



**E·C·G·R·A**  
ERIE COUNTY GAMING REVENUE AUTHORITY

**EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR'S  
REPORT  
FOR  
MARCH  
2021**



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## Innovation Entente Lab opens new digs, expands support to region's entrepreneurs

Friday, March 05, 2021

*Expand* is the operative word given the March 1 opening of Mercyhurst University's new Innovation Entente Lab (IEL) as well as the launch of its mobile unit, the hiring of new staff, and increased geographical coverage.



The IEL, part of the NWPA Innovation Beehive Network (<https://www.nwpabeehive.com/>) formed in 2014 to enhance business expansion and development in the region, combines the university's strong expertise in applied sciences with its rich tradition of liberal arts education to help promote community entrepreneurship and innovation.

IEL team members help clients identify key marketing strategies, potential funding pipelines, and the necessary strategic media options to help place entrepreneurs and small business owners on the path to success.

Thanks to the combined effect of recent grants, what was once a makeshift research lab has morphed into an uber-modern facility with 15 work stations, robust technological capabilities, two large wall monitors for projecting data, two MacBook Pros for graphic design, and a conference and presentation area.

Although the IEL staff, headed by Brian Fuller, and comprised of Mercyhurst undergraduate and graduate students, has been producing products for some time from various venues on campus, this marks the first time they have had a dedicated space, the result of an \$89,000 grant from the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority.

The new space, which is situated on the ground floor of the library, just south of the Cyber Education Center, was designed in part with input from Mercyhurst's interior design and graphic design students; there's even an alumni connection. The lab's conference table was handmade of repurposed barn wood at Willow Creek Barn Wood Furniture in Edinboro, which 2015 Mercyhurst alumnus Casey Brown co-founded with his father, Chris. Casey's sister, Kennedy, is also a Mercyhurst graduate, Class of 2020.

A more recent three-year grant of \$376,000 from the Appalachian Regional Commission allows the IEL to provide more direct, on-site support by taking teams of students on the road to serve clients in their own environs. Until recently, the IEL had served a five-county area, but has since expanded its regional coverage to include 17 counties, including parts of New York and Ohio. The funding has also prompted the expansion of the IEL workforce, from two to three student teams and the hire of a new assistant director, Abbey Lesniewski, who oversees the lab's day-to-day operations and coordinates its mobile capabilities.

Fuller said the IEL averages 40 clients a year. "With the latest grant," he said, "we have gone from 12 to 15 student analysts and are looking to increase production by 25 percent this year and another 40 percent in years two and three."

While the program's expansion bodes well for the university, it's students, local entrepreneurs and small business owners, Mercyhurst University Provost Dr. Leanne Roberts recognizes the collaboration among area universities and Blasco

Library as being the key to continued success.

"The Innovation Entente Lab is the direct result of Mercyhurst's participation in the Northwest Pennsylvania Innovation Beehive Network," Roberts said. "Since its inception in 2014 from an Ignite Erie Grant, the Network, comprised of the four local universities – Mercyhurst, Edinboro, Gannon, and Penn State Behrend – and the recent addition of Blasco Library – has worked to enhance business expansion and development in the Erie area. The Innovation Entente Lab is now one of five grant-funded centers that collaborate to encourage business growth with each location offering its own specialized area of expertise."



(<https://www.mercyhurst.edu>)

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## Quick Links

The Hub (<https://hub.mercyhurst.edu>)

Self-Service (<https://selfservice.mercyhurst.edu/Student>)



## Economic Impact & COVID Revitalization Committee Meeting

Wednesday, February 24, 2021  
11:00 a.m.

### ZOOM Information

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84509360856?pwd=RjBRVnpNcUZla09rMVhGNVlhVDY2UT09>

Meeting ID: 845 0936 0856

Passcode: 128266

### AGENDA

1. The Nonprofit Partnership – Adam Bratton
2. Erie Sports Park – Bob Catalde
3. Good of the Order



## Economic Impact & COVID Revitalization Committee Meeting

Wednesday, March 3, 2021  
11:00 a.m.

