



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

**EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR'S
REPORT
FOR
SEPTEMBER
2020**



BRIDGEWAY CAPITAL

Connect Opportunity with Capital

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August 1, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Perry Wood
Executive Director
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Dear Perry,

Bridgeway Capital is pleased to provide this Performance Report on the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority's 2016 Mission Related Investment (MRI) of \$1,000,000 under the Ignite Erie program. The Erie Growth Fund has been successful in sparking small business creation and growth and leveraging capital for Erie County.

Since our February 2020 report, Bridgeway made one loan from the Erie Growth Fund. L.L. Kuntz, an 18-year-old Erie-based company that designs, manufactures and tests engineered rubber and metal parts and components, received a \$375,000 working capital loan. Previously, GE Transportation was among their largest contracts. However, in 2018 and 2019 as GE Transportation began sourcing parts previously made by L.L. Kuntz, sales went down. L.L. Kurtz is now replacing these lost sales with domestic products for three new customers.

Bridgeway's loan provides the business with affordable working capital. Currently, the company is heavily supported by the owner's personal income. The loan will greatly reduce the amount of existing and personal debt in the company, allowing for better business cash flow. Further, the owner, currently in his 60s, has initiated succession planning—his daughter, who has long worked in the company is poised to become the company's next owner. This lending will help to ensure the long-term sustainability of the company. Lastly, the refinancing will allow the company to retain its 9 employees and hire 3 new FTEs within six months.

In total, Bridgeway has achieved the following:

- \$8 million in loans to 32 small businesses in Erie County;
- 86 percent of dollars lent have been directed to Bridgeway's target market of low-income people and communities and African-American individuals;
- \$7 million leveraged from other sources with the help of ECGRA funding; and
- 100.5 new jobs projected to be created and eight start-up businesses funded.

As shown in the accompanying budget, Bridgeway has successfully deployed the full \$1,000,000 provided by ECGRA's Mission Related Investment for the Ignite Erie program. This investment has leveraged \$11.2 million in additional resources for Erie's low-income people and communities.

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August 1, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Perry Wood
Executive Director
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Dear Perry,

Bridgeway Capital is pleased to provide this Performance Report on the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority's 2018 Mission Related Investment of \$2.5 million for the Inclusive Erie Fund. To complement ECGRA's funding, which is being directed to minority-owned businesses in Erie County, Bridgeway has committed an additional \$2.5 million in capital from other sources to finance non-minority-owned businesses.

Since receiving funding in October 2018 and formally launching the program on Dec. 3, Bridgeway has deployed a total of \$1,105,000 to 9 small businesses operating in Erie County. Program accomplishments to date include the following:

- \$296,000 has been lent to 5 African-American-owned businesses.
- \$689,000 has been lent to 3 non-minority-owned business.
- \$120,000 has been lent to a Syrian immigrant.
- 6 of the 8 funded companies are located in The City of Erie and operate in low- to moderate-income areas; the other companies are 1 Tagteam Logistics, which is located in McKean, and Perry's Pet, which is located in Waterford, both are in Erie County.
- To date, the Inclusive Erie Fund has supported the creation of 11 new full-time jobs.

During this reporting period, Bridgeway made a \$129,000 loan to Perry's Pet Clinic. The loan will support the purchase and renovation of a building on Perry Highway where Jessica Bahl will open her clinic. The clinic will distinguish itself by offering affordable veterinary care, annual vaccine packages, and cruelty case services. Jessica plans on hiring 3 full-time employees to serve as vet techs or assist in scheduling and financials.

Bridgeway's Inclusive Erie Fund is complemented by the Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator (EMOBA). EMOBA is designed to provide developing businesses a strong foundation for successful business growth. From the first cohort of entrepreneurs, Krystal Robinson has been able to turn an idea for a healthy food enterprise into a fleshed out business plan and marketing strategy. Currently, Bridgeway is reviewing 35 applications for EMOBA's second cohort, which is scheduled to begin in late August 2020.

