Cookie capacity rising with new production facility

**BY JOHN TOWNES**

The cookie economy of Berkshire County is expanding. More specifically, Klara’s Gourmet Cookies LLC, owners of Klara’s Gourmet Cookies (413-243-3370), has operated out of a 1,400-square-foot space on the first floor of a commercial building at 18 Railroad St., just off of Main Street in Lee’s downtown. The couple live in the building’s second floor with their young daughter.

The new Water Street facility, which is located near the Lee Premium Outlets retail complex on the town’s east side, was previously a commercial kitchen that was leased for short-term use by individual food producers. They purchased the building from Rodney Clark for $255,000 on July 31, and have spent the ensuing months remodeling the facilities and installing new equipment to meet their needs.

Vegan eatery opening in Pittsfield

**BY BRAD JOHNSON**

Owner hoping Thrive will do just that in former Adrien’s Diner site

Shari Peltier (left) and her daughter Trenna Marcinczyk are transforming the former Adrien’s Diner site (klarasgourmet.com). The business currently generates about $700,000 annually in gross sales.

“Cookie capacity rising with new production facility”

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The cookie economy of Berkshire County is expanding. More specifically, Klara’s Gourmet Cookies LLC, owners of Klara’s Gourmet Cookies (413-243-3370), have purchased a 3,300-square-foot commercial building at 195 Water St. to provide a larger space for production and related operations.

Klara’s Gourmet Cookies are sold at retail outlets throughout the Northeast and in some locations further afield, including New Mexico and Virginia. They also sell cookies online at their website (klarasgourmet.com). The business currently generates about $700,000 annually in gross sales.

Since 2009, Klara’s Gourmet Cookies (413-243-3370) has operated out of a 1,400-square-foot space on the first floor of a commercial building at 18 Railroad St., just off of Main Street in Lee’s downtown. The couple live in the building’s second floor with their young daughter.

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Donations to library get showcase on Spring Street

BY JOHN TOWNES

Friends of the David and Joyce Milne Public Library Inc. has opened a new chapter to replace the annual two-day book sale the organization has held for three decades.

As a result, Williamstown’s central business district has a new full-time used bookstore, Chapter Two Books, at 37 Spring St. It had a soft opening on Nov. 3, with an official ribbon-cutting and grand opening on Nov. 29 just before the annual Williamstown Holiday Walk.

Friends of the David and Joyce Milne Public Library is a volunteer-based 501c3 organization that raises funds and provides other support for Williamstown’s library, which is located at 1095 Main St.

“The annual book sale has been successful, but we’ve been thinking that there must be a better way to sell all of the books that are donated for it,” said Ginny Sheldon, a member of the organization’s board and the management team of Chapter Two Books.

Sheldon explained that the annual sale has been a major undertaking every year, including collecting and organizing an average of 25,000 books donated by the community for the sale. “Each year we’d have to organize and set up all those books at Williamstown Elementary School and then sell as many as we could over two days,” she said.

Sheldon added that they could not keep most of the unsold books because the space allocated for storage inside the library was not large enough. “So, after the sale was over, we’d have to find other places to take the books that were left over,” she said.

That problem found a solution with the new Spring Street bookstore, which has 780 square feet of retail space and about 80 square feet of additional workspace.

Sheldon said they expect to carry an inventory of between 4,000 and 6,000 used books in the store. Among these are softcover and hardcover books on a range of subjects (based on donations), including adult and children’s books, cookbooks, city guides, and some vintage books.

It also sells media, including CDs and DVDs. Chapter Two Books (413-884-6322 or www.chaptertwobooks.org) is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

History of support

Friends of the David and Joyce Milne Public Library was formed by a committee of library supporters in 1989 to raise additional funds to help the library by conducting an annual membership campaign and a weekend book sale. Funds it raises are used to supplement town, state, and trustee funding of materials, programs, equipment, and staff development at the library.

For example, in 2016 the organization raised $26,000 from book sales and other contributions. These funds were used for two public-access computers; an Ancestry.com subscription; a storage cabinet for the Children’s Room; children’s and young-adult programs and supplies; professional development for the staff, and the purchase of books, CDs and DVDs.

“The Friends’ overall mission also includes raising public awareness of library resources and needs, and promoting a public commitment to literacy and library engagement,” Sheldon said.

Sheldon said the organization had been thinking of alternatives to the book sale for several years. “The bookstore came about through a combination of circumstances,” she said.

The specific impetus was when a store-front on Spring Street became available earlier this year, after Ruby Sparks, a clothing boutique, closed.

“The space was affordable, and it was an opportunity to sell books right on the town’s central commercial street,” she said. “We also saw it as a way to add something to the town. Williamstown has many readers and has needed a good used bookstore. We also saw it as more than a bookstore. It is also a community gathering space where people can run across their neighbors while browsing for books.”

Sheldon said they did extensive research before moving forward with the bookstore plan. “We visited and consulted with library-friends groups in other places to look at alternatives,” she said. “We’ve modeled this after a similar bookstore in Schenectady, New York, called the Whitney Book Corner.”

Low overhead

Through their research and other planning, they determined that the operation would be financially viable. They are renting the space, but otherwise their expenses are minimal.

“All of the merchandise is donated by the community, as are the furnishings,” Sheldon said. “So, it is staffed and managed by volunteers. So, it does not require a large budget, and it’s an opportunity to generate continuous revenue by selling books on a year-round basis.”

She noted that they receive a steady stream of donations throughout the year. “People are very generous about donating, and we get a wealth of beautiful books,” she said.

“For example, every book in the store when it opened had been collected between Sept. 4 and Nov. 4.”

She added that the Friends and the Milne Library’s director, staff and trustees collaborated closely to make Chapter Two Books a reality in a very short period.

Sheldon said about 75 volunteers from the community have signed up to operate the store. This includes a management committee, and others who will work in the store as cashiers and do other tasks. The store’s general manager, Susan Pike, is also a volunteer.

A section of the Milne Library is being used to store and sort inventory, which will then be taken to Chapter Two. Donations of books for the store will be accepted primarily at The Friends Book Donation Center in the library. “Because of limited space in the store, we’ll be asking that all donations be made at the library,” said Sheldon.

Sheldon noted that they are also looking at supplementing the revenue from the brick-and-mortar store with online sales. “Once we have established the store and worked everything out, we may add that,” she said.

The Friends (milnelibraryfriends.org) will also continue other fund-raising activities, including its annual membership campaign.

They will also likely add other events, such as pop-up sales in the library and other locations and silent auctions of especially valuable or notable books.
B&B Micro Manufacturing explores expansion options

BY JOHN TOWNES
For B&B Micro Manufacturing in North Adams, the business of building “tiny houses” is growing rapidly, which also is leading to an expansion of products.

The company, which is based in the Wind- sor Mill complex on Union Street, recently was awarded the winning bid from the city to purchase a three-acre site that was a former city salt shed property on Ashland Street for $75,000.

B&B plans to use the property to augment its current operations as a storage site, and perhaps as a facility to manufacture trailers that are used to transport tiny houses. It also is a potential site for a new headquarters, said Jason Koperniak, one of the company’s three founding partners and owners. “It could potentially become a new headquarters and primary manufacturing facility, but that is just one of the options we’re considering.”

B&B was established in 2016 by Koperniak, Chris St. Cyr and Michael Bresett, who all grew up in Adams. It is named after B&B Precision Builders, a building company that was owned by Bresett’s late father, Michael Bresett, and which the three men had worked for when they were younger.