### ZOOM Information

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84509360856?pwd=RjBRVnpNcUZla09rMVhGNVlhVDY2UT09>

Meeting ID: 845 0936 0856

Passcode: 128266

### AGENDA

1. Erie County Convention Center Authority – John “Casey” Wells
2. Good of the Order



## Economic Impact & COVID Revitalization Committee Meeting

Wednesday, March 10, 2021  
11:30 a.m.

### ZOOM Information

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84509360856?pwd=RjBRVnpNcUZlY09rMVhGNVlhVDY2UT09>

Meeting ID: 845 0936 0856

Passcode: 128266

### AGENDA

1. Dr. Parris Baker
2. Urban Erie Community Development Center – Gary Horton
3. Good of the Order



## Economic Impact & COVID Revitalization Committee Meeting

Wednesday, March 17, 2021  
11:00 a.m.

### ZOOM Information

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84509360856?pwd=RjBRVnpNcUZla09rMVhGNVlhVDY2UT09>

Meeting ID: 845 0936 0856

Passcode: 128266

### AGENDA

1. Martin Luther King Center – James Sherrod
2. Stimulus Disbursement Observations – Autumn Anderson
3. Good of the Order



PP

**February 2021**

**Meeting with Executive Director**  
**Ongoing Social Media Management**  
**Ongoing Consulting**  
**February Comms**

IMPLEMENTED | Social  
13 February posts

IMPLEMENTED | Anchor Building Grants  
10 Graphics  
Release

IN PROGRESS  
COVID-19 Report  
2021 Grant social graphics

# County awards GECAC with Summer JAM contract

'We are proud to continue this partnership with them'

From Staff Reports Erie Times-News  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Erie County government has awarded a 2021 contract for the Summer Jobs and More program to the Greater Erie Community Action Committee.

This will be the seventh year that GECAC has operated the program.

In 2020, the Summer JAM program provided opportunities for more than 30 employers to offer positions to approximately 89 Erie County youth.

More than 60% of participating youth were under 18 years old, and 65% were new to the program. Because of the pandemic last summer, participation was lower than in the previous years, but GECAC implemented an appropriate strategy to work through it, and the Erie County Department of Health provided COVID-19 safety training to these youth.

"GECAC's consistent, creative and concentrated efforts of the Summer JAM program have demonstrated their commitment to the growth and development of

Erie County," said Gary N. Lee, the county's director of administration. "We are proud to continue this partnership with them and appreciate their solid investment in, and impact on, our youth."

GECAC offers recruitment and informational sessions for employers and participants through virtual meetings, outreach at local schools and community centers, social media blasts, and outdoor pop-up events. Youth are matched with employers based on the employer specifications, geographic proximity and availability of reliable transportation for youth. Then, GECAC provides orientation and training sessions.

The Summer JAM program is a collaborative effort of Erie County, GECAC, the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority and the Erie Community Foundation. The program is open to Erie County residents ages 16 to 21 who meet the program's household income guidelines.

The collaboration has invested approximately \$2.3 million while developing more than 1,000 youth leaders since the program's inception in 2014.

More information about the program can be found at <http://bit.ly/2021SummerJAM>. To apply for the program, contact GECAC at [summerjam@gecac.org](mailto:summerjam@gecac.org) or 897-6571.



Summer JAM (Jobs And More) participant Johnathan Byes-Hopkins, then 20, works in a mail room at Erie Insurance in Erie in this June 28, 2018 file photo. GREG WOHLFORD FILE PHOTO/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

The Corry Journal, Monday, February 15, 2021

## Summer JAM program to return with GECAC again in charge

BY KATHLEEN SPINAZZOLA  
[kathleen@thecorryjournal.com](mailto:kathleen@thecorryjournal.com)  
SARA JUKES  
[sara@thecorryjournal.com](mailto:sara@thecorryjournal.com)

Summer Jobs and More, an Erie County program that gives job opportunities to youth, is slated to return this year with a contract to operate the program being awarded to Greater Erie Community Action Committee.

