruiting other businesses as tenants," said Louis Allegrone, principal of Allegrone Companies.

Allegrone Companies is a family firm that originated as a masonry contractor in Pittsfield in 1921. It has since grown to become a major construction, development and real estate firm that serves a market in a radius of approximately 200 miles. It also has a branch office in Boston.

Its divisions include Allegrone Construction, which provides construction management, general contracting, design-build, and preconstruction planning services; Allegrone Home Builders, which partners with archi-

Over the past few years, Allegrone Companies has been gradually transforming a nondescript commercial building along Route 7/20 in Lenox into a cutting-edge office complex to house its own operations. The 35,000-square-foot facility also has space for a dozen or so business tenants.



itects, designers, and consultants on projects that include small renovation and restoration projects and large family estates; and Allegrone Masonry. It also has a real estate division that provides services related to commercial and residential development, project financing and brokerage services.

The company has become especially known for projects that include environmentally oriented new construction and adaptive re-use of existing sites and historic preservation. It frequently works on prominent projects and facilities for corporate clients, governments and nonprofit institutions and cultural organizations.

The Berkshire Design Center is intended to represent the values of social equity, conservation and green community, according to its promotional material.

It is designed to be a flexible, cost-effective facility to provide efficient office space with



the features, common services and amenities of a large corporate office for businesses of varying sizes. It is envisioned as an active business center that allows for interactions among tenants, and fosters opportunities

for networking and collaborations

It utilizes an open design with the flexibility to accommodate customized needs of tenant and differing sizes in its configuration. It can be tailored to provide spaces suitable for startups, very small businesses and independent freelance contractors.

"It offers suites that are small, with shared amenities and resources," said Allegrone.

Allegrone Companies purchased the property, which was in foreclosure, for \$900,000 in 2010. Originally, the structure had been built as a motel, known as the Edgewood. It was later converted into offices for a data-processing business. More recently it had housed a business known as the Leaning Center.

Allegrone Companies collaborated with local teams of architects, engineers, and local field contractors on the redevelopment of the site.

It did a complete renovation and expansion of the original 1960s-era building, to essentially create a completely new structure. The company also undertook extensive landscaping of the site, which is on a small hill overlooking Route 7/20 to the west.

To help finance the project, it received a \$3 million Recovery Zone Facility Bond from MassDevelopment. Voters in Lenox also approved a 10-year tax financing agreement.

Berkshire Design Center is oriented to a mix of tenants in professional services and creative industries, such as real estate, architectural, engineering and construction firms; financial services; technology; home design and furnishings, and fields such as visual arts, graphics and media.

The building includes a three-story glass atrium. An enclosed mezzanine space on the upper level is suitable for hosting private events and seminars. It also contains space that can be used to showcase products.

The second floor of the center includes an open kitchen and cafe area near the conference room. The area also serves as a common space for tenants to relax and network with other professionals in the building.

The site includes six acres of pervious outdoor greenspace with ecologically oriented landscaping to reduce the heat generated by the built sections, and protect water sources and drainage.

The structure was designed and constructed to adhere to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) guidelines of the U.S. Green Building Council.

The facility includes curtain-wall glazing to allow a flow of natural light to illuminate common spaces. Other energy saving measures include large windows, and LED lighting with occupancy sensors and timers. It utilizes air-sourced heat and cooling with constant fresh air recovery.

The site includes six acres of pervious outdoor greenspace with ecologically oriented landscaping to reduce the heat generated by the built sections, and protect water sources and drainage. The site is also prepared for the possible future installation of solar panels. ♦

Onota 74 Residences

continued from page 15

The apartments in the Onota include exposed rustic finishes such as raw wood and metal ornamentation, and architectural expressions of the mid-20th century.

With the Onota and Howard buildings completed, Allegrone said his company is turning its attention to another North Street commercial property it owns, the Stevenson Building, one block south of Onota 74.

"We're still working on the design and concept for that," he said. "But we like the idea of mixed use, and it will probably be along those lines."

He said they hope to begin that project next summer. "We'll also continue to look for buildings that are at the end of their life cycle, and are good candidates for redevelopment," he added.

Allegrone expressed confidence that Pittsfield is moving in the right direction.

"Pittsfield has come a long way in the last 10 years, and there's still room for growth," he said. "Our company is excited about completing the second phase of our effort with the opening of the Onota. Our hope is that these projects will help to spark continued development downtown, and other public-private partnerships in Pittsfield." ♦

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Pittsfield, MA 01201
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REAL

estate

continued from page 19

255 Hupi Rd.
Buyer: Kathleen Potoski +
Seller: Jason Brown
Price: \$472,114
Date: 9/30/16

20 Laurel Banks Dr.
Buyer: Keith Aibel +
Seller: Martin Galen +
Price: \$475,000
Mortgage: \$360,000
Lender: Bk of America
Date: 9/30/16

165 Pixley Rd.
Buyer: Ian Evans +
Seller: Diane Ostrander-Lim +
Price: \$315,000
Mortgage: \$252,000
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 9/27/16

MOUNT WASHINGTON

46 East St.
Buyer: Kyle Costello +
Seller: Ethan Dufault

Price: \$495,000
Mortgage: \$396,000
Lender: Berkshire Bank
Date: 10/7/16

NORTH ADAMS

7 Brook Ter.
Buyer: Amalio Jusino 3rd
Seller: Eileen Donovan
Price: \$89,000
Mortgage: \$87,387
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 10/14/16

12 Catherine St.
Buyer: Richard Langevin +
Seller: Michael Brassard +
Price: \$137,500
Mortgage: \$130,600
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 9/23/16

490 Church St.
Buyer: Alejandro Berrios +
Seller: John Caron +
Price: \$177,500
Mortgage: \$183,357
Lender: Movement Mtg
Date: 10/4/16