The company’s specialty is building small structures, especially the category of mobile recreational vehicles, or be more minimalist in their living space with somewhat more space. This enables us to see them, they decide they prefer something else, said Koperniak. “However, when they are interested in the concept behind tiny houses,” he said. “It opens up new markets and many additional classes of buyers.”

Koperniak explained that this enables them to construct larger pre-assembled modular homes in their manufacturing facility, while maintaining their focus on small structures.

“The ability to become a modular home specialist is a big deal for us,” said Koperniak. “It opens up new markets and many additional classes of buyers.”

He explained that the category of tiny houses are generally between 400 and 1,200 square feet. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the definition of an “affordable home” is one that costs no more than 30% of the family income. The average family income for a four-person family in Massachusetts is $75,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The DOE defines a “modular home” as a structure that has been produced in a factory and then transported to the site for installation. These homes are typically built on a steel or concrete frame and are designed to be energy efficient.

“Small modular homes, on the other hand, are generally between 250 square feet or less. According to their website (tinyhouses.com), the price for pre-designed tiny houses ranges between $39,000 and $89,000. Small modular homes, on the other hand, are generally between 400 and 1,200 square feet. The difference in size offers another option for customers, and greater flexibility in location and other factors.”

“We’ve had potential buyers who are interested in the concept behind tiny houses,” Koperniak explained. “However, when they see them, they decide they prefer something with somewhat more space. This enables us to serve those people who want to downsize or be more minimalist in their living space but want something larger than a tiny house.”

In addition, tiny houses are often in a category of mobile recreational vehicles, which small modular homes are installed as permanent structures.

“This makes a difference in terms of zoning and other building regulations,” Koperniak said. “Every municipality is different, but in general many have requirements for minimum square footage. They also allow permanent stationary structures but not mobile ones. So, small affixed houses have more flexibility in terms of where they can be located.”

He noted that all of their home products require for their long-term plans, and the most appropriate type of location. “We also have to look at what makes the most sense financially,” he said. “Is it better to build something new, or move into a building that’s ready to go, or adapt a building to our purposes?”

He added that the Ashland Street property has adequate space for a structure large enough for B&B’s needs, but they have to investigate its suitability as a site for a permanent home base.

“Most of our expansion will be in location and other factors. We’re looking at everything, and not ruling anything out,” he said. Several factors are involved, including the amount of space their business will be interested in the concept behind tiny houses,” said Koperniak. “It opens up new markets and many additional classes of buyers.”

He emphasized that their goal is to remain in North Adams. However, if an existing adaptable structure meets their criteria in another Berkshire community such as Adams or Pittsfield, they might consider relocating.

“It’s also possible that we might not have to move at all, if a new owner of the Wind- sor Mill decides we can fit into their plans and works with us to expand in our present location,” he said. “There are many possibilities at this point. We’re being very careful because we’re looking for the place where we are going to put down roots.”
Fiddleheads transplanted to former Route 7 Grill

BY JOHN TOWNES

Fiddleheads Grille has migrated south from its original location in the clubhouse at the Greenock Country Club in Lee to the former site of the Route 7 Grill in Great Barrington.

David Pullaro and Cindi Joyner had operated Fiddlehead Grille in a leased space at the Greenock Club for a few years, serving golf course food and more towards “casual rustic,” has a seating capacity for outdoor events,” noted Pullaro.

“We had to do a lot of work on it,” said Pullaro. “It had been sound, but it had been vacant for four years – and, as we progressed, we kept finding new things that had to be done.”

They repainted the exterior, redid the interior and finished the floors. They also rebuilt an existing smoker.

“We’ve been overwhelmed at how many people have been coming. We’re seeing regulars from our former location, and a lot of local people from the Great Barrington area.”

Fiddleheads Grille offers an extensive variety of dinner entrees ($12 to $29) including linguine and clams, chicken Alfredo, smoked meatloaf, vegetable enchilada, New York strip steak and house-smoked barbecue items, among others.

Both Joyner and Pullaro, who are Berkshire natives, have extensive backgrounds in the hospitality business. Joyner formerly worked at the front desk at the Red Lion Inn and at Oak ‘n’ Spruce resort.

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For the ninth year, all Big Y Supermarkets are working to help feed the hungry within their local communities through Care To Share Sack Hunger, a large reusable grocery bag filled with staple nonperishable food items for local food banks. Customers purchase a Sack Hunger bag of groceries for $10, and Big Y distributes the food to that region’s local food bank. In turn, the food banks distribute the filled sacks to area soup kitchens, food pantries, senior food programs, daycare centers and other member agencies. All of the donated sacks are distributed within the supermarket’s marketing area, so every donation stays within the local community. Since the program’s inception nine years ago, over 133,000 bags of food have been donated to area needy. This year’s Sack Hunger campaign runs through Dec. 26. As an additional option, customers may choose to purchase and donate a $10 “Virtual Bag” at the register that will be used by the agencies to purchase needed food items. Online donations will also be accepted. Go to www.bigy.com/sack for more information.

Salisbury Bank is again holding its “We Believe” toy drive to make this a special time of year for area children who might otherwise not experience the joy of the holiday season. Donations of new, unwrapped gifts can be dropped off at any Salisbury Bank office through Dec. 17. Gift ideas include but are not limited to: sports equipment and balls, books, board games, handheld electronic games, backpacks, building sets, craft kits, purses and cosmetics. Additionally, gift cards to local retailers are welcome. “As we kick off our 31st annual toy drive, we encourage the community to join us in experiencing the joy of giving this holiday season,” said Rick Cantele, the bank’s president and CEO. “Making a difference this holiday season. Donations of new, unwrapped gifts can be dropped off at any Salisbury Bank office through Dec. 17. Gift ideas include but are not limited to: sports equipment and balls, books, board games, handheld electronic games, backpacks, building sets, craft kits, purses and cosmetics. Additionally, gift cards to local retailers are welcome. “As we kick off our 31st annual toy drive, we encourage the community to join us in experiencing the joy of giving this holiday season.”

The Northern Berkshire Neighbors program of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition (NBCC) is seeking community-minded individu- als to take part in a free Community Outreach and Civic Engagement training program. Ideal participants must be committed to strengthening the northern Berkshires by exploiting how they can get involved; make a positive impact and help assist residents in accessing available services. The training will take place over a six-month period beginning Feb. 14 and meeting every Thursday from 5:30 to 8 p.m. As part of the training, participants will learn about the many local human service providers and community organizations in the northern Berkshire region. For those interested in participating, or to learn more about the training, visit thecoalition.org for an application and FAQ sheet. Application submissions will be accepted through Jan. 18. For more information, call Glenda Matus-Carter at 413-665-7888 or email gmatuscarter@nbccoalition.org.

The Leapfrog Group, an organization aiming to improve healthcare quality and safety for consumers and purchasers, has announced the Fall 2018 Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grades and awarded Berkshire Medical Center the designation of “A” for its continued achievement in patient safety. BMC is one of only 42 “Straight A” hospitals in the United States which have been awarded this top grade in every cycle since 2012. “Only a very select group of hospitals nationally continue to earn an A Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade year after year,” said Leisl Binder, president and CEO of the Leapfrog Group. “It shows an unbroken commitment to protecting patients from preventable errors and accidents that harm and even kill too many people in our country every day.” The Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grades uses 27 measures of publicly available hospital safety data to assign A, B, C, and D grades to approximately 2,500 U.S. hospitals twice per year. It is peer reviewed, fully transparent and free to the public. “This consistent recognition for patient safety is reflective of the dedication our care team has to providing nothing but the best and safest care possible,” said David Phelps, president and CEO of Berkshire Health Systems. “I congratulate and thank our physicians, nurses and all support staff who have and continue to contribute to this commitment to excellence, which places BMC among an elite group of hospitals nationwide for patient safety.”
QualPrint, a leading commercial printing company in western Massachusetts, has announced its merger with Sampco Companies, a prominent marketing materials group serving the building material industry. The combination of the two companies is expected to bring expanded capabilities to both, allowing each to better serve their current customers as well as the needs of a variety of new customers.