GECAC has operated the program for seven years, since Summer JAM's inception.

In 2020, the Summer JAM program provided opportunities for more than 30 employers to offer positions to about 89 youth across Erie County with GECAC at the helm.

Corry youth and businesses have participated in the program since 2015.

City Manager Jason Biondi said he is not sure if the city of Corry will be participating in the Summer JAM program this upcoming summer because of COVID-19.

"We have participated for several years now but it will be dependent on what things look like when the time comes," Biondi said. "We would like to but we have to evaluate."

He went on to say the city has not been contacted yet about how the program will look like this year.

Corry Area High School 2018 graduate Dylan Vanderhoof worked for the city as part of the Summer JAM program and came to love the job as a mechanic in the city garage. His part-time job became a career in 2020 when the city hired him full time as an inspection mechanic.

See JAM, P.3



Journal file photo  
The Summer Jobs and More program brought the city of Corry Dylan Vanderhoof, who now works as a full time inspection mechanic at the city garage.

## Girard looks back to spur its future



Councilwoman Jeanne Miller, left, Downtown Girard committee member Jim Tometsko, committee chair George Drushel, Borough Manager Rob Stubenbort and Melinda Meyer of Preservation Erie stand in front of a mural celebrating the history of the municipality, just off Main Street West in Girard on Monday. CHRISTOPHER MILLETTE/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

### Plans to seek Downtown Historic District designation

Valerie Myers Erie Times-News | USA TODAY NETWORK

A little history can help shape the future. ● Girard Borough is joining a growing list of Erie County municipalities that are building on their past to attract visitors and grow business. ● Girard is developing a master plan on ways to use its history to revitalize its downtown.



This plaque hangs near the front door of the Park Diner in Lawrence Park Township. The township's historic district is also listed on the National Register. FILE/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

"We want to create a look and feel for downtown that people want so that they're willing to visit, eat, do some shopping and see what we have to offer," Girard Borough Manager Rob Stubenbort said.

"A good-looking downtown area in a small town is the face of the town. We want to be sure we're seen at our best," Stubenbort said.

Girard Borough also plans to seek Downtown Historic District designation from the National Register of Historic Places to help draw new business and visitors.

See GIRARD, Page 4A

"Waterford has done a really nice job with their downtown, and I'd like to see something similar to that here. ... We didn't have George Washington, but we had Dan Rice, and that could be almost as good."

Pat Harvey Pharmacist at Girard Pharmacy

# Girard

Continued from Page 1A

And that can help rejuvenate the town, said Wendy Naylor, of Naylor Wellman Historic Preservation Consulting, based near Cleveland. The firm worked with the Lawrence Park Historical Society to get a National Register listing of the township's original commercial and residential district, including its iconic row houses, in 2018.

"What the National Register listing does is qualify income-producing buildings in the historic district for state and federal tax credits," Naylor said. "The motivation behind the tax credits is to get those buildings back in use and get businesses in and generating tax revenues."

One building rehabilitation sparks others, Naylor said. "Once you get one building rehabilitation going downtown it's contagious," she said. "Others follow. It's really fun to watch."

The historical designation also drives tourism, Naylor said.

"You use that story that makes you unique to promote your town," she said. "It becomes the basis for heritage tourism and just promoting the town as a wonderful historic community."

Girard's unique story includes that it once was the home of the Dan Rice Circus. Rice, who is credited with creating the Uncle Sam character, wintered his nationally known show in Girard in the mid-19th century.

Very different histories are the basis for Waterford and North East National Register designations.

The North East Historic District includes Gibson Park, downtown commercial and residential buildings and the historic property that most recently was home to Mercyhurst North East.

The region's agriculture, including grape farming and the wine industry, also helps boost tourism. North East is on the Lake Erie Wine Trail, linking wineries from Harborcreek to Silver Creek, New York. The Sustain North East Initiative currently is seeking funding for new plans to improve downtown buildings, attract residential and commercial tenants and improve streetscapes.

