



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

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



INVESTING IN ERIE'S FUTURE, NOW.

A REPORT ON **ECGRA'S PARTNERSHIP WITH BRIDGEWAY CAPITAL**

Since 2016, the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) has partnered with Bridgeway Capital to advance its mission to develop Erie's entrepreneurial ecosystem by spurring small business development. Bridgeway, headquartered in Pittsburgh with a satellite office in Erie, is a CDFI extending access to affordable and flexible capital to under-resourced, underestimated small and minority businesses and non-profits.



IGNITE Erie

Sparked by an initial \$1 million dollar investment from ECGRA, Bridgeway has made \$8 million in business loans available to 32 small business in Erie County since 2016 - that's a 700% return on investment. Important loans were granted in communities where businesses have helped create sustainable wages and revitalized the local economies they serve. The support of ECGRA's initial investment also spurred an additional \$3.2 million in private capital for small businesses

HOFFMAN UNITED

Hoffman United (HU) is a construction, property management, and investment company dedicated to being community leaders and redeveloping the Erie area. HU will make long-lasting economic impacts and help Erie thrive for years to come. Hoffman United's commitment to aiding in the development of downtown Erie through the procurement, rehabilitation, development, construction, and management of blighted/abandoned properties, makes them a crucial part of Erie's renaissance

Bridgeway provided Hoffman United a \$1,000,000 loan to support the acquisition of investment real estate in the City of Erie.

The portfolio includes 7 properties consisting of 34 apartments, 7 garages, and 1 commercial retail unit.

LL KURTZ

After decades of working as a mechanical engineer for other companies, Bill Kurtzhals started his own business, LL Kurtz, 20 years ago in Erie. LL Kurtz designs, manufactures, and tests engineered rubber parts from the ground up working with large clients like Firestone and the United States Government.

COVID-19 forced LL Kurtz into a tough spot, owing on equipment they'd purchased for growth that was derailed by the pandemic. Kurtzhals' local bank was unwilling to take on the refinancing. Bridgeway stepped in with a loan to help the company and save its employees but perhaps most importantly, it also allowed Kurtzhals to prepare for the business's next generation—to be led by his daughter, Leslie Paradisi.

“Working with him allows me to support his goals and why he started the business: to produce a highly technical USA-made parts at a fair price and provide local jobs- It is what I want to be a part of!”

~ Leslie

Bridgeway Capital provided LL Kurtz a \$375,000 loan to refinance all existing debt and improve cash flow. The additional working capital allowed Bill to hire several new employees.

INCLUSIVE ERIE

In FY 2018, in partnership with the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority, Bridgeway launched the Urban Entrepreneurship Program and the Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator (EMOBA). These groundbreaking programs help minority entrepreneurs develop and launch businesses, facilitated with extensive mentoring, one-on-one tailored technical assistance, and streamlined lending with somewhat relaxed credit standards.

Financed by ECGRA and managed by Bridgeway Capital, the **Erie Inclusive Fund will invest at least \$5 million in new loans in Erie County by 2022**, with a commitment to **invest half, \$2.5 million, in minority-owned businesses.**

\$5
million

\$2.5
million invested
in minority-owned
businesses

Erie Urban Entrepreneurship Program

Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator

More than 86% of dollars lent have been directed towards low-income businesses and communities and African Americans including the Erie Urban Entrepreneurship Program and the Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator. Both programs have helped minority entrepreneurs to develop and launch their businesses – a boost to the local economy and Erie’s investment in Black- and minority-owned businesses.

Since 2018, \$1,565,00 has been deployed to 10 Erie County businesses, creating 11 new jobs.

\$416,000



**5 AFRICAN AMERICAN
OWNED BUSINESSES**

\$1,149,000



**4 NON-MINORITY
OWNED BUSINESS**

\$120,000



**1 SYRIAN
IMMIGRANT
OWNED BUSINESS**

7 of the 10 funded companies are located in The City of Erie and operate in low- to moderate income areas

- Tagteam Logistic located in McKean
- Perry’s Pet in Waterford
- Rushin Enterprises based in Corry

SHAM MIDDLE EASTERN MARKET

Sham Middle Eastern Market received a \$120,000 fixed rate loan to provide growth capital needed for the grocer to survive and help families thrive during the pandemic. The local grocer is now able to effectively and competitively deliver halal meats, fresh produce and baked goods to Erie's burgeoning Syrian and middle eastern population. Sham Middle Eastern Market brings fresh foods to a low-income area located in an Erie food desert.

JOHNSON REAL ESTATE

Johnson Real Estate business owners, Sean and Kenya Johnson, began purchasing and renovating investment real estate in the city of Erie in 2012. They own several affordable residential properties and the building where their Learning Ladder Early Childcare business operates. This minority-owned business is achieving great things. Not only is their business growing, they are adding properties to their portfolio, providing affordable housing and supporting businesses that provide essential services, like childcare.