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Bridgeway Capital, August 2020 Performance Report - Inclusive Erie Fund

Business	Loan Amount	Total Project Cost	Target Market	New Jobs Projected	Startup	Minority-owned	Woman-owned	Funding Source	Funding Source Terms
Johnson Real Estate Properties	\$60,000	\$66,170	Yes	Yes	0	No	Yes	No ECGRA - MRI	Medium-term loan
Crockett Apartment Rentals	\$175,000	\$175,000	Yes	Yes	0	No	Yes	No ECGRA - MRI	Medium-term loan
Autumn's Beauty Supplies	\$15,000	\$15,000	Yes	Yes	0	No	Yes	Yes ECGRA - MRI	Medium-term loan
Mark Anthony Concrete	\$500,000	\$500,000	Yes	Yes	3	No	No	No Bridgeway	Medium-term loan
Sham Middle Eastern Market	\$120,000	\$120,000	Yes	Yes	1	No	Yes	No ECGRA - MRI	Medium-term loan
Valor Labz	\$60,000	\$68,500	Yes	Yes	4	Yes	No	No Bridgeway	Medium-term loan
1 Tagteam Logistics	\$10,000	\$11,500	Yes	Yes	0	Yes	Yes	Yes ECGRA - MRI	Medium-term loan
Parris Dawson	\$36,000	\$36,000	Yes	Yes	0	No	Yes	No ECGRA - MRI	Long-term loan
Perry Pet Clinic	\$129,000	\$660,000	Yes	Yes	3	Yes	No	Yes Bridgeway	Long-term loan

Total Lending	\$1,105,000
Lending in Target Market (by #)	100%
Lending in Target Market (by \$)	100%
New Jobs Projected	11
ECGRA Funds Used	\$416,000
Funds Leveraged - Internal Bridgeway level	\$689,000
Internal Leverage Ratio (Outside funds to ECGRA funds)	1.7
Funds Leveraged - External, project level	\$1,652,170
External Leverage Ratio (Outside funds to Bridgeway funds)	1.5



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August 1, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Perry Wood, Executive Director
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Dear Perry,

Bridgeway Capital is pleased to provide this Performance Report on the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority's 2020 Mission Related Investment of \$1.6 million for the Emergency Coronavirus COVID-19 Fund, which provides low interest loans to small businesses and nonprofit organizations in Erie County.

Since receiving funding in March 2020, Bridgeway has deployed \$620,000 to 24 small businesses and 2 nonprofits operating in Erie County. Program accomplishments to date include the following:

- 103 full-time and 58 part-time jobs retained;
- 10 loans to businesses and nonprofits operating in low- to moderate-income (LMI) areas;
- 15 loans totaling \$285,000 have been closed to women- or minority-owned businesses.

During this reporting period, Bridgeway made a \$50,000 loan to Chido's Dry Cleaning. Founded in 1946, Chido's is a State Street fixture. Chido's serves numerous local institutions, including hospitals, and remained open when COVID-19 hit as an essential business. However, sales dropped and Chido's was initially unsuccessful accessing federal relief through the Payroll Protection Program. Bridgeway's loan provided the working capital needed to make payroll, pay utility bills, and retain 8 full-time and 6 part-time employees.

King Precision Solutions, a manufacturing company that produces injection molding and tool builds, lost 75% of its orders since April 2020. To replace these orders, the company began producing tool and die polishing for a local Erie firm building COVID-19 test parts. The \$50,000 loan will support the retention of 14 full-time and 2 part-time employees.

Bridgeway has also closed two loans to nonprofits—Erie Philharmonic and Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership. With performances canceled and revenue stalled, the Philharmonic required working capital to meet costs. The \$50,000 loan to the Erie Regional Chamber will allow it to continue providing access, advocacy, and awareness to the businesses throughout the Erie region—a critical service during the COVID crisis.

Bridgeway thanks ECGRA for its continued support of our efforts to stimulate economic opportunity and equitable development in Erie County. Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or comments.

Sincerely,

TJ Bogdewic
President and CEO

BRIDGEWAYCAPITAL.ORG

Bridgeway Capital, Inc.
ECGRA COVID-19 Response Funds Disbursement Report
 Thursday, July 23, 2020