Waterford was the site of three French and Indian Wars era forts, including the French Fort LeBoeuf. The town also boasts the iconic Eagle Hotel, Fort LeBoeuf and Judson House museums, and Washington Park, featuring a statue commemorating George Washington's visit to Fort LeBoeuf in 1753.

The Washington statue is a particular draw for tourists, said Jim Edwards, president of Fort LeBoeuf Historical Society. "During the summer, there may be 20 people in the park one day and one or



A well-known piece of Girard history involves Dan Rice, who some reports say was the inspiration behind the Uncle Sam character. He quartered his circus in Girard from 1852 to 1875, as detailed by this Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission marker on Main Street West. CHRISTOPHER MILLETTE/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

two the next, with cars pulling over to take pictures," Edwards said. "It really does draw people who come into the museum too and have lunch at the Eagle Hotel."

Additional plans include erecting a monument honoring Civil War hero Strong Vincent, who was born and raised in Waterford.

That kind of historical promotion could help Girard, said Pat Harvey, a pharmacist at Girard Pharmacy.

"I think Waterford has done a really nice job with their downtown, and I'd like to see something similar to that here," Harvey said. "We have a historic past here also. We didn't have George Washington, but we had Dan Rice, and that could be almost as good."

Rice also erected the nation's first monument to Civil War dead, in Girard's downtown.

Empty storefronts are Girard's biggest challenge, Harvey said.

"We get plenty of traffic through town but we definitely need more businesses to get people in," he said.

Downtown Girard Inc., a new non-profit organization, is working with the borough to help revitalize the town's Main Street commercial district.

"Our main work is trying to organize the funding for downtown," said businessman George Drushel, chairman of Downtown Girard. "People already have taken advantage of facade grants, marketing grants and also block grant money available for residential homes along Main Street."

National Register listing could help

## More online

See video related to this story: [bit.ly/Girard\\_History](http://bit.ly/Girard_History)

The plan will guide downtown preservation, rehabilitation and development for two decades, Stubenbort said.

A \$20,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission and a \$10,000 grant from the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority will fund planning costs.

Urban Vantage and Preservations Studios of Buffalo, New York, have been hired to guide Girard planning and historic preservation. Urban Vantage will help prepare the downtown master plan. Preservation Studios will prepare the National Register nomination.

Girard Borough also is surveying residents about amenities, attractions and events that they'd like to see in their downtown. The survey is available on the borough website at [www.girardborough.com](http://www.girardborough.com).

"We also want the people who live here in Girard Borough to have what they want so they don't have to leave the borough to shop or eat or attend an event," Stubenbort said.

Public meetings will also be held to gather community ideas, he said. Some events will be held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We invite everyone to participate in the upcoming surveys, discussions, and other chances to be part of the planning process. The more ideas and comments, the better," Stubenbort said.

Contact Valerie Myers at [vmymers@timesnews.com](mailto:vmymers@timesnews.com).

## Project

(Continued from front page)

Bishop explained the streetscape portion of the project will include placement of two historic markers on North Main Street on either side of the Market Street traffic light.

One will focus on Union City's origins, name changes and National Register of Historic Places designation. The other marker will focus on Union City's furniture-making history.

The marker project is funded by Preservation Erie/Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority and the Union City Community Foundation.

There will also be three sidewalk interpretive panels. One panel will focus on Union City's furniture-making history; one will focus on French Creek's origins and growth; and one will focus on downtown Union City's historical architecture.

The panels project is funded by Union City Community Foundation and Union City Pride, with technical assistance from the Union City Historical Society.

For the trees project, WPC has identified potential sites, which include 22 sites on Main Street, three on Marl Street and three in Hogan's Alley area.

The plan is to first plant 12 trees on Main Street.

Demeo discussed the selection process and the tree-planting process. Members of Union City Pride have agreed to maintain all trees. Demeo will train them in how to water the trees for two years, mulching and pruning/shaping.

Funding for the tree project is by the Union City Community Foundation and Erie Community Foundation, with technical assistance by the WPC. Bishop was seeking Council's approval to move forward with the project.