TASTE & SEE: ALL THINGS FRUITS & VEGETABLES

Krystal Robinson entered EMOBA with an idea – she wanted to share her passion for healthy food and cooking with the Erie community. A participant in EMOBA's first cohort, she has been working intensively to build a business that increases access to healthy food in Erie.

Through the accelerator, she gained access to a network of business development professionals who guided her to develop a business plan and marketing strategy. Today her company is fully conceptualized, Taste and See: All Things Fruits & Vegetables, and she is busy working with the Erie Downtown Development Corporation as a vendor in Erie's Flagship City Food Hall. Krystal's passion for nutrition and her community are part of Erie's future.

"My goal is to help Erie to look good and feel good because it eats good."

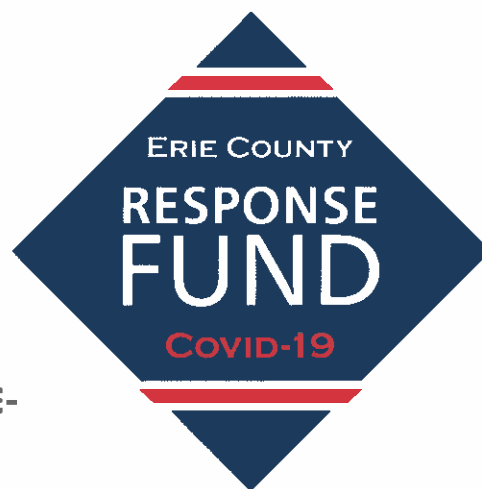
- Krystal Robinson, Owner
Taste and See: All Things Fruits and Vegetables

ERIE COUNTY EMERGENCY COVID-19 RELIEF FUND

In March 2020, ECGRA made an impact in our community by creating a COVID-19 Response fund in partnership with Bridgeway that focused on small business, nonprofits, and humanitarian aid efforts. The pandemic wreaked havoc on communities and small businesses across the county. This ECGRA investment allowed Bridgeway to make very low interest loans quickly to small businesses and nonprofit organizations in Erie County in desperate need of working capital as revenues plummeted.

Since March 2020, Bridgeway has deployed **\$633,200** to **25 small businesses** and **2 nonprofits** operating in Erie County saving 103 full-time positions and 58 part time jobs.

22
loans
TO BUSINESSES AND
NONPROFITS OPERATING
IN **LOW- TO MODERATE-**
INCOME (LMI) AREAS



16
loans
TOTALING **\$298,200**
HAVE BEEN CLOSED TO
WOMEN OR MINORITY-
OWNED BUSINESSES

CHIDO'S DRY CLEANING

A \$50,000 Bridgeway loan to Chido's Dry Cleaning helped preserve an iconic Erie business. Founded in 1946, Chido's is a State Street fixture. Chido's serves numerous local institutions, including hospitals, and remained open as an essential business when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. 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

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 Bridgeway loan will support the retention of 14 full-time and 2 part-time employees.