COVID-19 Small Business Emergency Loan Fund									
Recipient Name	Location	Contact Person	Amount	Term	Rate	Maturity Date	Stage	Loan Date	
Mark Anthony Concrete, Inc.	2825 W. 23rd Street Erie, PA 16506	Mark Anthony II	25,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 7/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 5/31/20; 4% thereafter	6/1/2026	Closed	3/23/2020	
Traditions Unlimited, LLC	1608 W. 8th Street Erie, PA 16505	Maria Minnaugh	50,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	3/30/2020	
Flagship MultiMedia, Inc.	1001 State St #1315 Erie, PA 16501	Brian Graham	50,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/2/2020	
Integrated Foodservice Consultants, LLC dba Mi Scuzi Ristorante Italiano	2641 Myrtle Street Erie, PA 16508	Michael Farsace	20,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/3/2020	
Global Thrift Partnering	2611 French Street Erie, PA 16504	Ann Camp	10,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/7/2020	
Gem City Accounting & Tax Solutions	3614 W 12th Street Erie, PA 16505	Carol Ann Taoukhi	7,500.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/13/2020	
Ferndcliff Enterprises, LLC dba Luggagedesigners	3522 Liberty Street Erie, PA 16508	Cynthia Fitzsimmons	15,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/14/2020	
Hair HQ, LLC	4447 Buffalo Road Erie, PA 16510	Michelle Feath	10,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/14/2020	
Izzy & Gab, LLC	964 W Erie Plaza Dr Erie, PA 16505	Stephanie Maleno	10,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/14/2020	
Erie Real Estate Cleaning Solutions, LLC	3404 Atlantic Ave Erie, PA 16506	Christine Latona	7,500.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/15/2020	

Darline Services, Inc. dba A Compassionate Hart Massage Therapy	2005 W 8th St #101 Erie, PA 16505	Heather Hart	10,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/16/2020
Chido's Dry Cleaners, Inc	1103 State Street Erie, PA 16501	Thomas Chido	50,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/17/2020
First Choice Insurance Agency, Inc.	1131 West 38th St Erie, PA 16508	Christine Pustelak	20,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 4% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/20/2020
Adam C. Frano dba Affordable Plumbing Co	4915 Pinebark Court Erie, PA 16506	Adam Frano	5,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 9/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 7/31/20; 4% thereafter	8/1/2026	Closed	4/21/2020
Standard Roofing & Siding Company dba Shanty Genuine Sheds	2904 Pittsburgh Ave Erie, PA 16508	Jon & Janet Skrabacz	25,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 9/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 7/31/20; 4% thereafter	8/1/2026	Closed	4/22/2020
Pero Real Estate, LLC	532 West 8th Street Erie, PA 16502	Jason & Nadia Pero	50,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 9/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 7/31/20; 4% thereafter	8/1/2026	Closed	4/22/2020
Great Danes, Inc. dba CJ's Auto Transport	8335 Buffalo Road Harborcreek, PA 16421	Jennifer Brown	20,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 9/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 7/31/20; 4% thereafter	8/1/2026	Closed	5/4/2020
Floral Gallery, Inc.	815 State Street Erie, PA 16501	James Eaton	10,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 9/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 7/31/20; 4% thereafter	8/1/2026	Closed	5/6/2020
Redus Auto Repair, LLC	1212 Industrial Dr Erie, PA 16505	Redus Boykin	20,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 9/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 7/31/20; 4% thereafter	8/1/2026	Closed	5/8/2020
Penn Watkins Properties, LLC	7 E Arlington Road Erie, PA 16509	Brandon Penn	20,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 9/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 7/31/20; 4% thereafter	8/1/2026	Closed	5/12/2020
Lake Erie Expediting, LLC	4328 English Ave. Erie, PA 16510	Ibro Dedic	25,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 10/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 8/31/20; 4% thereafter	9/1/2026	Closed	6/10/2020
Annie's Bubble Care	4023 Rice Avenue Erie, PA 16510	Ann M. Salow	5,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 10/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 8/31/20; 4% thereafter	9/1/2026	Closed	6/22/2020

Archery Encounters, LLC	1505 State St, 4th Fl Erie, PA 16501	Timothy Case	5,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 11/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 9/30/20; 4% thereafter	10/1/2026	Closed	7/8/2020
King Precision Solutions, LLC	2200 Colonial Ave. Erie, PA 16506	Todd King	50,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 11/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 9/30/20; 4% thereafter	10/1/2026	Closed	7/10/2020
Total			<u>520,000.00</u>					

COVID-19 Nonprofit Emergency Loan Fund

Recipient Name	Location	Contact Person	Amount	Term	Rate	Maturity Date	Stage	Loan Date
Erie Regional Chamber & Growth Partnership	1128 State Street Erie, PA 16501	Tamara Philabaum	50,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 3% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/7/2020
Erie Philharmonic, Inc.	23 W 10th Street, Erie, PA 16501	Steve Weiser	50,000.00	12 mo. interest only commencing 8/1/20; 60 mo. amortizing thereafter	0% through 6/30/20; 3% thereafter	7/1/2026	Closed	4/20/2020
Total			<u>100,000.00</u>					
GRAND TOTAL			<u><u>620,000.00</u></u>					



ERIE MASONIC TEMPLE
PRESERVATION FOUNDATION

32 West Eighth Street
Suite 400
Erie, PA 16501

September 7, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

We are pleased to announce the addition of the Erie Masonic Temple to the National Register of Historic Places on August 31, 2020. This achievement was made possible by a multi-year effort of a dedicated group of volunteers culminating in the listing.