QualPrint is a third-generation family-owned and operated printing company. Formerly known as Quality Printing Company, it was founded by the DiSantis family in 1963. Since then it has successfully developed a loyal base of business serving the unique needs of both local and international customers. The company currently has 45 employees.

Sampco Companies, founded in 1986, has six regional offices across the country with a combined 250 employees. The company specializes in designing and manufacturing product samples for residential and commercial building materials manufacturers in a variety of industries including flooring, roofing, siding, windows and doors. Brilliant Graphics, a Sampco Company, specializes in large format digital printing including dye sublimated fabric printing.

According to Michael Ryan, founder and CEO of Sampco Companies, all of this work requires printing, much of it exactly the same kind of work that QualPrint offers its clients. “This merger isn’t about changing QualPrint or how it does business,” said Ryan. “QualPrint is already a leader in commercial offset printing with a loyal, no-fuss, no-nonsense customer base. They are the experts with a family of long-standing loyal employees who are the key to its success.” He noted that the merger is about protecting and growing QualPrint’s business while at the same time diversifying their portfolio into the building material sector.

John DiSantis, QualPrint’s president and CEO (and the son of QualPrint’s founders), will retain his leadership role at QualPrint. “As a family-run company, one that considers our employees and customers like family, I would only consider a merger that protected the future of our 55-year legacy,” DiSantis said. “Sampco’s commitment is backed by their recent launch of a $1 million capital investment campaign to highly automate our capabilities. Both of our companies share the same ethics, values and a strong commitment to exceeding our customer’s needs. We’re both long-time residents and supporters of the Pittsfield community. Together, our customers will reap the rewards of our combined strengths and technologies.” He noted that his son, Nick DiSantis, will continue to lead at the company.

The administration of Gov. Charlie Baker has announced that the Barnum’s Outdoor Adventure at Pring Campground, owned by Drury High School, has been named a winner of the Honeywell/Notifi er Million Dollar award for its Honeywell/Notifi er systems. In addition to engineering, installation and maintenance on all Honeywell/Notifi er systems. In addition to engineering, installation and maintenance on all Honeywell/Notifi er systems, Honeywell/Notifi er systems. In addition to engineering, installation and maintenance on all Honeywell/Notifi er systems.
Participants sought for O+ North Adams Festival!

An innovative new festival will be coming to the Berkshires next spring, and organizers are reaching out now to line up participants of various types and on several levels. Applications and submissions from visual and performing artists are accepted until Jan. 5.

The O+ (pronounced “O-Positive”) festival is a public event that combines art, music events and a wellness exposition. The general public will experience all the art offerings and concerts, and have the opportunity to explore classes in yoga, dance, meditation, a health “EXPO+” of locally available services, and other programming. Admission will be with a “pay-what-you-can” all-access festival wristband.

Applicants are invited to have solo or group presentations in art, music, workshops, wellness, and creative writing.

For more information about the festival, visit o-plus.org or contact: info@o-plus.org or 413-448-8287, Lisa@ALNASCO.com.
Looking for a new financial advisor? Let’s talk.

3.5" x 2.5" | Maximum Font Size: 30 pt

Photographs. Slated to open the Eugene V. Thaw Gallery for Works on Paper, supervised the Marriott Study Center for Works on Paper, and contribute to other curatorial and academic initiatives. Leonard currently serves as senior curator of European art and director of publications and research at the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago, and an lecturer in the history of art at the University of Chicago's faculty.

Berks Health System has announced the appointment of Nisar Ahmed, MD, a board-certified and fellowship-trained hematologist oncologist at the Berkshire Medical Center medical staff and the physician staff of Berkshire Hematology Oncology of BMC. Ahmed is accepting new patients in need of hematology oncology services at the Berkshire Hematology Oncology of BMC offices in Pittsfield and Lenox. Dr. Ahmed received his medical degree from King Edward Medical College, Pakistan, and completed his residency in internal medicine at the Mt. Sinai/Bronx VA Residency Program. He was fellowship trained in hematology oncology at the University of Cincinnati.

CNP Berkshire Pediatrics has added Jamie Berkwits, physician assistant, to its pediatric primary care team. Berkwits holds a master’s degree in physician assistant studies from Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, and a second master’s degree in behavior from Union-Endicott. She has previously worked as a primary care/urgent care practitioner at 510 Medical Walk-In in Pittsfield. Flynn previously worked as a registered nurse at Berkshire Medical Center and at the Hospital of the Holyoke Medical Center.

Community Health Programs has named Nurse Practitioner Alison Flynn to serve on the staff at the clinic team at the NHB Community Health Center. Flynn is an adult nurse practitioner, who previously served as a primary care assistant at the Berkshire Health Center. She completed her nurse practitioner clinical internships at the Berkshire Health Center at Pittsfield and at the Valley Community Health Center. Flynn previously worked as a registered nurse at Berkshire Medical Center and at the Hospital of the Holyoke Medical Center.

Nicholas Flynn, chair and CEO of Snapcure, has named Richard Carney as the company's new chief executive officer. Carney will oversee the ongoing exhibition program in the Eugene V. Thaw Gallery for Works on Paper, and contribute to other curatorial and academic initiatives. Leonard currently serves as senior curator of European art and director of publications and research at the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago, and an lecturer in the history of art at the University of Chicago's faculty.

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Northern Berkshire Orthopedics

Northern Berkshire Orthopedics has exceptional providers ready to care for you. Through our team-based approach with Southwestern Vermont Medical Center and our Dartmouth-Hitchcock affiliation, you have access to board-certified, fellowship-trained specialists when you need them. Whether you need care for a sports injury, a joint replacement, reconstructive shoulder surgery, or fracture care, our goal is to get you back to the activities you love as quickly—and painlessly—as possible.
Vegan fare at Thrive continued from page 1

“Because it is a diner, it will feature diner-style food,” she said. “That also means we’re keeping our price points competitive with other [similar] options.”

The menu at Thrive (www.thrivediner.com) features soups, salads and sides, along with several burger and sandwich options priced between $4 and $12. Entrees include such dishes as avocado pesto noodle, southern barbecue tofu and marinara & mockballs, with prices from $9 to $12. Also offered are Buddha Bowls ($10), hearty dishes that allow diners to select from a range of grains, veggies and toppings.

With these and other menu items, Peltier said she wants to show that choosing vegan food does not mean snipping on flavor, and that vegan versions of familiar “comfort foods” can satisfy meat eaters and vegans alike. “This is going to be my opportunity to see if I can set myself apart from others who have failed,” she said.

Plan put in motion

The path that led Peltier to open a vegan restaurant had little to do with her own personal dietary preferences. “I am not a vegan or a vegetarian,” she noted. “I am a personal dietary preferences. ‘I am not a vegan or a vegetarian,’ she noted.

She explained, however, that her 21-year-old daughter, Trenna, has been a vegetarian since the age of 11. “I had to learn to cook meatless meals at home,” she said, adding that her daughter’s preferences also made her more aware of the limited options that vegetarians have when dining out.