ERIE PHILHARMONIC

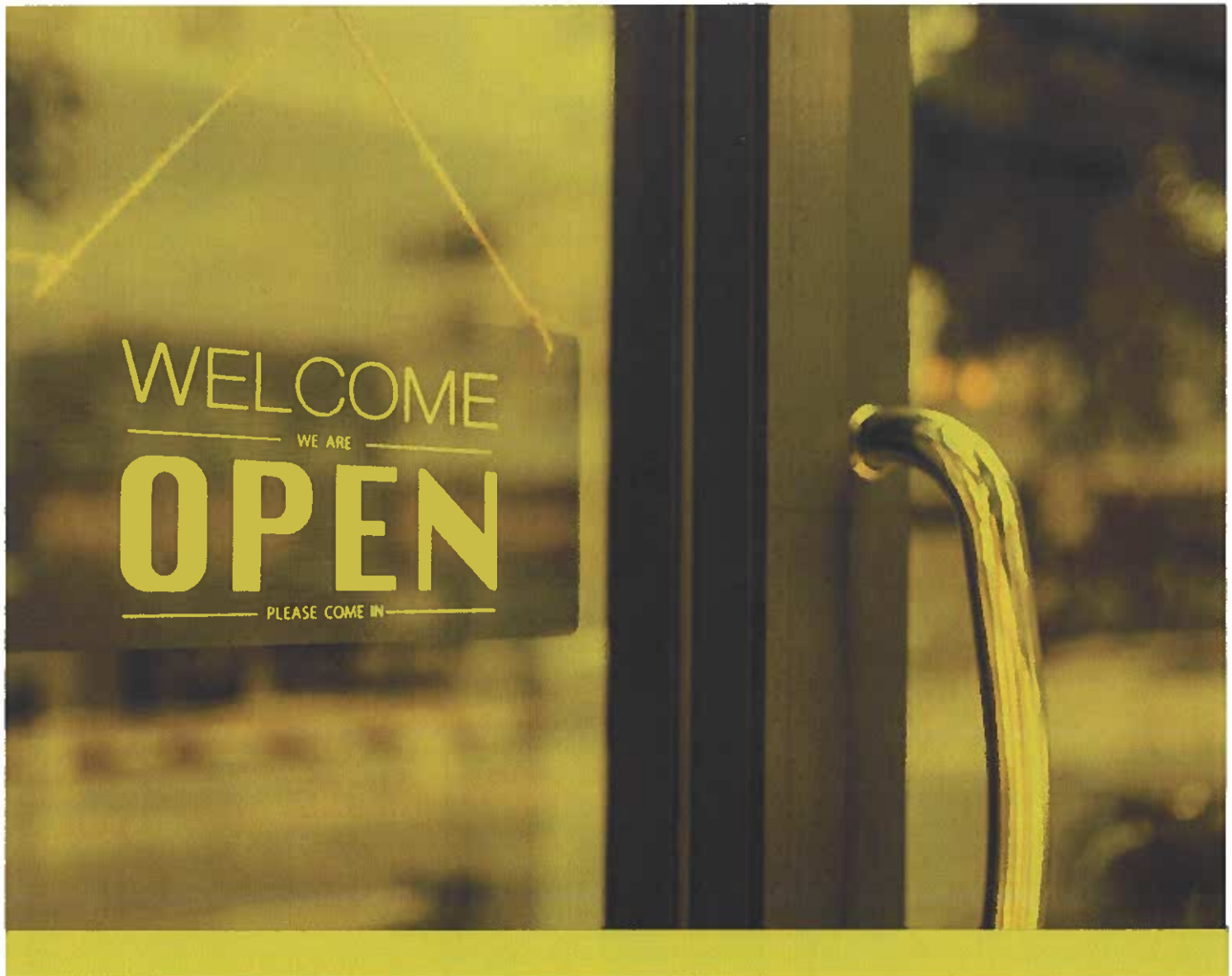
With performances canceled and revenue stalled, the **Philharmonic required working capital to meet costs and were provided a \$50,000 loan to meet their needs.**

ERIE REGIONAL CHAMBER AND GROWTH PARTNERSHIP

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.

CONCLUSION

This is a smart investment in Erie County. Prior to ECGRA's partnership with Bridgeway Capital, Erie County did not have access to a viable CDFI, which is a key element of the economic development ecosystem. The investment to Bridgeway Capital has been a great return on investment and is a tremendous success for Erie County and small business owners. ECGRA continues to elevate Erie County and is empowering businesses to thrive by continuing to invest in its future.





Strategic Planning Committee Meeting

Wednesday, June 30, 2021
10:00am
Via ZOOM

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81028847135>

Meeting ID: 810 2884 7135
Password: Not Required

AGENDA

1. Community Assets – Parks, Fields, & Trails
 - a. 10 applications

2. Good of the Order

2021 Community Assets Grant Program

PARKS, FIELDS, & TRAILS - Project Summaries

Total Requests: 10

Total Requested: \$182,910.12

Program Purpose: To provide funding for capital projects to create, protect, or improve publicly accessible parks, athletic fields, and trails throughout Erie County. Funding can also be used to increase or improve access to recreational facilities.

Erie County health assessments continue to show a decline in physical activity and an increase in preventable illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes. Investment in parks, fields, and trails can encourage healthy lifestyles, move towards equitable distribution of park opportunities, and even attract athletic competitions which enhance local tourism. Additionally, an investment in parks can help rejuvenate neighborhoods and Main Streets throughout Erie County.



1. Project Name – Edinboro Parks Beautification

Project Sponsor - Borough of Edinboro

Amount of Request - \$ 11,250

Project Total - \$ 22,500

Match Status – Secured by the borough from its general fund

Project Summary – The project will enhance existing parks and amenities like Edinboro Lake by adding trash receptacles, a drinking fountain/water bottle filling station, playground equipment, create four stations for a bicycle rental program and repair a pavilion.

Plans/Public Participation – The borough is working in conjunction with the newly formed Edinboro Community and Economic Development, the Lakeside Association, Edinboro University, and Boy Scout Troop #176. The ECED hired a consultant to do a plan for the borough and had a number of public meetings.

Recommendation – Fund the project as it has community support, matching funds, a good track record of completing projects, and it advances the program goals.

2. Project Name – Wells Park – Phase 1 (Basketball Court)

Project Sponsor – Girard Borough

Amount of Request - \$ 25,000

Project Total - \$ 125,000

Match Status – Secured by the borough from its general fund

Project Summary – Wells Park is located in downtown Girard adjacent to the borough hall, a playground, and pool. The current popular basketball court has deteriorated and will be completely rebuilt.