Following the presentation, Council passed motion to move forward with the project and approved the concept, something Union City will pursue with the understanding the project will come back to the borough for an easement plan.

The Corry Journal, Friday, February 19, 2021

## UC Borough Council hears update on Downtown Initiative project

BY MARYANN MOOK  
Staff writer

Union City will be getting some historic markers, sidewalk interpretive panels and trees.

Steve Bishop, project manager for the Union City Community Foundation, and Art Demeo, an arborist with

the Western PA Conservancy (WPC), attended Union City Borough Council's Feb. 9 meeting to explain the latest developments in the Union City Downtown Initiative project.

Union City Pride, along with the borough and Union City Community Foundation, had applied for a \$258,000

Erie Community Foundation Shaping Tomorrow Grant to be used for the Downtown Initiative project.

"It's all about creating an environment downtown so entrepreneurs feel they can be successful and to make it inviting to shoppers," Bishop said.

See Project, P.2

## Grants help aid Our West Bayfront's success in Erie



Our West Bayfront Executive Director Anna Frantz, left, and OWB Board President Candace Battles wait to speak to another board member after a brief ceremony marking the opening of their new headquarters at 404-406 W. Eighth St. in Erie. GREG WOHLFORD/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

### Projects aim to boost quality of life in neighborhoods

**Kevin Flowers**  
Erie Times-News  
USA TODAY NETWORK

When Michael Wolfe launched his sweat equity-fueled redevelopment project on West Eighth Street, the 51-year-old had no idea that an active, well-funded neighborhood organization existed in that area.

He does now.

Wolfe and his wife Katie Raezer moved to Erie from the Carlisle, Pa. area five years ago, looking to start fresh in "a smaller city that still had a home-

town feel."

In late 2019, the couple purchased the building at 463 W. Eighth St. as an investment opportunity. It includes six one-bedroom apartments and housed on the first floor Pie in the Sky restaurant until it closed in summer 2018.

"We're doing a lot of the work ourselves," said Wolfe, a former truck driver whose wife is an information technology professional.

"I think it was one of the contractors who told us about Our West Bayfront. We were able to get an \$8,000 grant from them to put new windows into the

building, and that really helped us out."

Wolfe said he and Raezer, 52, hope to have all six apartments fully renovated — and open a cafe with outdoor seating in the former restaurant space — within the next two years.

"I couldn't be happier that they're down here for the adjacent homeowners and the businesses," Wolfe said. "This city has some incredible buildings and areas in it. Sure it needs some help. But Erie is a really interesting place."

See BAYFRONT, Page 2A

Beason, Akela S., 45  
 Chivers, David G., 70  
 Coleman, Stephen C., 54  
 Docter, Debora K., 62  
 Federoff, Catherine M., 94  
 Freeman, Howard G., 95  
 Golembiewski, Charles J., 61  
 Harrington, Mary Ann Januleski, 86  
 Hayes, Carmela J. Musone, 98  
 Keeley, Ruth Ann, 94  
 Merritt, Glenn Edward Jr., 73  
 Miller, Marion Tomasiak, 88  
 Pozzatti, Amelia Metz "Patsy," 101  
 Ross, James "Jimmy," 48  
 Schiefelbeta, Deloris Mae Dyne, 89  
 Winkler, Joseph R., 80  
 Wood, Alan H., 72

**TODAY IN HISTORY**

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 24, the 55th day of 2021. There are 310 days left in the year.  
 On this date:  
 1868: The U.S. House of Representatives impeached President Andrew Johnson by a vote of 126-47 following his attempted dismissal of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton; Johnson was later acquitted by the Senate.