By comparison, dining options for vegetarians far outstrip those for vegans, who choose not to consume items made with animal products of any kind. That includes not just meat and fish but also eggs, dairy products, and even honey. These limitations call for added creativity in the kitchen – whether cooking for oneself at home or for others in a restaurant – to come up with appealing dishes without the use of such staples as butter, eggs or cheese.

Peltier said the seeds for Thrive were planted about two years ago in a social media context. “I was looking for the next thing to do after the kids got out of high school,” she recalled. “Some friends on Facebook were talking about when someone would open a vegan restaurant in the area.”

That discussion inspired Peltier to become the “someone” who would do just that. “I love creating new ideas and following through with them,” she said.

This same trait had earlier led her to establish her own online clothing sales business back in the late 1990s. “I got involved with that in the early days of e-commerce,” she said, noting that she was assisted in the process by enrolling in the Berkshire Enterprises entrepreneurial training program.

Peltier’s prior work experience had been of a more conventional nature, beginning with her first job as a dishwasher at age 15 and continuing in various positions in restaurants and bars for the next 15 years or so. “I got out of that business and decided it was time to go to college at 30 years old,” she said. “That path eventually led to an MBA degree.”

Peltier noted that the online clothing venture was something she could do while at home raising her kids. But, as they moved through and out of high school, she began thinking about starting something new. “I said a few years ago that I need to come up with a new plan,” she recalled.

In that context, the idea for Thrive took shape. She wrote up a business plan and then worked with Nancy Shulman at the Berkshire Office of the Small Business Development Center. “I wanted to bounce it off an expert and refine it,” she said, noting that Shulman’s guidance led to a more solid plan.

Affordable option

Peltier’s original intent was to open her vegan restaurant in Lenox, a location that she felt would best allow her to tap a receptive customer base. She soon discovered that the town’s trendiness came at a price – in the form of significantly higher rents than she was willing to pay. “We would have been working just to pay the rent,” she said. “And to me that just didn’t make any sense.”

Her search for other more affordable options eventually led her to the former Adrien’s Diner site just on the outer edge of downtown Pittsfield, which was being offered for sale.

“At that time it had been vacant for three- and-a-half years,” she said. “Nobody wanted to deal with all the issues that came with it.” Among these, she said, were a variety of building code violations, including three illegal egresses, as well as “a whole snowball of other problems that needed to be fixed.”

While the prospects for correcting these problems posed other potential buyers to stay away, Peltier saw them as a challenge that she was ready to take on. She explained that her confidence on this stemmed from extensive hands-on experience she had gained over the years working with her father to buy and renovate apartment buildings.

“When I saw [Adrien’s], I thought, ‘It’s not that bad. I can do a lot myself,’” she said. Peltier also saw the prospect of owning her own restaurant instead of leasing space as a clear advantage. “I’m a smart businesswoman,” she said. “This means I can put money into my own place instead of paying sky-high rents to someone else.”

She made an offer on the site in March and completed the purchase of the property for $30,000 on April 27. From there she began the process of planning the renovations that she would handle and lining up contractors who were needed for other aspects that she could not legally do herself. “I sifted through dozens of contractors to find ones who would do this on my budget,” she said. Among those she credited for their willingness to work with her are Mickle Electric and Weider Mechanical, who respectively upgraded the diner’s electrical and plumbing systems; and Pittsfield Pipers, who installed a new exhaust hood that she had gotten “at a great price.”

Another more complex issue involved the building’s noncompliance with handicap accessibility regulations. Peltier explained that the physical limitations of not just the building itself but the property it sits on means that there was already an exterior ramp that would provide access to the restaurant.

To solve this situation, Peltier applied for a waiver of ADA access through the state’s Architectural Access Board in Pittsfield, which included “a structural context (which included plans for a wheelchair ramp and lift, as well as takeout orders and for curbside delivery)” was ultimately approved by the board in late summer.

The process of clearing these and other hurdles has pushed the opening of Thrive several months beyond Peltier’s initial target. “I was hoping to open back in May,” she said, acknowledging now how unrealistic that goal was. “But this has given me an opportunity to make this place amazing.”

Along with her daughter Trenna, who is joining her in the venture, Peltier has been developing Thrive’s menu, planning for its operation, and creating what she describes as a “whimsical decor” featuring “lots of little lights and paintings and unusual colors.”

The restaurant (413-344-9343 and www.thrivediner.com) has seating for about 40 at lights and paintings and unusual colors.”

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CANDACE WALL, LMHC
Counselor’s new practice targets needs of people assisting others

BY JOHN TOWNES
Professional whose jobs involve continually helping others also need to pay attention to themselves to prevent burnout and other personal impacts of excessive stress.

Candace Wall, a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC), said she learned that lesson firsthand in her own career as a counselor in a very stressful, high-risk environment. She also saw the same issues with other mental health professionals she has worked with.

That prompted her to establish a practice to help individuals, businesses and organizations recognize and learn solutions to professional interpersonal overload.

As a counselor and trainer, her emphasis is on providing counseling and workshops to help professionals handle job-related stresses and their effects.

“My main passion is helping people who work with people,” said Wall, whose office is in the Norton Mill at 50 Roberts Dr. in North Adams. “If you are assisting others constantly in your workday, you can become preoccupied with them and forget yourself. Unless you notice it and take care of yourself, it can lead to anxiety, depression and other serious emotional problems. It can also have impacts on your personal life and health.”

Wall said that during her own career she has gone through periods of anxiety and overload, and has had to figure out how to manage stress and be able to work effectively.

She learned methods to cope with and balance the pressures of work with self-help techniques.

“The fact that I’ve been through this myself and come out on the other side is one reason I’m so interested in this,” she said. “It’s an advantage I can offer as a clinician and trainer.”

In addition, she said, in her professional administrative roles and in professional interactions with colleagues, she found that many of her peers experienced similar problems.

“I found it very satisfying to help other professionals who were dealing with their own struggles,” she said. “I realized that was what I wanted to focus on as a professional.”

Wall emphasized that she works with people in many different occupations in her practice.

“This can affect counselors, medical doctors, salespeople, lawyers, customer service representatives and anyone else who is continuously interacting with people,” she said.

Wall said that she works with clients one-on-one. She helps them to sort out and evaluate their specific situation, determine their goals, and help them develop techniques to handle their jobs more effectively, alleviate stress and its effects, and reconnect with their personal relationships.

While her primary emphasis is on job-related issues, she also works with individuals who are seeking counseling for personal or family issues.

In addition, she offers single- or multi-session group work and quarterly training programs for businesses and other employers, focusing on a specific topic such as self-care, risk and safety in community mental health settings, self-esteem, mindfulness and other related topics.

She also offers consultation services to businesses and organizations to identify workplace issues, screen candidates and assist in respectful employment relations.

Wall grew up in Adams and currently lives in Stamford, VT, with her husband and daughter.

She received her bachelor’s degree in psychology at the College of Saint Rose in Albany, and a master’s degree in forensic psychology at the Chicago School of Psychology.

She returned to the Berkshires and initially did an internship at the Berkshire County House of Correction.

She then joined the Brien Center, where she worked for six years. She started as a clinical crisis counselor and subsequently became program director and clinical lead of a state contract for Community Based Flexible Support, which provides counseling and other services to help integrate clients into the community and be self-supporting.

For a year, she also worked at the House of Correction as a staff clinical professional.