20 Clark St.
Buyer: Pamela Lillie +
Seller: Nancy Ritter
Price: \$176,500
Mortgage: \$141,200
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 10/3/16

40 College Ave.
Buyer: Stanley Dubis +
Seller: Theresa Brooks
Price: \$120,000
Date: 9/30/16

33-35 Hall St.
Buyer: HSBC Bank
Seller: John Paulin Jr +
Price: \$100,000
Date: 10/12/16

86 Lyman St.
Buyer: Heather Tooley
Seller: Peter Solari
Price: \$79,000
Mortgage: \$81,233
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 9/26/16

117 Meadow St.
Buyer: Brian Rennell
Seller: Amigo Properties
Price: \$109,000
Mortgage: \$112,082
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 10/7/16

9-11 Montana St.
Buyer: William Montgomery +
Seller: Pauline Cantone RET +
Price: \$119,900
Date: 9/30/16

25 Overlook Ter.
Buyer: T Maxwell-Shuker Haines +
Seller: Terry Haig
Price: \$192,000
Mortgage: \$110,000

Lender: MountainOne
Date: 9/23/16

314-316 State Rd.
Buyer: Theroux Properties LLC
Seller: Brian Allard +
Price: \$154,000
Date: 10/3/16

OTIS

131 Dewolfe Rd.
Buyer: Leonard Sabia Jr +
Seller: Gerard Scholl +
Price: \$110,000
Date: 10/7/16

58 Point Rd.
Buyer: Robert Quinan Jr +
Seller: Richard Pactor +
Price: \$366,000
Mortgage: \$292,800
Lender: LoanDepot.com
Date: 10/7/16

1053 Reservoir Rd.
Buyer: Otis Rock Garden LLC
Seller: Linda Balicki T +
Price: \$625,000
Mortgage: \$531,250
Lender: Pittsfield Coop
Date: 10/4/16

2379 W Center Rd.
Buyer: Alan Spencer
Seller: Joseph Ryan +
Price: \$180,000
Mortgage: \$176,739
Lender: Inland B&T
Date: 10/12/16

PERU

117 Middlefield Rd.
Buyer: Eric Fitzgerald +
Seller: Albert Eurbin Jr

Price: \$155,000
Mortgage: \$155,000
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 9/30/16

PITTSFIELD

24 Alba Ave.
Buyer: Melanie Menier
Seller: Woodger William Est +
Price: \$207,000
Mortgage: \$165,600
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 9/30/16

Ashland St.
Buyer: Timothy Wagner
Seller: Belli FT +
Price: \$112,000
Date: 9/30/16



27 Ashley St.
Buyer: Mark Tatro
Seller: Craig Walton +
Price: \$125,000
Mortgage: \$100,000
Lender: MountainOne
Date: 9/30/16

56 Bartlett Ave.
Buyer: RSB Properties
Seller: Richard Johansen +
Price: \$140,000
Date: 9/29/16

139 Bartlett Ave.
Buyer: William Allen Jr +
Seller: Maryann Tebben
Price: \$190,000
Mortgage: \$152,000
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 10/7/16

148 Bartlett Ave.
Buyer: RSB Properties
Seller: Richard Johansen +
Price: \$140,000
Date: 9/29/16

Blythewood Dr.
Buyer: Craig Crawford +
Seller: Peter Simkin +
Price: \$210,000
Mortgage: \$157,500
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 9/29/16

23 Brookside Dr.
Buyer: Michael Rosenthal +
Seller: Patrick Ricchi +
Price: \$385,000
Mortgage: \$308,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 9/30/16

17 Brown St.
Buyer: US Bank Na Tr
Seller: Richard Shove +
Price: \$100,652
Date: 9/29/16

124 Bryan St.
Buyer: Joseph Burke
Seller: RSB Properties
Price: \$85,000
Mortgage: \$84,000
Lender: Pittsfield Coop
Date: 9/29/16

800 Dalton Ave.
Buyer: Quail River Properties
Seller: 800 Dalton Ave Mgmt
Price: \$450,000
Mortgage: \$453,414
Lender: CC Partners LLP
Date: 9/23/16

24 Davis St.
Buyer: Timothy Johnson +
Seller: Keith Haven +
Price: \$110,000
Mortgage: \$104,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 10/14/16

30 Doreen St.
Buyer: Matthew Kiernan +
Seller: Stacy Blair
Price: \$149,295
Mortgage: \$142,495
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 10/14/16

158 Doreen St.
Buyer: Jamie Northwood +
Seller: D Katherine Lavigne
Price: \$197,500
Mortgage: \$175,775
Lender: Pittsfield Coop
Date: 9/28/16

157 Eleanor Rd.
Buyer: Alexander Lomaglio +
Seller: Christine Plourde
Price: \$164,900
Date: 10/12/16

274 Eleanor Rd.
Buyer: Ashley Brouker
Seller: Shannon Ramos
Price: \$164,000
Mortgage: \$154,000
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 10/14/16

59 Elizabeth St.
Buyer: David Lotto +
Seller: Michael Shirley +
Price: \$176,000

Mortgage: \$132,000
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 10/5/16

539 Elm St.
Buyer: FNMA
Seller: Colin Houston +
Price: \$78,000
Date: 9/19/16

34 Elmview Ter.
Buyer: Paul Saldana
Seller: Citimortgage
Price: \$121,100
Date: 9/30/16

5 Fasce Pl.
Buyer: Kyle Laundry
Seller: Charles Hessler +
Price: \$140,000
Mortgage: \$112,000
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 9/26/16