Plans/Public Participation – The decision to rejuvenate the basketball courts came from a borough masterplan currently underway. The project has already been publicly bid and the approved low bid is in line with the proposed budget.

Recommendation – Fund the project as it has broad community support, matching funds, Girard has a good track record of completing projects, and it advances the program goals of encouraging outdoor recreation. The project can begin as soon as funding is awarded.

3. Project Name – Southwest Park Project

Project Sponsor – Union City Borough

Amount of Request - \$ 25,000

Project Total - \$ 90,477

Match Status – The borough has applied for funds through PA DCNR and the Union City Community Foundation. The decision is anticipated in September.

Project Summary – The project will include rehabilitation of an important, yet underutilized neighborhood park. It will include new sidewalks, ADA parking & access improvements, installation of a pavilion & a "half court" basketball court, new swing set, protective play surface, benches & safety fencing. The borough wants to invest in the park as the neighborhood around it is below the median income and has an underserved population.

Plans/Public Participation – The decision to address the park in this location came from a park masterplan developed two years ago with ECGRA and DCNR funding.

Recommendation – Fund the project as it has broad community support, Union City Borough has a good track record of completing projects, and it advances the program goals of encouraging outdoor recreation and an equitable distribution of park investment.

4. Project Name – North Hills Golf Course Building Improvements

Project Sponsor – City of Corry

Amount of Request - \$ 25,000

Project Total - \$ 50,000

Match Status – Corry will use funds from the golf course enterprise fund. The transfer was discussed with Corry city council.

Project Summary – Corry proposes to replace the roof at the city owned North Hills Municipal Golf Course cart barn. The city also plans to install all new roof support beams and to install vinyl siding on the ends of the building.

Plans/Public Participation – The project was discussed at council meetings.

Recommendation – The application indicates that the labor for the project will be from staff members which is an in-kind match. ECGRA does not allow in-kind donations of materials or labor. The maximum allowable grant would be \$12,500 which reflects 50% of the material costs. The project does not directly support or encourage outdoor exercise. ECGRA funded an irrigation system upgrade at the golf course in 2020 (funded in 2018 for \$21,404).

5. Project Name – Baldwin Park Pickleball Courts

Project Sponsor – City of Erie

Amount of Request - \$ 25,000

Project Total - \$ 182,591.20

Match Status – The city has applied for \$155,200 from PA DCNR to fund the project and there is a letter of commitment from the Erie Pickleball Association for \$25,000. The city has pledged no funds towards the project - only in-kind services which is in addition to the project total.

Project Summary – The city proposes to create six pickleball courts at the site of currently deteriorated tennis courts at the city’s Baldwin Park located at West 25th and Geist. (Two pickleball courts can fit within one tennis court.)

Plans/Public Participation – The city of Erie does not have a park masterplan and little public input was sought regarding the project and funding application. The vast majority of letters of support in the application are from suburban residents.

Recommendation – The city of Erie has not completed two ECGRA funded projects from 2018 despite time extensions. Additionally, without public participation or input, the uncertainty of matching funds, and the question of the need for ECGRA funding, the recommendation is to ask the city to re-apply the next program cycle.

6. Project Name – Disc Golf at Pleasant Ridge Park

Project Sponsor – Fairview Parks and Recreation Authority

Amount of Request - \$ 5,000

Project Total - \$ 10,000

Match Status – The cash match has been secured.

Project Summary – The authority proposes to create an 18-hole disc (frisbee) golf course at the 86 acre Pleasant Ridge Park in Fairview Township.

Plans/Public Participation – Planning for the park began in 2019 when the Lake Erie Disc Golf club approached Fairview about creating a course at Pleasant Ridge Park. The authority surveyed residents and others to gauge interest and support. The majority of respondents were in favor of the project. Nationwide the sport is growing, and Erie County has just three public disc courses. Two of which are on college campuses. There is support from the Township supervisors as well as pledges of in-kind labor and materials.

Recommendation – The small investment in the course will create another public disc golf course in Erie County, give residents a no-cost outdoor recreation opportunity furthering the program goals, and give Erie County a venue for disc golf tournaments which can enhance the local economy. Recommendation is to fully fund the modest request.

7. Project Name – Goodell Gardens Trail System, Phase 1

Project Sponsor – Goodell Gardens

Amount of Request - \$ 12,365.12

Project Total - \$ 24,730.26

Match Status – Goodell will use funds from its reserves if matching grants or donations are not secured.

Project Summary – Goodell Gardens proposes to create an additional 2.7 miles of walking trails within its 80-acre property. Project will also create benches, a Story Walk activity, a shelter, and signage.