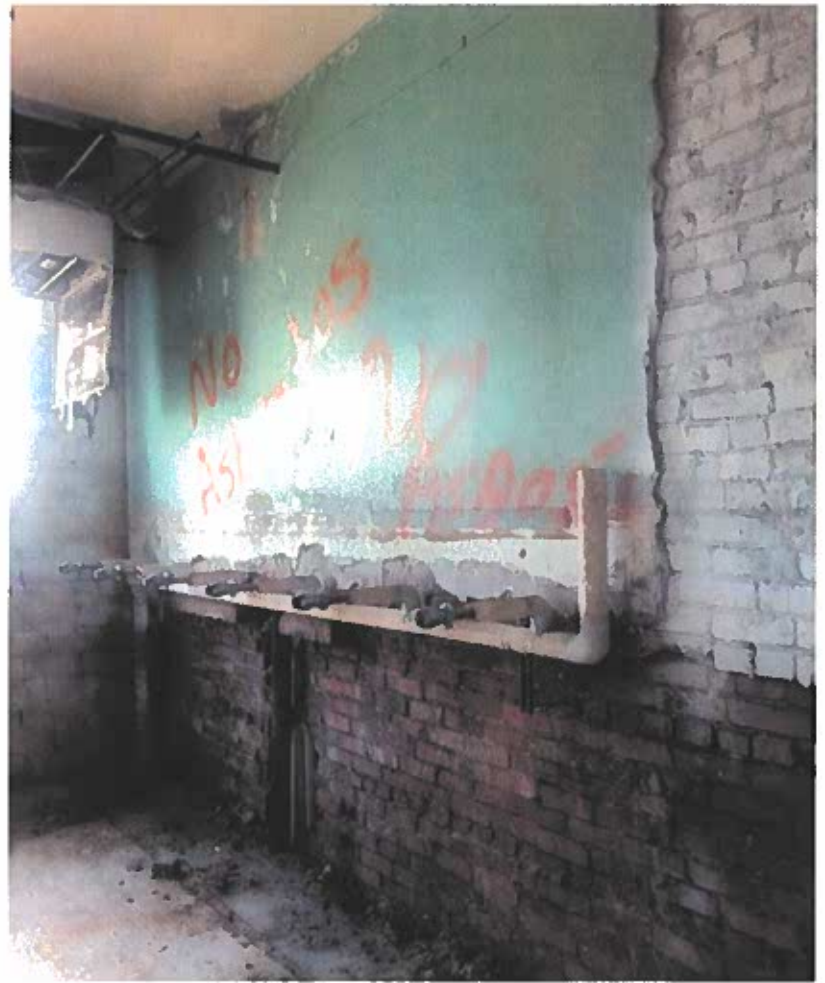
We are proud to highlight the important historical contribution of the building to the City of Erie and look forward to participating in the downtown rebirth.

Please see the attached press release for immediate distribution.

Kind Regards,

Eric

Eric Carlson
Chairman
Erie Masonic Temple Preservation Foundation
(814) 459-2425 Ext 705
foundation@masonictempleerie.com



Reimagining Wayne School Stakeholder Progress Report, September 2020

Project stakeholders: CCG, PNC Bank, Erie Community Foundation, ECGRA, Erie Bank, Northwest Bank, The Reinvestment Fund, Hamot Health Foundation

Project milestones:

New Market Tax Credit deal closed on August 14, 2020

Groundbreaking on August 20, 2020 (photo above)

First draw request submitted on September 1, 2020 (\$167,865.57)

Extensive demolition of the main entrance and ECAT's spaces complete (photos above)

Currently pursuing state RACP and federal EDA grants to support additional tenant improvement spaces

Tech After Hours programming begins on September 22 (at Erie High)

Work on ECAT's application for state licensure continues with an expected application date of December 2020

In the News:

Governor Wolf [press release](#); ERCCP Flagship Opportunity Zone [interview](#)



c/o 5031 West Ridge Road
Erie, PA 16506-1249

August 18, 2020

Board of Directors

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Terry Holmes, Esq.

Lee Marzka

Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
Attention: Tammi Michali
5340 Fryling Rd., Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Dear Tammi,

Thank you to you and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority for providing 12 face shields for the staff and cleaning crew at St. Patrick's Haven. I truly appreciate you working with us to obtain the masks to help keep our employees safe.