75 Foote Ave.
Buyer: Tayana Johnson
Seller: Kylie Speirs
Price: \$125,000
Mortgage: \$100,000
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 10/3/16

72 Gale Ave.
Buyer: Peter Taylor +
Seller: Jacob Barbour
Price: \$139,900
Mortgage: \$137,362
Lender: Merrimack Mtg
Date: 10/12/16

37 Glenn Dr.
Buyer: Robert Catan 3rd +
Seller: Christopher Wooliver
Price: \$240,000
Mortgage: \$228,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 10/13/16

45-47 Henry Ave.
Buyer: David Lotto +
Seller: Michael Shirley +
Price: \$176,000
Date: 10/5/16

181 Holmes Rd.
Buyer: 2 Bears NT +
Seller: Marie Lynch
Price: \$355,000
Mortgage: \$290,000
Lender: Pittsfield Coop
Date: 9/20/16

233 Holmes Rd.
Buyer: Molly Ferioli
Seller: Allison Crane
Price: \$360,250
Mortgage: \$288,200
Lender: Easthampton SB
Date: 10/14/16

87 Howard St.
Buyer: David Lotto +
Seller: Michael Shirley +
Price: \$175,000
Mortgage: \$131,250
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 10/5/16

40 Jayne Ave.
Buyer: Brett Hall +
Seller: Gary Shampang +
Price: \$189,000
Mortgage: \$174,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 9/30/16

52 Kensington Ave.
Buyer: Matthew Cripps
Seller: Salvatore Pocarobba +
Price: \$157,000
Mortgage: \$137,000
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 10/13/16

266 Lebanon Ave.
Buyer: Alaina Driscoll
Seller: Richard White +
Price: \$166,000
Mortgage: \$149,230
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 10/6/16

290 Lenox Ave.
Buyer: Rebecca Couture
Seller: Nicholas Persson
Price: \$174,000
Mortgage: \$165,300
Lender: Berkshire Bank
Date: 10/7/16

115 Leroi Dr.
Buyer: Lorraine Jones
Seller: Richard Boudreau +
Price: \$210,000
Date: 10/13/16

69 Lyman St.
Buyer: Patrick McLain +
Seller: Michael Batho +
Price: \$129,900
Date: 9/23/16

42 Merriam St.
Buyer: Erika Casas
Seller: Sales & Service Inc
Price: \$123,000
Mortgage: \$120,772
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 9/28/16

93 Mohegan St.
Buyer: Timothy Wager
Seller: Belli FT +
Price: \$112,000
Mortgage: \$112,000
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 9/27/16

183 Montgomery Ave.
Buyer: John Martin Jr
Seller: Michele Raty
Price: \$113,000
Mortgage: \$90,400
Lender: Adams Community
Date: 9/27/16

106 Nancy Ave.



Natural Gas Safety: Things you should know...

Natural gas is one of the safest and cleanest burning energy sources available. That’s why it is America’s number one fuel choice. Delivering safe, reliable natural gas service to our customers is our top priority.



SMELL

A distinctive, pungent, “rotten eggs” odor.



SIGHT

A white cloud, mist, fog, bubbles, blowing dust or dead vegetation.



SOUND

An unusual noise like roaring, hissing or whistling.

What you should do if you suspect a leak



MOVE

to a safe environment.



CALL

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DO NOT

strike a match, use telephones, or switch on/off appliances, lights, or even a flashlight in the area where you smell natural gas.

Pipeline safety

The natural gas pipeline system is the safest method of transporting energy, and pipelines underneath streets play a vital role. While rare, pipeline failures can occur due to corrosion, material defects, events of nature, excavation damage and more. We ensure pipeline safety through the planning, design, operation, maintenance, inspection and testing of pipelines. And we work closely with emergency responders to prepare for and respond to emergencies.



Call Before You Dig (www.digsafe.com)

The greatest risk to underground pipelines is accidental damage during excavation on public and private property. To protect natural gas pipelines, the law requires that all contractors – even homeowners planning to build a deck, patio or addition – notify Dig Safe at 811 at least two full working days before excavating. We will mark our facilities in the area of work, and at no cost.

For additional safety information, please visit our Web site

• www.berkshiregas.com



BERKSHIRE GAS

Berkshire County real estate transfers

Buyer: Farouk Abdul-Wahid
Seller: Todd Terpak
Price: \$314,500
Mortgage: \$200,000
Lender: Pittsfield Coop
Date: 9/27/16

77 New Hampshire Ave.
Buyer: Carlos Sanchez +
Seller: Lisa Pope +
Price: \$119,900
Mortgage: \$116,303
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 10/7/16

441 North St.
Buyer: 2 Rabbits LLC
Seller: Blue Ox 2 LLC
Price: \$742,500
Mortgage: \$557,000
Lender: NBT Bank
Date: 9/19/16

24 Pleasure Ave.
Buyer: RSB Properties
Seller: Richard Johansen +
Price: \$79,500
Date: 9/29/16

106 Quirico Dr.
Buyer: John Baumbach
Seller: Juan Arevalo +
Price: \$208,000
Mortgage: \$204,232
Lender: Homestead Fund
Date: 10/14/16

43 Sadler Ave.
Buyer: Mary Oconnor +
Seller: David Duquette
Price: \$109,900
Mortgage: \$106,603
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 10/14/16

57 Scammell Ave.
Buyer: Guidewire Inc
Seller: Mark Field
Price: \$232,000
Mortgage: \$294,000
Lender: Chicopee SB
Date: 9/20/16

101 South St.
Buyer: 101 South Street LLC
Seller: 101 South Street LLC
Price: \$900,000
Date: 10/12/16

526 South St.
Buyer: Laurence Dougherty +
Seller: Joan Accuosti LT +
Price: \$131,500
Mortgage: \$98,625
Lender: Santander Bk
Date: 10/14/16