**CELEBRITY BIRTHDAYS**

Actor Dominic Chianese ("The Sopranos") is 90. Singer Janie Sommers is 80. Actor Johnny O'Hara ("The Mindy Project") is 79. Actor Barry Bostwick is 76. Singer-producer Rupert Holmes is 74. Actor Edward James Olmos is 74. Musician George Thorogood is 71. Actor Helen Shaver ("The Color of Money") is 70. News correspondent Paula Zahn is 65. Country singer Sammy Kershaw is 63. Singer Michelle Shocked is 59. Actor Billy Zane is 55. Actor Daniel Kaluuya ("Black Panther," "Get Out") is 32. Rapper-actor O'Shea Jackson Jr. ("Straight Outta Compton") is 30.

**CORRECTION**

A story on page 1A of Monday's newspaper about Erie County Technical School funding did not make clear that Millcreek Township School Board is asking to change the funding formula for future renovation projects at the school. The board rejected a resolution authorizing the current \$27.8 million project because the resolution did not include a commitment from partner school districts to change the formula for future work at the school. The district is committed to paying \$9.9 million under the current formula for renovations planned now. School Board President Gary Winschel said Monday.

**GETTING IT RIGHT**

If you notice an error, please bring it to the attention of Christopher Millette at 870-1712 or send e-mail to cmillette@timesnews.com

**Bayfront**

Continued from Page 1A

**Big moves for the neighborhood**

Since launching in 2016, Our West Bayfront has been busy with projects throughout its service area. The nonprofit neighborhood organization focuses on improving the area from Presque Isle Bay south to West 12th Street and from Sassafras Street west to the Bayfront Parkway.

Those initiatives include installing an 1,850 square-foot splash park at Bayview Park near West Second and Cherry streets that includes features which dump water from above, spray mist and bubble up from the ground; sidewalk improvements; home rehabilitation; building renovations; enhanced neighborhood security cameras/lighting; community gardens; neighborhood cleanups; and public art.

Our West Bayfront unveiled its newest project on Feb 5: A new headquarters in a 139-year-old, 5,200 square foot building in the 400 block of West Eighth Street.

The building, constructed in 1882, housed Howard's Photography for decades but had fallen into disrepair and was vacant for years before Our West Bayfront purchased the property for \$30,000 in 2018.

The first floor also includes a community meeting space and roughly 1,000 square feet of retail/commercial space that will be available for rent; three upper-floor apartments were also refurbished as part of the \$1 million project.

The nonprofit neighborhood organization has also been prolific at attracting grant dollars — roughly \$2.6 million thus far — that are crucial to those projects, which aim to boost the quality of life in Erie's west bayfront neighborhoods.

Our West Bayfront's grant funding, since 2017, includes:

- \$560,000 from the Erie Community Foundation
- \$500,000 from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency
- \$382,000 from the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
- Smaller grants from other groups, including the Erie Redevelopment Authority and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development

The group has also tapped into state tax credit programs, via Gannon University for \$175,000 each year for various programs and administrative costs.

"They helped make my place a lot better," said Erie's Anthony Williams, who received a \$7,911 Our West Bayfront grant in 2020 for facade repairs, including new windows and doors, at his home in the 100 block of Walnut Street.

Our West Bayfront "has made a big difference" in the neighborhood, said Williams, a west bayfront resident for more than 20 years. "The things they've done at Bayview Park, that's been one of the biggest improvements. Things are just a lot nicer."

**'We have a plan'**

Anna Frantz, Our West Bayfront's executive director, said she believes the group's success in attracting grants can be attributed largely to its comprehensive plan for west bayfront neighborhoods, completed in 2016 that was heavily shaped by input from residents and businesses.

That plan laid out a detailed community improvement strategy, Frantz said.

Many of those initiatives have been completed or are underway.

"We have a plan, and we're guided by that document," said Frantz, who earns \$76,790 as the organization's full-time



Erie Mayor Joe Schember checks the view from one of three new second-floor apartments, built above the new offices of Our West Bayfront in Erie. The renovated 140-year-old building at 404-406 W. Eighth St. also has first-floor commercial space available in addition to the Our West Bayfront headquarters and apartments. GREG WOHLFORD/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

director. "We had projects that we knew we wanted to get started on, and I think that we have been able to show how we will get them done and the ways we can leverage funding to get additional dollars."

Perry Wood agrees.