Thank you for partnering with us as we continue to serve homeless men in Erie while in the midst of a pandemic. We truly value and appreciate your support.

Blessings for continued good health and safety,

Betsy Wiest

St. Patrick's Haven,
a sponsored ministry of
the Sisters of St. Joseph
of Northwestern
Pennsylvania,
is a 501(c)3 nonprofit
organization.

CTE finalists named

Finalists show commitment in the toughest of times



At Port Erie Plastics, from left, moldmaker Mick Purlice, Jeff Horneman, support operations manager, and Sean Cannole, general manager, show off a mold this spring to produce plastic face shields. It was part of a collaborative effort with Penn State Behrend and two other local companies. Their project is a finalist in this year's Commitment to Erie Awards, which will be presented Sept. 23. (REG WOLFORDS FOR THE PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM MARTIN)

By Jim Martin
Erie Times-News

Commitment to Erie
Awards

Will be announced Sept. 23 at 6 p.m. at GoErie.com.

The disruption caused by COVID-19 hasn't been easy for anyone, not for families sheltering at home, not for those who have lost their jobs or been left to worry about loved ones they could not visit.

And certainly not for the businesses, organizations and nonprofits that drive the local economy and look after the needs of our neighbors.

All the same, the efforts of those employers and nonprofits have been innovative and at times heroic, both over the long haul and especially in recent months.

That was apparent to judges of the Commitment to Erie Awards, sponsored by the Erie Times-News and GoErie.com. Each year, the program honors organizations that have demonstrated a commitment to the community, their employees and their customers.

This year will be no different.

But the venue will. Instead of a celebratory dinner at Erie's Bayfront Convention Center, winners will be announced Sept. 23 at GoErie.com, where viewers can tune in to learn live about the finalists and the names of the winners.

Today, we reveal the identity of one of those winners in advance.

This year's Legacy Award, presented to a person who has worked over a period of years to improve life in Erie, will be awarded this year to Erie businessman Rick Griffith.

Griffith is a successful business owner, has served on a long list of boards and operates several schools, including Erie Institute of

See FINALISTS, D2

FINALISTS

From Page D1

Technology. He's also a developer with a vision for Erie.

But when many people hear the name Rick Griffith, they encourage us and urge us to keep life and ourselves in perspective.

Like our other winners, Griffith, who you can hear more about in the Sept. 23 program, will receive an original piece of Erie-themed artwork commissioned by the Erie Times-News.

Winners were chosen by a group of four judges that included Jim Martin, business reporter for the Erie Times-News; Scott Miller, dean of the School of Business and the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Edinboro University; Amy Doolan, associate dean of the College of Engineering & Business at Gannon University; and John Magenan, retired dean of the Black School of Business at Penn State Behrend.

Picking this year's winners wasn't easy, but it was rewarding.

Commitment to Erie Judge Scott Miller explained: "As members of the community, we are really interested in seeing our region flourish. We get excited when we see entrepreneurial spirit, commitment to mission, dedication to employees and, importantly, commitment to the Erie region by engaging with its employees and the broader community to make this a better place to live, work and play."

The finalists for this year's awards are:

Commitment to Erie Award, \$1 or more employees

• The first finalist, which we are calling the Erie Shield Project, isn't single employer at all. Instead, it's a group of them who came together to do something extraordinary.

In May, at the height of the PPE shortage, Penn State Behrend joined forces with three local companies, Port Erie Plastics, Munot Plastics and Billey Technologies, to design, produce and distribute plastic face shields for medical professionals. More than 124,000 were produced.

• Erie Homes for Children and Adults: The organization, founded in 1912 to address the needs of a single infant abandoned at Union Station, today serves more than 400 people with physical and intellectual disabilities and ranks as one of Erie's largest employers with nearly 600 employees.

• Saint Vincent Hospital: Opened by the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1875, the hospital, one of Erie's largest employers, is owned today by Highmark and the Allegheny Health Network. In just the last two years, the hospital has completed more than \$100 million worth of construction projects, including a \$25 million cancer center and a \$51 million, three-story ER and operating suite.

Commitment to Erie, 50 or fewer employees

• Debbie Vahanian and Glass Growers Gallery: The business, which was sold earlier this month, has provided an outlet for the region's artists and a place for the rest of us to come to learn about, touch and enjoy art and things of beauty for the last 46 years.