Risks of rewarding work

While many people find it very rewarding and satisfying to help others solve problems, those in helping professions can experience burn out or compassion fatigue without knowing it, according to Wall.

They can become anxious, depressed and/or disconnected, but often overlook these issues.

“People enjoy helping people,” she said. “But they can try to do too much. When it starts to affect you in a negative way, and you take the pressures and stress home with you, it’s important to ask, ‘Am I neglecting myself?’

Wall said that people who deal with mental health, social services or other intense situations are especially susceptible to that.

“You can vicariously experience trauma or witness it firsthand, if you spend your days helping people deal with sexual abuse, hopelessness and other critical issues,” she said. “You’re taking it all in and you have to put it somewhere.”

She noted that this also presents a dilemma for people who are trained to understand and help others find solutions to emotional and psychological problems such as anxiety and depression.

“People in those fields know the necessary skills to handle these issues, may find it difficult to practice what they preach when it comes to themselves,” she said.

However, it is not only people who work in those occupations who experience problems with interpersonal overload. It can occur in other professions and businesses involving customer or client services and other interactions.

For example, someone working in real estate sales is helping people with the process of purchasing or selling a home, which involves major life decisions and situations involving complex negotiations as well as financial and legal matters that do not always proceed smoothly.

It can also affect people who work service positions that may not be critical or life-altering but are important to the customer or client.

“I was talking with a hairdresser who experienced similar stress as a result of working with many customers every day,” Wall said.

Professionals also have to continually shift attention between the needs of multiple clients or customers. A specific situation is of utmost importance to the individual involved, but for the service provider it is one of numerous cases they are working on during a day.

In her practice, Wall said, her role is to provide professionals with an opportunity to discuss these issues, analyze their own situation and behavior in an objective way, develop strategies to help them handle the stress more effectively, and make related changes and decisions.

Sources of support

In a general sense, she said, there are several basic suggestions that anyone can follow.

“The most important thing is finding someone you can talk to about what you’re experiencing on an ongoing basis,” she said.

“It might be a supervisor or other colleague or...
a friend or loved one. It should be someone you can be open with and who is willing to listen and be supportive.”

She added that employers should have people designated to provide this type of support and assistance – whether it is a supervisor, administrator, other staff person or an outside expert such as herself.

People also should prevent taking on too much, both to prevent burnout and to keep it from getting worse.

“It’s also important to know when to turn down additional assignments or duties,” she said. “You’re not superman or superwoman. Overextending ourselves is one of the reasons that people experience excessive stress.”

Wall also stressed the importance of people giving sufficient attention to their own needs and recognizing when ordinary workplace pressures are having a negative impact on their own well-being and overall quality of life.

“You have to take care of yourself,” she said. “You can’t do your job well if you’re neglecting your own feelings and needs.”

Related to that is the necessity to balance work with personal life, including involvement and relationships with friends and family. “I also want to engage our community and recreational activities,” she said.

Feeling burnout and its related effects can be the result of many factors. Understanding what is causing it is an important step to finding solutions that are based on a realistic assessment of the situation and reasons.

One crucial step for anyone who is experiencing excessive job-related stress is to understand the specific causes and determine if it is a signal that larger changes are needed.

That includes analyzing whether burnout is due to specifics that can be adjusted, or whether it is time to change jobs or professions. “Helping people to figure out that puzzle is one of the aspects of my own work that I find most satisfying,” Wall said. “Burnout can mean many different things, and it’s important to know why it is happening to you.”

She added that engaging in this process is also a way to avoid making rash decisions, such as hastily quitting a job.

“Do you need to do something else entirely,” she said, “or do you just need a vacation? Are you feeling excessive stress because you’re doing too much? Can you improve it by making adjustments in your workload or learning personal coping skills?

Wall said employers also can learn to recognize what factors in the workplace might be contributing to stress and burnout among their employees, and take action to reduce its likelihood.

She noted that, in addition to her professional services, she also is offering free workshops and other events in collaboration with other professionals and organizations on a periodic basis.

“One of the reasons I returned to the Berkshires is that I wanted to serve the community,” she said. “Offering several free programs annually is one of the ways I can do that.”

One such activity she recently sponsored was “Woman’s Night Out – No-Pressure Networking,” a free open gathering held on Nov. 29.

Wall can be contacted at 413-353-2515 or on candacewalltherapy. or on candacewall.com or Facebook page candacewalltherapy. ◆
Cory Jacobson, CEO of Michigan-based Insight Management Consulting, believes that the Beacon Cinema in downtown Pittsfield will be good addition to the small family of independent movie houses his company operates under Phoenix Theatres. "Our hope is that we can rescue the theater in the fact that a theater can be successful there."

While noting that he plans to do things differently at the Beacon, Jacobson said Stanley and the city deserve credit for undertaking the project in the first place. "It's a very impressive project that has added a lot to the city," he said. "From my perspective, I can see that a lot of passion and hard work has gone into it. I respect Mr. Stanley for having the vision and commitment to achieve this. It would likely have never come to fruition without him."

Close-knit operation
Insight Management/Phoenix Theatres currently has a total of about 230 employees in its theaters, and a staff of seven in its management office.

"One of the best things about our company is that most of the management team has been together for a long time, including people who came with me when I started it," Jacobson said. "Some left, but came back when we started making a little money because it's a nice company to work for. It's very personal and it's close-knit. We try to like each other and are basically best friends."

In addition to operating its own movie theaters, the company offers management, consulting and training services to other theater operators. It also has an equipment installation service.