1021 South St.
Buyer: 1021 South Street LLC

Seller: Robert George
Price: \$125,000
Date: 10/4/16

7 Southbrook Ln.
Buyer: Pearson FT +
Seller: Charles Abbott +
Price: \$495,000
Date: 10/14/16



66 Unkamet Park Dr.
Buyer: Mark Peronto +
Seller: Peronto FT +
Price: \$210,000
Mortgage: \$189,000
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 10/14/16

106 Ventura Ave.
Buyer: Karis Howes
Seller: Mary Mcguinn +
Price: \$129,500
Mortgage: \$124,400
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 10/3/16

12 Vivian Ave.
Buyer: HSBC Bank
Seller: Sean Boyle
Price: \$143,000
Date: 9/30/16

434 W Housatonic St.
Buyer: Amerco Real Estate Co
Seller: Pittsfield Plaza Members
Price: \$1,200,00
Date: 10/6/16

27 Warwick St.
Buyer: Cathleen Chittenden
Seller: Becky Booker
Price: \$264,000
Mortgage: \$206,400
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 9/20/16

16 Waubeek Rd.
Buyer: Mark Quigley +
Seller: Michelle Hennessey
Price: \$530,000
Mortgage: \$318,000
Lender: Fairway In Mtg
Date: 9/278/16

3 Whittier Ave.
Buyer: William Davis
Seller: Melinda Payson
Price: \$174,700
Mortgage: \$160,700
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 9/27/16

26 Wilson St.
Buyer: Bartola Orellana
Seller: Norma Mcdermott
Price: \$80,500
Mortgage: \$79,041
Lender: Academy Mtg
Date: 9/29/16

50 Worthington St.
Buyer: Charbonneau Family Ventures
Seller: Anthony Rufo
Price: \$82,500
Date: 10/12/16

49 Yorkshire Ave.
Buyer: Joseph Hassoun
Seller: Norman Sweet 3rd +
Price: \$117,000
Mortgage: \$62,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 10/13/16

Alpine Trail U:16
Buyer: Anthony Giovanone +
Seller: Curtis Brasseur
Price: \$358,000
Mortgage: \$322,200
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 9/23/16

143 Appleton Ave. U:143
Buyer: Charles Thompson +
Seller: Ronald Jones +
Price: \$75,000
Mortgage: \$60,000
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 10/3/16

52 Churchill Crst. U:52
Buyer: Susan Wood
Seller: Martha Dimond
Price: \$149,900
Date: 9/23/16

72 West St. U:1
Buyer: Berkshire Children & Families
Seller: American Red Cross
Price: \$250,000
Date: 10/11/16

RICHMOND

1691 Dublin Rd.
Buyer: Deborah Caine +
Seller: George Decker +
Price: \$285,000
Mortgage: \$228,000

Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 10/7/16

2131 Dublin Rd.
Buyer: John Ryan +
Seller: Henry Fenn +
Price: \$282,000
Date: 10/7/16

110 Monument Cir.
Buyer: Jeffrey Kaplan +
Seller: Ivan Caine +
Price: \$517,500
Mortgage: \$410,000
Lender: Poli Mtg
Date: 10/7/16

199 Old Post Rd.
Buyer: Robert Erardy +
Seller: James Biancolo +
Price: \$430,000
Mortgage: \$374,100
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 9/22/16

60 Osceola Notch Rd.
Buyer: Meryl Rudin
Seller: Mark David
Price: \$495,000
Date: 9/21/16

1090 State Rd.
Buyer: Trustco Bank
Seller: Raymond Alexander
Price: \$279,751
Date: 10/13/16

20 Swamp Rd.
Buyer: Richard Levy +
Seller: Girl Scouts of Central
Price: \$1,350,000
Date: 10/6/16

SANDISFIELD

176 Sandisfield Rd.
Buyer: Kathryn Brenny
Seller: Dana Yee
Price: \$595,000
Mortgage: \$476,000
Lender: Pittsfield Coop
Date: 9/29/16

308 Sequena Dr.
Buyer: Jeffrey Lewis +
Seller: Burton Larit +
Price: \$327,500
Mortgage: \$262,000
Lender: Village Mtg
Date: 9/30/16

11 Smith Rd.
Buyer: Alexander Nikituk +
Seller: Daniel Radlauer
Price: \$372,480
Mortgage: \$353,856
Lender: Adams Community

Date: 10/7/16
73 West St.
Buyer: Michael Scapin
Seller: Albert Bethge
Price: \$112,000
Mortgage: \$118,340
Lender: Greylock FCU
Date: 10/7/16

SAVOY

46 Hawley Rd.
Buyer: Wells Fargo Bank
Seller: Christopher Wood +
Price: \$84,000
Date: 10/11/16

SHEFFIELD

Beech St. Lot 2
Buyer: Agassi Nakhapetian +
Seller: David Neubert
Price: \$240,000
Date: 10/11/16

152 Berkshire School Rd.
Buyer: Howard Sherman +
Seller: Philip Gura +
Price: \$352,500
Mortgage: \$334,875
Lender: Salisbury B&T
Date: 9/29/16

132 Bull Hill Rd.
Buyer: 328 Peacon Lane LLC
Seller: Hugh Hardy +
Price: \$850,000
Date: 9/27/16

364 Maple Ave.
Buyer: Ted Manger
Seller: Richard Brousseau +
Price: \$262,500
Date: 10/5/16

49 Root Ln.
Buyer: Stephen Teele +
Seller: Alma NT +
Price: \$210,000
Mortgage: \$215,938
Lender: Village Mtg
Date: 9/28/16