As ECGRA's executive director, Wood has seen and helped scrutinize Our West Bayfront's grant applications to his agency. ECGRA annually distributes millions of dollars in gross revenues from Presque Isle Downs & Casino into municipalities, neighborhood associations and other nonprofit agencies for a range of programs, events and community improvements that benefit the public.

The Gaming Revenue Authority, for example, in 2019 awarded a \$250,000 grant that is being used to help fund Our West Bayfront's improvement plans for the West Eighth Street business and retail corridor.

That area includes Our West Bayfront's newly-revamped office and the property that Wolfe and Raezer purchased.

"Their progress has been tremendous and that's one of the reasons we continue to invest with them," Wood said.

Wood added that Our West Bayfront's long-term plan also aligns with Erie Refocused, the city's long-range comprehensive development plan, which addresses the city's future need in a number of areas including housing, transportation, land use and economic development.

"They've continually made focused investments, which is what (Erie Refocused) recommends," Wood said.

**Engaging residents**

Kaitlyn Falk, 25, helps Our West Bayfront make those investments — especially when it comes to youth — as one of the neighborhood group's most active volunteers.

"I lived my whole life in the west bayfront," said Falk, the community schools coordinator at Strong Vincent Middle School, 1330 W. Eighth St., who also lives in the area. "I'm lucky because I get to participate in a lot of Our West Bayfront activities as a part of my job."

Falk has led youth fitness classes at Bayview Park, helped out with Thanksgiving dinners at the Martin Luther King Center, and volunteered at National Night Out events in Gridley Park on West Sixth Street, between Poplar and Plum streets. Falk said Our West Bayfront has given residents "the opportunity to be engaged" when it comes to community revitalization.

"What I've noticed is the kids like having something to do... And from what I've seen, a lot of the neighbors and the Gannon employees who live nearby get a chance to be involved and feel like they're really a part of something," Falk said. "There's a sense of belonging and a sense of ownership."

Our West Bayfront was initially

funded by a \$1.6 million commitment over six years from UPMC Health Plan, Gannon University, Marquette Savings Bank and Erie Insurance.

That funding is not part of the \$2.6 million Our West Bayfront has been able to secure since 2017.

However, that kind of seed money helped to position the neighborhood group as one that would eventually thrive as a "standalone organization" that would help stabilize and improve the "physical environment" in west bayfront neighborhoods, said Keith Taylor, Gannon's president.

Asked about the organization's success in accessing grant funds, Taylor said: "Funders look for stability. They look for who your partners are," Taylor said. "They've earned their own recognition and people's confidence, and all of that has been done in partnership with the neighbors."

**Building capacity, 'consistency'**

As part of her role as the city of Erie's planning director, Kathy Wyrosdick works closely with neighborhood groups across the city.

She helps bring those groups together for frequent conversations to talk about their projects and find common themes.

And Wyrosdick looks for ways to help them build capacity.

"The ones I've seen become successful in Erie have local champions that sponsored development of their strategic plan. The projects they've done align with what the neighborhood says it wants to see. And many of them also hired someone to affect the plan full-time," Wyrosdick said.

"That makes such a difference. That person has the time to dedicate to a neighborhood plan — it's that simple," Wyrosdick said. "That person can keep the plan on track. And getting grant money is only half the battle, because you have to have someone to administer it and follow all the (regulations) attached to the money."

"Most volunteer organizations have dedicated people, but many of them just don't have the time or the resources to dedicate to a neighborhood plan," Wyrosdick said.

Frantz, Our West Bayfront's executive director, believes the organization can remain steady, continue to draw funding for development, and make the neighborhoods it serves even more attractive. "I hope that Our West Bayfront continues to be an organization that people feel a part of in this neighborhood, whether they're a homeowner or renter or business owner," Frantz said. "I think we've succeeded in creating more positive energy and a more positive perception of this neighborhood. We want to make it a place where people want to stay and an area that people want to move into."

Contact Kevin Flowers at kflowers@timesnews.com. Follow him on Twitter at @ETNflowers.