Plans/Public Participation – Goodell Gardens completed a community survey in 2020 along with a three-year strategic plan for its property in Edinboro. In 2020, the Edinboro Community and Economic Development (ECED) group also formulated a plan which called for more walking trails in the borough.

Recommendation – Goodell continues to collaborate with the community and enhance its property. ECED’s masterplan for the borough encourages four-season activities like walking trails. The project is also in-line with ECGRA program goals and Goodell is able to complete the project in a timely manner.

8. Project Name – Headwaters Park Trail Improvement

Project Sponsor – Headwaters NRC Trust (Erie County Conservation District)

Amount of Request - \$ 9,295.00

Project Total - \$ 18,590.00

Match Status – The matching funds are secured and will be provided by the Erie County Conservation District and Headwaters Natural Resource Center Trust. ECCD will provide \$7,300.00 and Headwaters NRC Trust will provide \$1,995.00

Project Summary – Headwaters Park has recently completed a significant expansion to its public space and trail system. There are several details that need to be completed including protective gates to its trailheads, finishing details to the rain garden, and drainage systems to protect the new trails. The park is open to the public and is located at Route 8 and I-90.

Plans/Public Participation – Public involvement began with the Master Site Plan (MSP), approved by the Erie County Conservation District Board of Directors in March of 2015. This collaboration was realized through participation by government agencies, municipalities, local educators, and public and Park neighbors. The creation of the MSP has guided the direction of the park and the current and future decisions regarding its maintenance, expansion, and preservation for the public. Staff stays in constant contact with its visitors in multiple ways, mainly through website updates, phone conversations and emails, conversations with visitors on the trail, and through social media. It has been found that through this spectrum of means to connect with the public that staff is efficiently able to gather feedback and ideas from a variety of demographics and visitors to the park. This wide range of ideas and feedback has been valuable when designing current and future plans for the park.

Recommendation – ECGRA has invested \$51,751 in the park through two grants since 2018. The relatively small request would complete and protect that investment. The trail system encourages active recreation and enhances one of the few parks in that area of Erie County (eastern Millcreek). The recommendation is to fully fund the project.

9. Project Name – Erie to Pittsburgh Trail Segment in Downtown Corry

Project Sponsor – Impact Corry

Amount of Request - \$ 25,000

Project Total - \$ 458,239 (\$48,000 in-kind property donations)

Match Status – To date \$25,500 is secured in cash. \$316,475 has been requested from PA DCNR

Project Summary – Impact Corry will build 4,700 linear feet of multi-use trail through the heart of Corry to link to rails to trails projects: one to the north of Corry (connecting Clymer, NY) and one to the south which will connect to Spartansburg in Crawford County. The segment is important to the completion of the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail which will link the two cities by stitching together trails along the former railroad lines in Western Pennsylvania. As part of the project, they will create 3.17 acre park, trailhead, a spur connecting to Corry’s Mead Park, and rehabilitate blighted property on end of trail as welcome center and trailhead.

Plans/Public Participation – Numerous plans and efforts include the development of the formerly used rail lines in and around Corry as multi-use trails and the development of Corry as a “Trail Town” which would welcome trail users and leverage their visits to help bolster small businesses. That adjacent property owners would be willing to donate property for the trail connection illustrates the significant support from Corry residents.

Recommendation – The Erie to Pittsburgh Trail has significant momentum right now and Impact Corry has a number of projects underway to compliment that effort. Impact Corry has five ECGRA funded projects open currently. Staff will discuss with Impact Corry their ability to take on an additional project, but otherwise recommends the project funding.

10. Project Name – Transforming Urban and Everyday Spaces into Early Learning Places

Project Sponsor – United Way of Erie

Amount of Request - \$ 20,000

Project Total - \$ 40,000

Match Status – \$13,500 in cash from the United Way and \$6,500 in in-kind.

Project Summary – The proposal is to place items (descriptions were not provided) in public spaces (with Erie’s Wayne Park to be the first) which will stimulate young minds and foster early learning.

Plans/Public Participation – All of the project planning was internal. There was no public involvement or input.

Recommendation – The project was not vetted publicly. The proposal is vague and the budget contains \$6,500 in in-kind donations which are not eligible under the ECGRA guidelines. The proposal to assist children with early learning has merit, but the Parks, Fields, & Trails program is very clearly designed to encourage physical activity to promote a healthier Erie County. The proposal is a youth and education project which may need more refinement. Recommendation would be to seek funding from the Erie Community Foundation.

Workforce training program pitched to City Council

BY CAROL FIELDING
carol@thecorryjournal.com

During a planning session Thursday evening, Corry City Council welcomed Kevin Arrington, president of A+ Strategies and Corporate Solutions, and Michael Chevalier, president of Preferred Systems, as they presented a Family Matters Economic Stimulus Package.