"What we really are about is making the conversion from film to digital projection equipment," Jacobson said. "We represent a number of manufacturers and have a group of employees for special training in the installation of new digital theater technology for our own theaters as well as for other theater operators who want to integrate digital projection."
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Jacobsen noted that he regularly attends his own theaters—and those of their competitors—to keep a close eye on everything that affects the customer experience. “My company’s original recommendations to the Beacon as a consultant were based on that premise, and they were an important step in that direction, he noted. He said Phoenix will build on that with other improvements, both in the near term and over time. Among other changes, they will extend the Beacon’s operating hours to include more showings throughout the day and into the evening. This will both increase the number of tickets sold and offer more options for customers. It may also help to reduce lines at showings during peak hours. They also will make it more convenient for patrons to buy popcorn, candy and beverages, with a redesign of the concession stand. For movie theaters, concession sales are often more important than ticket sales to the bottom line. Jacobsen noted, however, that his company will not look to significantly expand the Beacon’s food and beverage offerings or set up the lobby as a café. “My clients are always concerned about becoming restaurant operators,” he said. “We’re here to support other downtown businesses, not compete with them. For example, I was talking to the operators of The Marketplace (a next-door cafe that is another anchor tenant in the building). I told them, ‘You know how to make great coffees and sandwiches and soups. I’m going to stick with what I know, which is showing movies and selling popcorn and candy.’” (The Beacon also has a license to sell beer and wine. At the city council meeting, Jacobson was asked if they planned to continue that. Jacobson replied that his other theaters don’t rely on alcoholic beverage sales, but since the patrons of the Beacon are used to purchasing them there, he would prefer to keep the license. To handle the expanded operations, they are currently hiring additional staff for the Beacon. Jacobson said the goal is have at least 30 full- and part-time employees in place by the holidays. “I’d tell anyone interested in a job to go to our website and apply now,” he noted. Jacobson said there will be physical improvements, but the theater will retain its existing basic look and characteristics. Part of the original project included historic preservation requirements that retained the original features of the facade and other elements of the former department store. The theater will also retain its name. “The Beacon should continue to be the Beacon,” he said. “It is a unique property. I love the fact that it is a theater behind a former department store. We’re going to keep that as its identity, rather than trying to improve our brand, as Phoenix Theaters.” However, Jacobson said he is making one immediate addition to the lobby that will have a noticeable impact. “I just bought a Yamaha grand piano that will be placed in the lobby,” he said. “It’s an automated player piano that is tied into the Internet and can play any type of music. That makes a big difference in the mood in a lobby.” One facet of the Beacon that is new to Jacobson’s company is the additional commercial space in the building, including offices above the theater and on the corridor of the other commercial space in the rear extension to McKay Street. “We’re not commercial developers or land lords,” he said. “But I have been a tenant, so I at least understand it from that standpoint. Some of it is primarily asking tenants what they want. And sometimes their requests are simple basics, like having clear directional signs and making sure elevators are operating.” He said they will work on some deferred maintenance projects in the building. “I also plan to employ someone who is an expert in commercial rentals and knows the local market to handle that aspect of it,” he said. Pittsfield perception Since first becoming involved in the Beacon, Jacobson said he and his staff have been visiting and studying Pittsfield and the Berkshires regularly. While aware of the challenges the city and region face, he believes the overall trends are positive. “In addition to demographic studies, you can tell a lot just by looking around and talking to people and businesses,” he said. “We’ve spent a lot of time having meals in places like District (a restaurant around the corner from the Beacon). The mood seems upbeat, and people and business owners seem happy with what’s happening here, which is always a good sign.” He added that downtown Pittsfield has also retained positive physical characteristics that have been lost in many communities. “The architecture downtown is really unique and beautiful,” he said. “A lot of small towns look at these glorious buildings and recognize their value compared to what is common today. No one is going to build ornate structures like the Kinnell-Kresge Building anymore.” He added that the region also has the type of diversity that can support a theater like the Beacon. “It’s obvious that the city and Berkshire County have an element of deep character. That means there are many people who appreciate the benefits of a Beacon, and the types of theaters we operate.” He said his company is adept at identifying and booking films that reflect the tastes and desires of their communities. “Since the Beacon first opened, some people have expressed a desire for the theater to include more independent, foreign and other ‘art house’ films along with the mainstream commercial fare. “We try to present the best of both worlds, with a mix of the big popular movies and smaller independent films,” Jacobson said. “In part, the selection will depend on the time of year. During the summer and holidays a lot of big commercial films are released, and that will be the emphasis then. At other times of the year we can also include more specialized films.” Jacobsen chuckled when asked to comment on the frequent observation that movie theaters have become less viable as businesses because of the emergence of streaming services, the popularity of mobile viewing and the increased quality of home entertainment equipment. “I’ve been hearing that as long as I’ve been in this industry,” he said. “When I started in management in the ’70s, it was said that VCRs and Blockbuster would be the end of movie theaters. Before that it was television. And before that it was probably said about radio.” In reality, he said, movie theaters have weathered all of these challenges. “If you look at the record of theaters over the last 70 years, the business has been remarkably stable,” he said. “Like any industry, the movie business has ups and downs,” he added. “Last year there was a downturn, and there were predictions that the sky was falling. But this year there has been a 10-percent increase.” Jacobsen noted that it often depends on the quality of films in any given year. “We’re not selling widgets,” he said. “We’re selling art. Sometimes that is art very good, and sometimes it’s really bad. The fluctuations in business reflect that.” Nevertheless, he added, theaters must be nimble and offer reasons to go out to see a movie, including the quality of presentation. “There isn’t a theater in the U.S. that is better than it was five or 10 years ago in those terms,” he said. This also requires keeping up with advances in presentation technology, he said, adding that part of the plan for Beacon Cinema is to upgrade its projection and audio equipment over time. “I’m very involved in the technology side and the quality of images and sound,” he said. “Right now the next generation of projectors is about to be released. This will include new chips and file storage that will allow for higher frame rates. That will dramatically increase the visual quality of images on the screen.” Jacobsen noted that he is acquainted with Douglas Trumbull, the special-effects pioneer who lives in Berkshire County and had a large role in bringing film production to the Berkshires in the 1990s. “We visited him at his studio on one of our trips here,” he said. “He is working on some amazing technologies that are far ahead of what is available today. The quality is unbelievable and demonstrates what is still possible. I’ve come to feeling very excited, like I was 17 again.”
NEWS ANALYSIS
Project's complex financing adds to misperceptions on debt forgiveness
BY JOHN TOWNES

After much soul searching and expressions of mixed emotions, the Pittsfield City Council voted 8-2 to forgive $2.55 million in debt for owners of the Beacon Cinema in order to keep the downtown movie theater and commercial building that houses it open. That was a key to a plan that was adopted to enable the upcoming sale of the theater business and building by the Beacon’s developer/owner Richard Stanley to Insight Management Consulting, a Michigan-based firm that operates four other theaters as Phoenix Theatres (see related story on page 18).

In September, a consortium of local banks and lenders that had provided $4.6 million in financing for the downtown redevelopment project announced plans to initiate foreclosure on the property, for which $3.7 million was still owed.
The banks subsequently agreed to write off all but $750,000 if it were sold to Insight Management/Phoenix Theaters. That company will pay $644,000 for the Beacon’s building and assets, which will be applied to the settlement. Stanley will pay the balance himself.
The sale was contingent on the city’s forgiveness of an additional $2.55 million contributed to the project. The original request by Phoenix was for the city to forgive the entire amount immediately.
Mayor Linda Tyrer made a counter proposal to forgive $1.05 million now. To give the city some leverage, the remaining $1.5 million will be forgiven in increments over 10 years, as long as the theater remains in business. If the theaters closes, Phoenix will be responsible for repaying the balance.
The council’s vote to approve the plan at its Nov. 27 meeting is the key to a deal that would enable the sale. However, the proposal has been contentious and divisive, being seen by some as a Hobson’s Choice between two problematic options.
During the Nov. 27 meeting, several councilors said there had been receiving more comments and strong opinions from their constituents about the debt forgiveness than any other council vote in recent memory, with much of this feedback in opposition to the plan.
Councilor Kevin Morandi, who voted against the measure, said in an interview that the city had been paying $1 million annually in property taxes and $200,000 in taxes on its parking lot to the city for 20 years to provide aid to the theater business.
In communications to officials, posts in so-called ‘courtesy notices’ that are struggling do not receive such generous treatment when they receive such treatment when they fall behind in their taxes or other payments to the city. Some contended the city should not continue to support the property is eligible for a partial deferment on taxes related to any increased value due to the improve- ments. The higher taxes are phased in over a designated period.
Ruffer, however, said the TIF is not a part of the debt-forgiveness package. “The TIF has no bearing on that,” she said. “The debt forgiveness is a totally separate matter.
However, the funds to the Beacon project and was extended in 2016 for another five years. Under a TIF, a business owner who upgrades a property is eligible for a designated period.”

Ruffer pointed out that the Beacon has paid – and will continue to pay – taxes in a larger sense. “Between personal and business property taxes, it has been paying [annually] looking at the merits of the proposal.”

Critics also see a double standard in the city forgiving the Beacon’s debt, even though other individuals and businesses do not receive such generous treatment when they fall behind in their taxes or other payments to the city. Some contended the city should not be supporting one business, while others that are struggling do not receive such a bailout. Others argued that said the city should let the foreclosure take place and allow the private-sector market determine the property’s future.