358 S Undermountain Rd.
Buyer: Agassi Nakhapetian +
Seller: David Neubert
Price: \$240,000
Mortgage: \$192,000
Lender: Citibank
Date: 10/11/16

95 Salisbury Rd.
Buyer: Mary Murray

Seller: James Law 3rd +
Price: \$230,000
Mortgage: \$225,834
Lender: Quicken Loan
Date: 9/19/16

STOCKBRIDGE

11 Cherry Hill Rd.
Buyer: Pater Garfinkel
Seller: Peter Putnam
Price: \$215,000
Date: 10/7/16

1 Christian Hill Rd.
Buyer: Jennifer Trench
Seller: Wesley Triplett
Price: \$217,500
Mortgage: \$174,000
Lender: Lee Bank
Date: 9/29/16

WASHINGTON

60 East St.
Buyer: Berkshire 4 RT +
Seller: S Vandeusen
Price: \$630,000
Date: 9/30/16

61 East St.
Buyer: Berkshires 4 RT +
Seller: Shirley Vandeusen
Price: \$630,000
Date: 9/30/16

237 East St.
Buyer: Geneve Brossard
Seller: Frederick Collins +
Price: \$245,000
Date: 10/14/16

WEST STOCKBRIDGE

7 Cone Hill Rd.
Buyer: Roger Kavanagh +
Seller: Christian Urbain +
Price: \$439,000
Mortgage: \$325,000
Lender: Salisbury B&T
Date: 10/5/16

295 Great Barrington Rd.
Buyer: Brian Zucker +
Seller: Norma Comstock
Price: \$325,000
Date: 9/30/16

41 High St.
Buyer: Nathan Turner +
Seller: John Kruszyna +
Price: \$325,000
Mortgage: \$260,000
Lender: United Wholesale
Date: 9/30/16

WILLIAMSTOWN

191 Berlin Rd.
Buyer: 191 Berlin Road NT +
Seller: Patricia Franz +
Price: \$450,000
Date: 9/30/16

Cold Spring Rd.
Buyer: Karen Shepard
RET +
Seller: Burns James Est +
Price: \$227,000
Date: 9/22/16

Flora Glen Rd.
Buyer: Robert Kraus
Seller: Gary Polumbo +
Price: \$115,000
Date: 10/3/16

Hopper Rd.
Buyer: Michael Cushman +
Seller: Karen Shepard
RET +
Price: \$410,000
Date: 9/22/16

31 Sabin Dr.
Buyer: Mark Reinhardt +
Seller: Gillian Adams RT +

Price: \$190,000
Date: 9/26/16

774 Simonds Rd.
Buyer: RSB Properties
Seller: Richard Johansen +
Price: \$76,000
Date: 10/7/16

4 Thornliebank Rd.
Buyer: Jason Velazquez +
Seller: Philip Endres +
Price: \$199,000
Mortgage: \$204,627
Lender: MountainOne
Date: 9/28/16

189 Stratton Rd. U:C2
Buyer: James Wade +
Seller: Barbara Jennings
Price: \$99,900
Date: 10/3/16

WINDSOR

825 North St.
Buyer: Jane Lyon
Seller: Gregory Lindstrom +
Price: \$185,900
Date: 10/13/16

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• Upstairs apartment and/or more space for offices

• Large back shop/garage/utility space with office

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MARKET

place

MISTER TIRE RETIRES

Vianor fills niche left by closing of longtime north county business

BY BRAD JOHNSON

Each autumn when the days would grow shorter and cooler, the lines would begin to grow longer at Mister Tire.

The northern Berkshire business for many years was a popular provider of drive-through service for the seasonal switch to winter tires (and the reverse on the opposite side of the calendar).

That tradition looked to be coming to an end earlier this year when Mister Tire’s longtime owner, Larry Davis, announced he would be retiring and closing the business. And close it he did, in early June – leaving Mister Tire’s former customers to wonder where they would go for their snow tires this year.

An answer came sooner than expected when it was announced in July that a new company, Vianor, would be taking over the former Mister Tire operation.

“We had a verbal agreement with Larry before he closed,” said Jason Phelps, president of Vianor Tire Inc., a Vermont-based company that operates its own tire service centers and supplies several others in the



Vianor Tire Inc. has taken over operations at the former Mister Tire in North Adams. The Vermont-based company, which is affiliated with Finnish tire manufacturer Nokian, has retained the staff and most aspects of the Mister Tire business, including drive-through service for the seasonal switch to winter tires.

region. “The transaction was completed in early July, we did our construction and opened in early August.”

“Those months are usually the slowest time of the year for the tire business,” added Mark Reeve, marketing and communications director for Vianor.

The construction that Phelps mentioned involved some minor renovations to the Mister Tire building at 528 Curran Memorial Hwy. (Route 8) in North Adams. Key among these was the construction of a larger, more comfortable and Wi-Fi equipped customer waiting area.

This, Phelps explained, was a necessity due to the single-most significant change to the former Mister Tire’s operations: previously, customers waiting in line would drive their own cars (two at a time) into the service area and then watch from the sidelines as the Mister Tire team conducted their well-choreographed tire-changing routine; now, they are asked to leave their cars once they are next in line and enter the customer lounge while a Vianor employee drives the car into the service bay.

“It’s still drive-up service, but a different process,” said Phelps, explaining that this change was made primarily for safety and liability issues. “This first season there will be some communication issues, but people have mostly been positive about it.” He added that a large interior window looks out into the service bay, allowing customers to keep an eye on the proceedings if they choose.

Once customers are in the waiting area, another change becomes evident: a service counter equipped with two computer work stations where Vianor employees enter customer information and generate printed receipts documenting the work done on a given visit.