The program provides workforce training, focused on young adults from ages 18 to 30, to help get them plugged into job opportunities in Corry.

The total cost for the project is \$4.5 million.

"This won't come out of anyone's budget and will not be a burden to the taxpayer," Arrington said.

Funding for the program is being requested in the form of grants from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), Erie Community Foundation, Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority and through Impact Corry.

The approach of A+SCS comes in three stages totaling 13 weeks of study.

The first stage is four weeks of leadership development with remedial math and English skills.

"Leadership development teaches the student why you are in society, what is your place in society, and your responsibilities," Arrington said.

Five weeks of the second stage focuses on workforce development. Oral communication, financial literacy, why to have a relationship with a bank, career assessments, conflict resolution, and work etiquette are some of the major topics.

The third stage and final four weeks is specialized occupational training at the employer location.

"At the end of those 13 weeks students will have built personal skills and relationships with the employers so they can get those open jobs," Arrington said.

"The biggest thing we want people to know is that there are stipends to the participants," Arrington added. "We pay them to participate in the program. It has to be worth their time to stay engaged and make a commitment."

For the first nine weeks participants will receive \$10 an hour. For the last four weeks, participants will work a minimum of 20 hours a week at \$12 an hour. Then A+SCS will try to line them up with jobs that will start at \$14 an hour, currently almost twice minimum wage.

◀ See Council, P.2

cil

(Continued from front page)

Mitchell expects there to be 300 jobs open in Corry in the next three to five years.

"It sounds like the applicant for all of these funds will be the City of Corry," said City Manager Jason Biondi. "This means the City Council will have to approve the project and approve for your entity to apply for those funds in the city's name."

Arrington confirmed that would be the case.

"Yes, the city of Corry would be the recipient of the funds and we would

contract with the city for the program," Arrington said.

He went on to note the many improvements being worked on in Corry.

"A big thing I'm hearing about in Corry is that you're moving at lightning speed, so what we really want to do is align some resources that make sense for all of us to push and grow in the same direction," Arrington said. "We bring resource alignment into different entities, in this case, the city of Corry.

My organization will focus on workforce development and entrepreneurial education."

Chevalier noted his experience in continuing education and helping people find jobs.

"I work with the community, the unions, trying to match people with jobs and identifying the right people to work," Chevalier said. "I also work in drug and alcohol employee assistance and treatment, and mental health. We deal with continuing education and certifi-

cation boards to get people certified."

"We're prepared to train 100 people over the next four years. If we can get these people starting out making \$30,000 a year at places like Erie Insurance, AHN St. Vincent, UPMC Hamot, and all of the skilled trades and unions, this will also create a pipeline for students at our local colleges who are more focused and better prepared for their educational and occupational college experience."

Renaissance Block Grants make impact in Corry

BY CAROL FIELDING
carol@thecorryjournal.com

In 1971, Glenn and Lois Henderson bought their home in Corry. Built in the 1920s, their house had undergone some updates, but the roof was showing signs of wear and needed to be replaced.

In 2019, right about the time the family was contemplating the cost of a new roof, Lois Henderson heard about the Renaissance Block Grant program from Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority

(ECGRA). As a senior citizen on a fixed income, Henderson would not have been able to afford a new roof without the help of a grant.

But thanks to the grant, the Hendersons' home is now sporting a new roof. And that home is only one of 22 homes that received renovations thanks to the grant.

"ECGRA has been transformational throughout the county by offering all of its programs, but for residents and residential homeowners and landlords, the Renaissance Block Grant is

making a huge difference," said Charles Gray, executive director of Impact Corry. "We wouldn't be getting this done without them."

Since 2019, Corry is in its second round of ECGRA Renaissance Block funding.

"Our first round in the grant had 22 participants and leveraged \$190,924.30 in matching local investment," Gray said. "This round will fund another 20 projects projected to have a \$203,500 local matching investment."

The block grants began with the area called

Schoolhouse Block, which comprised properties between Wayne Street and North Center Street, and East Bond and East Irving Street to East Frederick Street.

The next section, referred to as Park View, is currently in progress. Park View is comprised of Wayne Street to North Center Street, and East Smith Street to East Main Street.

"We started in the fall of 2019 with those community meetings and the four neighborhoods were chosen," Gray said. "Now everybody from

Schoolhouse Block has had their opportunity to use the funds and we're more than halfway done with Park View."

The next portion of the city to be transformed will be Hiram's Haunt, so named because the house of Hiram Cory, founder of Corry, was in that neighborhood. Hiram's Haunt runs from North Center Street to Mead Avenue, and West Washington Street to West Smith Street. More neighborhoods will follow.

◀ See Grants, P.3

Grants

(Continued from front page)

"These neighborhoods were based on formulas of how many people wanted to participate, did the work, how many properties, and how much money was going to be invested, so it was all a very fair process," Gray explained.