One reason the councilors gave for voting for the proposal was that the debt forgive- ness was not actually affecting the city’s operating budget.
The debt does not involve funds that could have been used to offset taxes or fees for residents or other purposes. Rather, it was in the form of loans that were designated as loans, in order to qualify Stanley’s proj- ect for some of the federal tax credits that make up another portion of the project’s financing.

As the anchor tenant of the redeveloped Kinnel–Kresge Building, the Beacon Cinema has been an important component of downtown Pittsfield’s revitalization efforts since its opening in 2009. However, the debt load associated with the historic building’s restoration has weighed the project down over the years, along with difficulty filling other commercial space there. (Photo by Cindy Johnson)

As a public-private initiative, the Beacon was financed by a complex combination of private investment by Stanley, including $4.6 million in financing from a consortium of local banks and lenders, and public support through the sale of Federal New Market Tax Credits, state and federal historic preservation tax credits, and other grants and quasi-public financing.

Diana Ruffer, the city’s director of community development, said in an interview that the city had achieved its goals for downtown Pittsfield, in terms of adding a center of activity and stimulating the busi- ness district. However, opposition expressed by others has been based both practical and philosophical grounds.
In communications to officials, posts in social media and other venues, many residents said the city should not continue to support a failed project at a time when its resources were already being stretched thin, and it was having to take on other projects including a new water treatment plant.

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One reason the councilors gave for voting for the proposal was that the debt forgive- ness was not actually affecting the city’s operating budget.
The debt does not involve funds that could have been used to offset taxes or fees for residents or other purposes. Rather, it was in the form of loans that were designated as loans, in order to qualify Stanley’s proj- ect for some of the federal tax credits that make up another portion of the project’s financing.

As the anchor tenant of the redeveloped Kinnel–Kresge Building, the Beacon Cinema has been an important component of downtown Pittsfield’s revitalization efforts since its opening in 2009. However, the debt load associated with the historic building’s restoration has weighed the project down over the years, along with difficulty filling other commercial space there. (Photo by Cindy Johnson)

As a public-private initiative, the Beacon was financed by a complex combination of private investment by Stanley, including $4.6 million in financing from a consortium of local banks and lenders, and public support through the sale of Federal New Market Tax Credits, state and federal historic preservation tax credits, and other grants and quasi-public financing.

Diana Ruffer, the city’s director of community development, said in an interview that the city had achieved its goals for downtown Pittsfield, in terms of adding a center of activity and stimulating the business district. However, opposition expressed by others has been based both practical and philosophical grounds.

In communications to officials, posts in social media and other venues, many residents said the city should not continue to support a failed project at a time when its resources were already being stretched thin, and it was having to take on other projects including a new water treatment plant.

Critics also see a double standard in the city forgiving the Beacon’s debt, even though other individuals and businesses do not receive such generous treatment when they fall behind in their taxes or other payments to the city. Some contended the city should not be supporting one business, while others that are struggling do not receive such a bailout. Others argued that said the city should let the foreclosure take place and allow the private-sector market determine the property’s future.
‘TAX CUTS & JOBS ACT’ TAKES ITS TOLL

Challenges aplenty with this year’s filing season

BY JAMES R. ROSE, EA CFP

A review of all changes arising from this sweeping tax-code revision is not possible here, and what is offered is merely to create an awareness of some of those items most likely to be encountered during this year’s tax-filing season. For a more detailed review, the IRS has issued the 14-page Publication 5307 – Tax Reform Basics for Individuals and Families as a preliminary guide, and has been updating charts, worksheets, regulations and forms on a daily basis.

While still in draft form at the time of this writing, Form 1040 is receiving a makeover, allowing a “postcard” summary for those use filing Forms 1040EZ, 1040-A, and 1040. For those whose tax reporting situations are more complicated, business, rental and investment schedules — along with their various attachments — will still be required.

Deductions deconstructed

The new legislation seeks to simplify tax reporting for a larger majority of taxpayers by increasing basic standard deductions, while eliminating exemption allowances and limiting “itemized” deductions. To that end, it may be helpful to know what not to look for any longer — and to understand what has been lost as well as gained.

Personal and dependent exemption deductions, having been “absorbed” into the newer, larger, standard deduction allowances. For instance, in prior years, a married couple with two child dependents would have qualified for a married-filing-joint (MFJ) standard deduction of $12,700, and $5,000 in itemization deductions, one for each person listed on the tax return. Under prior law, in 2017, the standard deduction for MFJ was $25,950. Each of the four exemption deductions was worth $4,050 — qualifying this family for a total $24,900 in combined standard and exemption deductions.

The MFJ standard deduction is now raised to $24,000 (from the $12,700, 2017), and exemption deductions are zeroed out — leaving this particular family with less overall deductions in 2018, and higher potential taxable income. The trade-off is a lower tax rate on that higher income, as well as higher tax credits for those dependent children listed on the return.

The “standard deduction” is the benchmark by which we determine whether to “itemize” tax deductions — most taxpayers may deduct the larger of the two. With the new standard deduction, it is expected that millions more taxpayers will now forego itemizing. (While some may have traditionally itemized, the new law is projected to bring that level to 10 percent or less.)

The new law further simplifies that process by eliminating and/or limiting what actually qualifies as an “itemized” deduction. Deductions subject to the 2 percent AGI limitation have been suspended — effectively eliminating miscellaneous deductions for employee business, hobby, tax and investment expenses. Casualty and theft losses are now only allowed for those which occur in federal declared disaster areas. New allowance and limits are in place for personal residence mortgage interest deductions, as well as state and local property taxes (SALT) on income, sales and real estate.

These aggregate SALT deductions are now capped at $10,000 — a change which originally drew a chorus of concern, led by the representatives and governments of high-tax states (such as those here in the Northeast). Subsequent exploration of creative ways to redefine these expenses, so as to bypass this limitation, prompted the IRS to issue Notice 2018-54, a two-page review cautioning that “taxpayers should be mindful that federal law controls the proper characterization of payments for federal income tax purposes.”

The chorus has since been quieted to muffled murmurs and grumbles. Preliminary calculations project that mid-to-high-income taxpayers will see a net positive effect, with the expected benefits of lower tax rates and credits trumping lost deductions.

What one deduction may allow, another may take away.

What one deduction may take away, another may allow. The implication is that the “only” “wrong” decision from a tax perspective may be the one made before reviewing all the options and permutations available.

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## Berkshires Real Estate Market