“On your first visit we have to get you into the system,” said Phelps, noting that information about the customer’s car, mileage, tire size and other details are entered. The benefits of recording this information become evident on subsequent visits, he said, when the process is more streamlined, or when a customer calls to inquire about pricing or availability of new tires for their car. “We have all that information right there, and the customer doesn’t need to look to see what their tire size is,” he said.

This kind of customer database is, of course, commonplace in most businesses these days – including those that sell tires and provide related automotive services. Its absence during the reign of Mister Tire stemmed, perhaps, from the longevity of the business (it operated under Davis’ ownership since 1978 and at its current location since 1992) as well as the overall no-frills approach that the always-affable Davis took to running Mister Tire.

Also an anomaly was the business model itself – one in which customers would, by choice, drive up and sit in their cars for as much as an hour (or two or three during peak periods) as the queue crawled slowly forward. Customers also had the option of dropping their car off early in the day and returning to pick it up later – something they can still do at Vianor. But the business did not – and still does not – offer the option of service by appointment.

“We did not think about changing the process to appointments,” said Phelps. “The overall theme of the operations has not changed – that’s what made the business successful.”

Nordic connection

Vianor comes to the Berkshires by way of Colchester, Vt., where the company and its tire distribution center are based. Phelps explained that it was established in 2007 as the U.S. affiliate of a company in Finland bearing the same name, which has long operated in European countries as the retail side of the Finnish tire manufacturer Nokian.

That tire brand is widely known as a leader in snow tire design and performance. “Nokian invented the winter tire,” said Reeve, noting that the company also in recent years has expanded its line to include all-season tires.

Nokian tires are, not surprisingly, the house brand at Vianor outlets. Also featured prominently are tires by Bridgestone/Firestone. Phelps noted, however, that the stores deal in a wide variety of tire brands. “We will sell pretty much every brand available,” he said. “If a customer wants a particular tire, we will get that tire for them.”

The Finnish parent company established its U.S. operations through the purchase of six existing tire service centers in Vermont, New Hampshire and northern New York. Since then the company has added a few more locations, the closest to the Berkshires being in Rutland, Vt. The new North Adams store, Phelps said, is the company’s tenth location and the only one in Massachusetts.

The former Mister Tire is also unique among Vianor stores in other key ways. Phelps said, for example, that all other U.S. Vianor locations offer service on an appointment basis, as opposed to the drive-through model in North Adams.

Reeve added that the North Adams drive-through service is actually similar to the “Nordic model” used by the parent company’s European stores. “They’re known as Vianor Pit Stops,” he said.

Whereas the North Adams location has long focused exclusively on tires sales and service (as well as the related area of wheel alignment), the other U.S. stores offer a much wider range of automotive services, such as brakes, exhaust, and state inspections, among others. “They are more of a full-service operation,” said Phelps, noting that this tends to result in more balanced year-round business.

He added, however, that tires and alignment will remain the scope of operations for the company’s newest store. “We will not be offering those other services in North Adams,” he said.

In addition to its own stores, Vianor has what Phelps referred to as “partner locations” throughout the same region. Currently numbered at 68, these locations are supplied by Vianor Tire through its Colchester distribution center.

“Mister Tire was actually a Vianor partner before we bought it,” said Phelps, noting that it is also the first time the company has purchased one of its partner locations.

In addition to acquiring the North Adams location, Vianor also retained most of the former Mister Tire staff. “Every Mister Tire employee was offered a position with Vianor,” said Phelps. “That’s our typical model [when acquiring a new location]. The employees are what made it successful.”

He said that the North Adams operation has about eight employees during peak seasons. The store is managed by Darin Harvey, who has been with the company since 2010. “He was our assistant manager in Montpelier [Vt.], and relocated with his family to manage the North Adams location,” said Phelps.

While Vianor’s network of partner locations has significantly expanded the company’s wholesale volume, Phelps acknowledged that the growth of its own retail store locations has, to this point, been at a deliberate pace.

He explained that the few store locations that have been added all were existing service operations that were a good fit for the company’s model. Those acquisitions also were initiated, as was the case with Mister Tire, by the owners approaching Vianor. “As a general rule, we do not solicit people,” Phelps said. “We wait for them to contact us. And that has led to slow expansion.”

That approach may be adjusted in the future, he added. “We would like to expand on a slightly faster pace in the next three years,” he said. ♦



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What should and shouldn't be in your company's website

BY DEB WATSON

When business owners decide they are going to put together their own website in an effort to save money, the results are often predictable. They usually use a template, and the look is often amateurish. In addition, the content can be wordy – with paragraph after paragraph and no graphics or photographs to break things up. Or, it won't tell you much at all about what they do.

So, what should be in your website? Here are some guidelines.

Sensible domain name

Your domain name must make sense. It should contain your company name, if possible, to help you brand your company. If your company name is not available, try adding a geographic word to it. Don't jump to all of the new extensions available for domain names – do everything you can find a good domain name that is a "dot-com."

Who are you?

Your home page must quickly and clearly describe who you are and what you do. Someone who stumbled upon your site shouldn't have to investigate to figure it out. You only have a few seconds to grab someone's attention and entice them to want to learn more about you. This requires really knowing who your target market is and what motivates them.

Make it easy to read

I read an article called "How the Web Became Unreadable" that described how many people, like me, have to squint at websites, especially on their phone. Text that was once crisp and dark was suddenly lightened to a pallid gray. Though age has indeed taken its toll on my eyesight, it turns out that I was suffering from a design trend.

In the *Typography Handbook*, it warns against having too much contrast, recommending using a very dark gray vs. black. What is "dark gray" to you may not be to your readers. In addition, every computer (and this includes smart phones) has different settings, and people can make their own adjustments for brightness, etc.