The current list of properties in Park View will have to be finished prior to the next round of any new funding being opened for Hiram's Haunt.

"Essentially, the program is that we match up to \$5,000 of homeowner or landlord investment," Gray explained. "When the next grant opens up, people may apply, the application goes through the process, and when it comes their turn, if it's a do-it-yourself project we pay for materials, not labor."

"If it's a contractor then we match it. They give us their bids, we create a contract saying we promise to reimburse a certain amount for the job, they do the job, they bring us their paid invoices, and then we reimburse. We typically reimburse in under two weeks."

Because people have been curious to know which houses in Corry have undergone improvements, as part of the First Fridays in October, Impact Corry will have literature and maps where people can take self-guided tours.

"This will be where people can see not only the Renaissance Block homes but also the Mission Main Street properties," Gray said. "Hopefully when we get Paint the Town off the launch pad this summer, people can walk through

the city and see every house and business that's been improved.

"The main thing is we want to thank ECGRA because this is huge," Gray added. "Because of the homeowners matches, some of them spend more than the \$5,000. So it actually leverages a specific match. Local dollars going into the houses. I think that's very impressive."

"This is all part of our Community Strategic Plan to help homeowners. Until we really fix things up in Corry there is an equity gap. Before, if you invested in your house you weren't going to get all that money back. This is going to help people invest in their homes and jump that equity gap. I think that it is bringing a sense of pride and loving your house a little more."

Thanks to Renaissance Block, the Hendersons' family home remains safe and dry.

Enthused by the roof investment, Lois has plans for new windows, a new storm door, and maybe new siding to keep her home beautiful and useful for generations to come.

"This is a home where many generations gather together for holidays and special occasions," Henderson said. "I love Corry, I raised my sons here. Today, I am enjoying being a grandma to seven grandchildren and a nana to 15 great-grandchildren."

All of whom consider grandma's house their second home, and will for many years to come, thanks to the Renaissance Block Grant.

A look at what's behind Union City's mural

BY MARYANN MOOK
Staff writer

entertained the Union City region for more than 80 years.

George Warden is depicted there.

Warden was a sousaphone player for the Coleman Band, a musical group that

him without both arms.

Union City's industrial heritage, firefighting history, wooden furniture manufacturing, historic buildings, rail industry, French Creek and strong sports programs are all represented there, as

well.

Anyone — pedestrians or motorists — entering Union City from the south will be greeted by all of these figures and more on a mural that spans the south wall of a building at 28 S. Main St.

The mural was designed and made by artists Tom Ferraro and Steve Mik of the Looking Glass Project in Erie. Ferraro and Ed Grout started the business in 2012 with a mission to encourage people to tell their stories, and then transform those stories into public art.

When Grout left a couple of years ago, Mik joined Ferraro in the collaboration.

"There was a call for artists for the mural, so we submitted a proposal for it," Ferraro said.

Union City Borough and Union City Pride Inc. had advertised for artists to do the mural project.

Ferraro said, with any job, their process is to always engage the community and go in with no preconceived notion. They did that during

COVID-19.

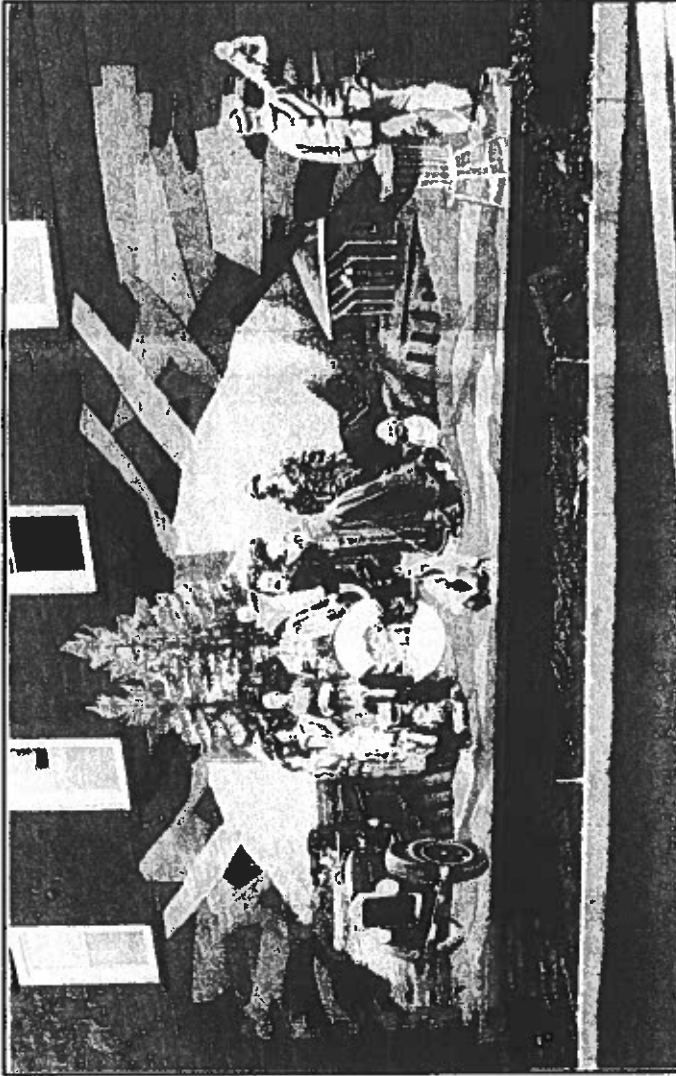
Ferraro and Mik engaged the community early in the design process to help identify key themes and colors. They gathered input through surveys, stories and interviews, all of which supported the understanding that Union City played a main role in the development of Erie County.