• New York Lunch, East Avenue: This business has been on East Avenue for more than 90 years and owned for the past 50 by Nina and Stephen Palouras, Greek immigrants who found their American dream in Erie. Along with their son, Gus, they are still at it, serving up Greek dogs, burgers and a long list of other things to takeout customers.

Community Service, 50 or fewer employees

• Young's Cleaners turned a challenge into an opportunity and found a way to keep their employees busy and productive when the coronavirus took a bite out of the drycleaning business. They began sewing and selling cloth face masks that were scooped up by customers who found themselves with a sudden need.

• Fat Mom's Grub: When COVID-19 shut down schools, owners Jason and Janet Mann decided to offer kids a simple lunch for \$1 at their Corry business. Then they recruited volunteers and donations began to come in. The \$1 lunch became free and before it was all over more than 25,000 free lunches were distributed.



Stephen Palouras and wife Nina, 79, are shown with their son Gus Palouras on Dec. 4 at New York Lunch on East Avenue. The business is a finalist for this year's Commitment to Erie Award for employers with fewer than 50 employees. (JACK MARRASIAN FOR PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM MARTIN)

more than 50 employees. Scott Enterprises: This family-owned company wanted to do something for the community at a time when businesses were shut down and many of their own employees were laid off. Once a week, Scott Enterprises began handing out chef-prepared meals that would serve four. More than 16,000 meals were distributed.

• Country Fair: Recognized by Forbes as one of the best mid-sized companies to work for in America, Country Fair has found numerous ways to help the community, including the distribution last year of more than 200,000 pounds of food to Second Harvest Food Bank.

Last year, customers who used Country Fair's special charity pumps helped raise more than \$20,000 for each of five charities.

New Business of the Year

• Underdog BBQ: As the focal point of last year's Undercover Billionaire television show, Underdog BBQ provided Erie with exposure to a nationwide audience. Now, as the company looks to begin franchising the restaurant concept, the Erie story is likely to be heard by even more people.

• Room 33 Speakeasy: Owners Rebecca Slyn and husband Rob Mahrt had no good reason to be optimistic when COVID-19 forced them to close their non-essential business. But their business, which had depended almost entirely on alcohol sales, became a two-shift takeout restaurant with a creative

menu, offering takeout cocktails and kits to make special meals at home.

Agent of change

• Erie Community Foundation: Led by Mike Hatcher, the organization has grown over the last 33 years from 53 endowments worth \$20 million to 850 funds valued at \$286 million.

Along the way, the organization has established Erie Gives, contributed to the Erie Downtown Development Corp. and was instrumental in bringing Magee Womens Research Institute to Erie.

• Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership: Led by James Grunke, the organization has worked over the past year to make economic development an Erie priority by raising money for the cause, identifying areas of focus and hosting an economic development conference that drew national attention.

In recent months, the chamber has worked during COVID-19 to be both a primary source of information and the voice of the local business community.

Workplace of the year

• Red Letter Hospitality, which operates several popular Erie-area restaurants, was hit like all restaurant companies when businesses were forced to shut down.

But the company stayed focused on a few key priorities: Helping employees, helping the community and living to fight another day. Employees were helped by

a \$28,000 fundraiser and free weekly meals distributed to employees and their families. Red Letter also delivered more than 7,000 meals to essential workers.

• Gannon University: The university has made headlines over the past couple years for its investments, including the \$20 million renovation of Knight Tower.

Equally important is the university's commitment to its students, faculty and staff. Gannon has established goals to address employee concerns about communication and hopes for additional benefits. Working with the Binsy Institute, Gannon also created a campuswide rewards and recognition program.

Nonprofit of the year

• Meals on Wheels: For nearly 50 years, Meals on Wheels of Erie has been delivering meals to older residents of the city and surrounding communities. Never has that work been more important than during recent months when many of its older clients needed meals and groceries delivered more than ever.

Each year, Meals on Wheels delivers more than 20,000 meals and shops for groceries more than 500 times.

• Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania: The food bank has seen the need for its services grow in recent months along with rising unemployment numbers and economic insecurity. Under normal circumstances, Second Harvest solicits and distributes millions of pounds of food to member agencies in 11 counties.

• WQLN Public Media: For more than 50 years, WQLN has been serving the Erie community, providing educational programming as well as history, arts and documentary programs.

Its mission has expanded over recent months as COVID-19 has sent all of us looking for reliable information and clarity. WQLN stepped into that void by providing a forum for public briefings by Erie County government and access to both the arts and public meetings.

Contact Jim Martin at jmartin@timesnews.com. Follow him on Twitter @ETNMartin.