As the author of the article, Kevin Marks, says, "Ignore the fads and go back to the typographic principles of print – keep your type black, and vary weight and font instead of grayness. You'll be making things better for people who read on smaller, dimmer screens, even if their eyes aren't aging like



Deb Watson, owner of Business Marketplace (deb@businessmarketplace.com), provides website, marketing and graphic design services.

mine. It may not be trendy, but it's time to consider who is being left out by the web's aesthetic."

Design and style

First-time visitors to your site will often just scan the home page to see if they feel they're on the right site before slowing down to read the whole page. Consequently, you need to organize the content for scanning. Keep these three points to keep in mind when presenting your content:

- break things down into short paragraphs, with headers, when appropriate;
- use bullet points or numbered items; and
- highlight important words or phrases.

Clear navigation

You need to make sure that your site is easily navigated, with clear links on the home page. I recommend using drop-down menus if you have multiple sub-pages to interior pages. Visitors should not have to click more than two or three times in order to find what they are looking for. More than that and they may well go elsewhere.

Make it easy to find you

It is so frustrating not to quickly see a store's location or a phone number prominently displayed. You have to make it easy to find you. You need to make sure that you offer both a phone number and email address to ensure that prospective customers can contact you – many people go online at night and want to contact you when it is convenient for them.

Call to action

You need to let visitors know what you want them to do and, when appropriate, give them an incentive to do so. For example, you may want them to call for a free quote, or to sign up for online coupons, or to click to receive a valuable white paper. Make sure your call to action is clearly presented.

Final no-nos

- Do not force people to hear music or

email your firm's news and announcements to: info@btaconline.com

other audio files on your site automatically. Many people are going online in an office or a library and this can be problematic. As well, many people are just annoyed at it!

- A personal pet peeve of mine: black backgrounds with colored fonts. I look forward to the day when all sites designed this way are gone. They are hard to read and look so amateurish!
- Do not present outdated content. If you're going to have a calendar of upcoming events on your site, make sure it's current. It gives such a bad impression when the events are for two weeks, months or years ago. You

don't have to update the content of your site constantly, but make sure that you're not referring to a "new" tax law change that occurred in 2012, for example.

- Don't go crazy with the bells and whistles just because you can. And remember that iPads and iPhones, as well as many of the newer tablets, cannot see Flash – there are a lot of websites that display black boxes instead of content on these devices!

The bottom line? Simplicity and basic colors are the best bet. Again, the content is the focus, not dancing clowns at the top of the page. ♦

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This commercial building along Pleasant Street in South Lee has been transformed into a gallery and studio where Michael Ozner makes and sells a wide range of “functional artwork” and high-end sculpted work.

Ozzie’s Glass Gallery
continued from page 1

to “functional artwork” such as stem ware, vases, candle holders and his popular hummingbird feeders – arranged in display cases immediately inside the entrance.

An upstairs showroom features several more display cases with some of Ozner’s high-end sculpted work – from intricately detailed dragons to whimsical figurines in a wide variety of styles.

Behind one display counter on the main level is another kind of space featuring a large work bench with an array of tools, equipment and supplies used in the art of glass blowing. This studio is where Ozner now spends his days creating new work for display and sale in his gallery.

The combination of gallery and working studio is an important aspect of how Ozner views his work, and how it is viewed by his customers. While his glass creations are a strong draw on their own, he said having a working glass studio right in the center of things gives customers a chance to witness the glass-blowing process first-hand.

“It makes such a huge difference,” said Ozner. “People say that they had no idea how much goes into it.”

While occasionally it means that a customer has to wait a few minutes for Ozner to complete a stage in process when he is at the studio on his own, no one has minded the inconvenience. “They enjoy watching me work or take their time looking at what we have in the display cases,” he said.

The on-site glass blowing also supports a key selling point that Ozner had wanted to

stress with the combination gallery and work studio. “What I’m offering here is locally made art by a local resident who is making it right in front of you,” he said.

Early connection

A native of Bridgewater, Ozner moved to the Berkshires with his family when he was 14, and has “been here pretty much ever since.”

His interest in glass blowing originated with a visit to a glass studio in West Stockbridge when he was 16. “I connected with a glass blower there and ended up working there weekends and during the summer,” he said.

That particular operation utilized a large and expensive furnace set-up. As Ozner acquired skills in the glass-blowing process, he also began to see it as the work he wanted to do going forward. “I looked into how I could do this without the big [furnace] set-up, and got introduced to torch work,” he recalled.

That process, also known as lamp work, involves using a combination propane and oxygen torch to produce the high temperatures needed to melt the glass material. While more limited in terms of the type of glass work that can be done compared to furnace work, the torch system was something that could be set up affordably and safely in a small home-based studio.

With the support of his parents, Ozner set up such a studio in the basement of the family’s home. “Safety was the number-one priority,” he said, noting that all proper regulatory procedures and safeguards were followed to ensure a hazard-free working environment.

“I saw how fulfilling on a personal level this work can be, and that’s how I’ve approached it ever since.”



Michael Ozner talks with some customers visiting the region from New York City. He says that having a working studio on site allows him to interact directly with those visiting the gallery and buying his work.

For the next few years, Ozner honed his skills while finishing high school and moving on to college. “It was pretty much trial and error,” he said. “There was no YouTube back then to show how it was done.”

While he attended college locally for a few semesters, Ozner eventually left so that he could focus on his glass work full time. “Early on I was making stuff for wholesale,” he said. That included, among other items, a range of pipes other functional products.

“At the same time, I was teaching myself how to do the stuff I do today,” he said, adding that some of this early work was shown and sold in local galleries.

In his early twenties, Ozner left the Berkshires for an opportunity to work with David McDermott, a master glass blower on Cape Cod. “It was the crucial turning point in my life in terms of what I learned,” said Ozner.