Additional information was gathered from resources found in the Union City Historical Museum and Erie County Public Library, from the Union City Historical Society, online and during visits to the community.

"We actually went two times to the museum because there were so many things in there," Ferraro said. "We toured the museum one time and the other time we went through it ourselves."

They also researched Union City history in the reference books at Erie County's Blasco Memorial Library.

◀ See Mural, P.2



Manyann Mook/The Corry Journal
A mural designed and made by artists Tom Ferraro and Steve Mik of the Looking Glass Project greets visitors heading north on Main Street in Union City.

Covering Corry, Columbus, Concord, Clymer, Elgin, Findley Lake, Spartansburg, Spring Creek, Union City & Wayne Township

Mural

(Continued from front page)

They also walked around town.

"We wanted to get a sense of the landscape," Ferraro said. "We went to the trestle and the (American Legion) ball park."

Mik said, to him, Union City is a place trying to revitalize itself.

"It has a long history of furniture dedication people carry with them," Mik said. "They are trying to revitalize the town with new ideas. People have a strong sense of pride for the community."

The two artists presented the mural May 26th during the borough's 150th celebration of the naming of Union City.

Here is the artists' description of the mural:

The composition is framed with an archway, which reinforces the location as a gateway and welcomes visitors into the downtown district. The archway is made up of abstract shapes that symbolize some of the natural elements surrounding the community.

The darker green and orange shapes represent the forests and agricultural community that surround the borough. In the lower section of the mural, the composition rides on blue and light green shapes that flow across the bottom, representing the impact of the fortunes and perils of French Creek on the town.

Images of Union City citizens through the ages are at the center. They represent the community's story through its people and provide a visual timeline that stretches from the late 19th century to the present. These individuals are not dignitaries or celebrities, but rather, they represent ordinary people — the true treasure of the community.

The images are all sepia toned and were found in the photographic collections of the Union City Museum and Historical Society and in print and digital publications.

Starting from the bottom left, two unidentified boys surround a heating stove representing Union City's heritage of manufacturing and commerce.

Above the boys stand two women and a football player taken from a 1924 Union City High School yearbook. The women and athlete symbolize Union City's commitment to and value of education and nurturing a competitive spirit. To the right of the football player stands Postmaster Wright (c.1910) and Warden with his granddaughter, Margret Gardner.

Next are Sarah Kendall and Sylvester Butler (in a bearskin coat c.1912). In the lower right is a photograph

of Showers and his daughter, Marie, who symbolize the resiliency of the individual people and community of Union City. After his industrial accident, Showers went on to lead a life that inspired the entire community.

His story mirrors the determination of a community that has overcome fires, floods and severe economic challenges. Sliding into the Union City logo is a color image of a young softball player — a shoutout to the community's present and future and commitment to revitalization.

These images are anchored by a circular logo that is currently being used to represent Union City, and it acknowledges the organization behind the mural project — Union City Pride Inc., a community organization dedicated to restoring pride in and celebrating the heritage of Union City.

Images with historical significance flank the central figures. The old firetruck on the left is completely restored and at the museum. The Union City train station depicted on the right is an example of preserving history through the reuse of historic buildings. Images of French Creek, the iron rail bridge, fall foliage, blue skies and the rail line fill the background.

On the far right, the mural is completed by a standing figure of a railroad signalman, circa 1910. His green light welcomes visitors to Union City's downtown. The signalman is leaning on a wooden chair, which acknowledges Union City's chair-making industry and informal title, "The Chair Center of the World."

The mural is painted on a fabric called Polytab, or Parachute Cloth. The mural is all hand painted using acrylic paint.

Both artists like the finished product.

"It is what we envisioned," Ferraro said. "We felt, because of the location, it welcomes people into the community. We wanted a gateway feel to it, and we think we captured that."

Mik agrees.

"It turned out really good. We were both happy," Mik said. "The design we centered on is carried all the way through."

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