**January 2019**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Seller</th>
<th>Buyer</th>
<th>Lender</th>
<th>Mortgage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 Beach St.</td>
<td>224 Columbia St., Rt.8 Adams</td>
<td>10/3/18</td>
<td>$139,900</td>
<td>James Williams</td>
<td>Jessica Labombard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1514 Monterey Rd.</td>
<td>9 Big Island</td>
<td>10/23/18</td>
<td>$471,000</td>
<td>Benham FT</td>
<td>Richard Bliven</td>
<td>Lender: HarborOne</td>
<td>$376,800</td>
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<td>177 Clubhouse Dr.</td>
<td>77 N Gate Island Rd.</td>
<td>10/31/18</td>
<td>$276,498</td>
<td>Deutsche Bank</td>
<td>Donna Seymour</td>
<td>Lender: Greylock FCU</td>
<td>$199,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Arch St.</td>
<td>177 Clubhouse Dr.</td>
<td>10/26/18</td>
<td>$143,000</td>
<td>Wayne Curley</td>
<td>Kai Kuo</td>
<td>Lender: Greylock FCU</td>
<td>$147,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Big Island</td>
<td>146 Draper Ave.</td>
<td>10/2/18</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>Wayne Curley</td>
<td>Bev Gannett</td>
<td>Lender: Greylock FCU</td>
<td>$103,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128 Crane Ave.</td>
<td>177 Clubhouse Dr.</td>
<td>10/4/18</td>
<td>$800,000</td>
<td>Beverly Dufur</td>
<td>Megan Tardibuono</td>
<td>Lender: Adams Community</td>
<td>$800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126 Crane Ave.</td>
<td>128 Crane Ave.</td>
<td>10/4/18</td>
<td>$115,371</td>
<td>Deutsche Bank</td>
<td>Linda Obrien NT</td>
<td>Lender: Adams Community</td>
<td>$103,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130 Columbia Ave.</td>
<td>126 Crane Ave.</td>
<td>10/3/18</td>
<td>$135,990</td>
<td>Wayne Curley</td>
<td>Richard Bliven</td>
<td>Lender: Greylock FCU</td>
<td>$132,500</td>
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<tr>
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<td>126 Crane Ave.</td>
<td>10/3/18</td>
<td>$137,750</td>
<td>Wayne Curley</td>
<td>Maria Devault</td>
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<td>$147,500</td>
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<td>130 Columbia Ave.</td>
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<td>10/4/18</td>
<td>$127,000</td>
<td>Wayne Curley</td>
<td>Mary Darwin</td>
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<td>Lender: Greylock FCU</td>
<td>$130,000</td>
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### Berkshire Real Estate School

The Berkshire Real Estate School offers free workshops on brokerage relationships, which are scheduled for the next few weeks. The programs are designed to help Real Estate practitioners find ways to work on both sides of the ledger, even though they are only supposed to represent their client.

- **OTIS**
  - 2 Big Island
  - 10/21/18
  - $115,000
  - Buyer: FRB
  - Seller: M. Gabrielle
  - Lender: Greylock FCU
- **PITSFeld**
  - 72 Middletown Rd.
  - 10/21/18
  - $220,000
  - Buyer: J. Eagan
  - Seller: M. Eagan
  - Lender: Greylock FCU
- **Berkshires Real Estate School**
  - 212 1st St.
  - 10/18/18
  - $220,000
  - Buyer: J. Eagan
  - Seller: M. Eagan
  - Lender: Greylock FCU
- **PITSFeld**
  - 10 Alco St.
  - 10/18/18
  - $100,000
  - Buyer: J. Eagan
  - Seller: M. Eagan
  - Lender: Greylock FCU
- **Berkshires Real Estate School**
  - 146 Draper Ave.
  - 10/18/18
  - $147,500
  - Buyer: J. Eagan
  - Seller: M. Eagan
  - Lender: Greylock FCU
- **Berkshires Real Estate School**
  - 130 Columbia Ave.
  - 10/18/18
  - $150,000
  - Buyer: J. Eagan
  - Seller: M. Eagan
  - Lender: Greylock FCU
- **Berkshires Real Estate School**
  - 126 Crane Ave.
  - 10/18/18
  - $150,000
  - Buyer: J. Eagan
  - Seller: M. Eagan
  - Lender: Greylock FCU
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  - $150,000
  - Buyer: J. Eagan
  - Seller: M. Eagan
  - Lender: Greylock FCU
Klara’s Gourmet Cookies continued from page 1

“This was really a perfect fit for our business,” said Diller, noting that its prior use as a commercial kitchen provided some of the basic infrastructure needed for cookie production.

When combined with warehouse space they lease in the Berkshire Corporate Center at 480 Pleasant St. in Lee, the new facility gives the business a total of 6,000 square feet of space.

Sotonova and Diller said that the move will both increase their potential output of cookies and add to the overall efficiency of the business, with a larger oven and other equipment for baking, packaging and shipping.

They noted that the business had outgrown its current space several years ago.

“In 2009, we bought this building on Railroad Street as a live-work space,” said Diller. “It was well-suited to our situation then because we could live on the second floor and operate the business on the first floor. But as the business grew, we’ve been crowded out. Right now I’m in my office at a desk surrounded by cookies. There’s hardly room to move in here.”

While the new location will provide much-needed space for their growing business, Sotonova noted that the increased efficiency of the operations there will also have an important personal benefit.

“We work very long hours,” she said. “This morning I was up at 1 a.m. to start baking. This afternoon I had to do some bookkeeping that may go into the evening. As we become more efficient and can bake more cookies faster, that will also give us some free time, more efficient and can bake more cookies that may go into the evening. As we become faster, that will also give us some free time, more efficient and can bake more cookies that may go into the evening. As we become faster.

Klara’s Gourmet Cookies is a small business that started as a passion project for Klara Sotonova, a Czech native who moved to the United States in the early 2000s. She began baking cookies as a hobby and decided to turn it into a business after receiving positive feedback from friends and family.

The business started by baking cookies in Sotonova’s home kitchen and selling them at local farmers markets. Over time, the business grew, and Sotonova and Diller decided to move to a larger facility to accommodate the increased production.

The expansion is being financed by Adams Community Bank, through an SBA 504 loan package in which the bank provides 50 percent, a certified development finance company provides another 40 percent, and the borrower provides 10 percent.

Diller noted that Keith Girouard of the Berkshire County office of the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center provided vital assistance.

“He has been a tremendous help,” said Diller. “We started talking with him about this several years ago, and he provided important advice and assistance all the way. Without him, this probably would not have happened.”

Czech roots

The origins of Klara’s Gourmet Cookies extend back to Chrast, a town in the Czech Republic where Sotonova grew up.

She developed her baking skills at a young age, learning from her mother and grandmother, using traditional recipes that had been in her family for generations.

Sotonova emigrated to the United States about 20 years ago at age 19 in search of opportunities she did not believe existed in the Czech Republic. She initially came to the Berkshires for a job in the kitchen at Eisner Camp in Great Barrington, which is affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism.

She earned a degree in hospitality management from Berkshire Community College and then worked in a restaurant in nearby Hillsdale, N.Y., where she met Diller, who was a chef.

“We started spending more and more time together,” recalled Diller, who grew up in southern Berkshire County. “One day she made some of her cookies for me, and I realized two things: A) she loved me, and B) she really knew how to bake. The cookies were great.”

He suggested they start a business baking and selling her cookies, which led to the formation of Klara’s Gourmet Cookies in 2006.

At first it was a very small operation in her apartment in Great Barrington.

“We started out in direct sales in places like the Lenox Farmers’ Market and a market in Boston,” said Diller. “Then we got distributors and gradually started adding wholesale accounts, and the business took off. It became too large for the apartment, and we moved to our present live-work space in Lee in 2009.”

They presently sell a line of about 12 varieties of cookies, including Ginger Shortbread, Double Chocolate Sea Salt and Coconut Macaroons, among others. They also sell gift baskets that include thematic selections of cookies plus a few additional items such...
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Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation
Entrenched in the Berkshires for 129 years, The Pittsfield Cooperative Bank has continuously sought to empower our friends and neighbors to build a better community.

Some come to the area to explore our serene mountainous landscape and never leave. Others grew up here and want to give back to their hometown – perhaps as a dentist. Then there are those who have incredible talents and ideas that can change the region… if only they had a little financial support and the encouragement of a lending team with more experience than any professional unit assembled since Dasher, Dancer and the gang got together.

†Seasons Greetings†

from The Pittsfield Cooperative Bank –
where you’ll find silver, gold and a whole lot more.