While technical skills and the insights into the creative process were among the elements he gained through his work with McDermott, Ozner said the experience was illuminating in other ways. “It was not just what he produced and how he did it – but also how much he enjoyed it,” Ozner explained. “I saw how fulfilling on a personal level this work can be, and that’s how I’ve approached it ever since.”

At age 23 Ozner came back to the Berkshires to continue his work and, after saving money through his wholesale business, was able to purchase a house in Becket, where he set up his home studio. “I’ve been doing work there ever since until opening the gallery,” he said.

The decision to open his own gallery was supported by his experience over the past few years of selling his work at various art shows and craft fairs throughout the region. “I was doing pretty well with that, and thought a gallery could work for me,” he said.

That notion led a few years later to the opening of Ozzie’s Glass Gallery. “I’ve risked everything I have doing this,” said Ozner, noting that some \$30,000 in life savings went into getting his gallery and studio open.

The “nightmare”

The risk turned out to be much more real than Ozner expected, however, when a series of permitting complications and contracting issues turned the process of opening his gallery into what he described as a “year-long nightmare” of delays and uncertainty.

“It was a really difficult process to go through,” said Ozner, recalling that it began in straightforward fashion about two years ago when he learned of a vacant commercial building that fit his key criteria for a studio and gallery.

“My mom found this building that used to be a sign shop,” he said, referring to the 850-square-foot stand-alone structure set back just a few feet from the roadway along the northern side of Pleasant Street. Ozner said it was the right size and right location for what he had in mind. In terms of zoning and other factors, it was also suitable for setting up the kind of glass-blowing operation that he specializes in – using torches that burn a combination of oxygen and propane.

He made arrangements to lease the building, and the owners gutted and did a full remodel of the interior, leaving the space “as blank and open as possible” for Ozner to set up his gallery.

His girlfriend, Becky Simmons, assisted with the key process of scouting out the glass display cases that would be used in the gallery, among other things. “I couldn’t have done this without Becky’s help,” he said. Ozner also credited his long-time friend, Matt Martin, with “helping to get this place built.”

Meanwhile, Ozner focused on the task of setting up his glass-blowing studio within the space. Although already familiar with the specific steps and safety measures necessary to set up the propane and oxygen torch systems (as he had done in his own home-based studios over the years), he learned that town building code required the work be done by a professional contractor licensed for such installations.

Accepting this requirement, Ozner located a licensed contractor and made arrangements for the work to be done. This, too, should have proceeded in straightforward fashion, and Ozner should have been up and running in his new studio last fall. But, for reasons that Ozner said remain a mystery to him, the contractor he had hired began the work and then faded out of the picture.

“Seven months went by at a stand-still,” said Ozner, noting that the contractor gave assurances that the work would be completed, only to abruptly bow out of the project altogether.

Although Ozner acknowledges that he

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Michael Ozner heats glass with a propane and oxygen torch in his studio. Protective eyeglasses are available for visitors to wear while watching him work.

should have cut ties with the original contractor much earlier in the process, he said the other aspects of getting the gallery up and running were also consuming his time and attention.

While awaiting the glass-blowing studio work to be done, Ozner and Simmons got the gallery set up and ready to open on a limited basis last fall. “We started by opening the gallery space for two days a week,” he said, noting that all of the glass work continued to be done in his home-based studio in Becket.

“This is exactly where I want to be. I can’t wait to get into work every morning.”

That limited schedule continued through the winter and spring. After Ozner finally severed ties with the no-show contractor, he lined up the services of another who was able to complete the work in expedient fashion.

With that work finished, Ozner then got the sign-off from town officials to begin operating the glass-blowing studio in early June.

In conjunction with that, he also shifted the gallery operation into high gear. “We opened full-time the first week in June,” said

Ozner, noting that the business is currently open seven days weeks.

While the complications that kept the gallery and studio from opening as soon as he had wanted were both unwelcome and stressful, Ozner noted that they did – in an unintended way – provide a good test of his overall business model. “I was blown away

that I could survive on [being open] just two days a week,” he said.

Since opening both sides of the business full-time, the response has continued to exceed Ozner’s expectations. “Over the last few months it has just been amazing,” he said.

That included a grand opening weekend event in early August that drew a steady crowd of shoppers, visitors and well-wishers. “It was beyond awesome,” said Ozner regarding the turnout for the event, which featured ongoing demonstrations of his glass-blowing skills.

As part of the event, sections of the gallery were used for an exhibition of work by several local artists that was put together by Nicole Webster-Clark, a high school friend of Ozner’s and the art teacher at Lee High School. “She orchestrated this and put it together,” said Ozner, adding that the exhibition of artwork “tied the place together.” The artwork, which will be changed on an occasional basis, is also offered for sale.

During the busy summer months, both Ozner and Simmons ran the shop. He noted that Simmons has gone back to college for the fall and that he is currently staffing the shop on his own during the week. “Becky is still helping on weekends,” he said, adding that she is also handling most of the administrative and back-office work.

With business continuing to be strong through early autumn, Ozner said he may have to consider additional staffing help. “I may need to hire someone at least for the holiday season,” he said.

Hours at Ozzie’s Glass Gallery (413 822-4830) are “roughly” from 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

While describing his gallery as “still a work in progress,” Ozner said, for him, it represents the fulfillment of that lesson he learned several years ago from the Cap Cod-based master glass-blower about finding real enjoyment in the work you do. “This is exactly where I want to be,” he said. “I can’t wait to get into work every morning.” ♦



Michael Ozner’s fanciful glass pumpkins are popular sellers at this time of year. He says the response to his gallery has been “beyond awesome” since he was finally able to open on a full-time basis this summer.

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