



WARREN RUDA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A new welcome center will operate on the ground floor of Hazleton Launch Box on West Broad Street. Penn State Hazleton held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the center earlier this year.

A WARM WELCOME

State grant will fund center to make downtown more inviting

BY SAM GALSKI
STAFF WRITER

They're rolling out the welcome wagon in downtown Hazleton.

Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress secured a \$30,000 state grant for a welcome center that will operate on the ground floor of a former bingo hall that reopened at 13-15 W. Broad St. last fall as Hazleton LaunchBox Supported by Pasco L. Schiavo, Esq.

The LaunchBox offers educational programming, technical assistance, co-working space and other resources to aspiring entrepreneurs.

Although LaunchBox occupies the majority of the first floor, the alliance reserved about 600 square feet at the front for retail space that will also function as the welcome center, said Krista Schneider, executive director for the downtown alliance.

Five years ago, a survey that community stakeholders conducted as part of a strategic plan revealed that the downtown was

unwelcoming to strangers, lacked an ability to show community pride, was unfriendly and poorly promoted and marketed, Schneider said.

The center is part of a broader initiative designed to reverse those perceptions, bolster the image of the community and create an identity for the downtown as a destination for business growth, she said.

"This new brand, which (the alliance) will soon be launching as 'Downtown Hazleton on the Rise' is designed to convey new attitude that embraces diversity, art, and culture, and encourages education, entrepreneurship, and innovation, and celebrates Hazleton's immigrant and industrial/blue-collar heritage," Schneider said in an email.

The welcome center will be called "The HUB," and promote the alliance's vision for the downtown by developing new marketing materials for business recruitment, promoting existing businesses and higher educational institutions, as well as entrepreneurship opportuni-

ties, special events, cultural attractions and other opportunities for engaging the community, she said.

When established, the welcome center will double as "pop-up" storefront space where start-up food and retail businesses, artists and local authors can sell their products and showcase their creative work through special events such as First Friday, Schneider said.

The alliance was the lone Luzerne County organization that secured a share of \$5.5 million in Keystone Communities grants that were announced by Gov. Tom Wolf in December.

The state Department of Community and Economic Development administers the grants, which are designed to support local initiatives that "grow and stabilize neighborhoods and communities, foster effective public-private partnerships, and enhance the overall quality of life for residents," according to the governor's office.

The welcoming center will be the go-to place for events orga-

nized by the alliance and Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce, such as the community-wide clean up in the spring, programming offered at LaunchBox, and local functions and tours, Chamber President Mary Malone said.

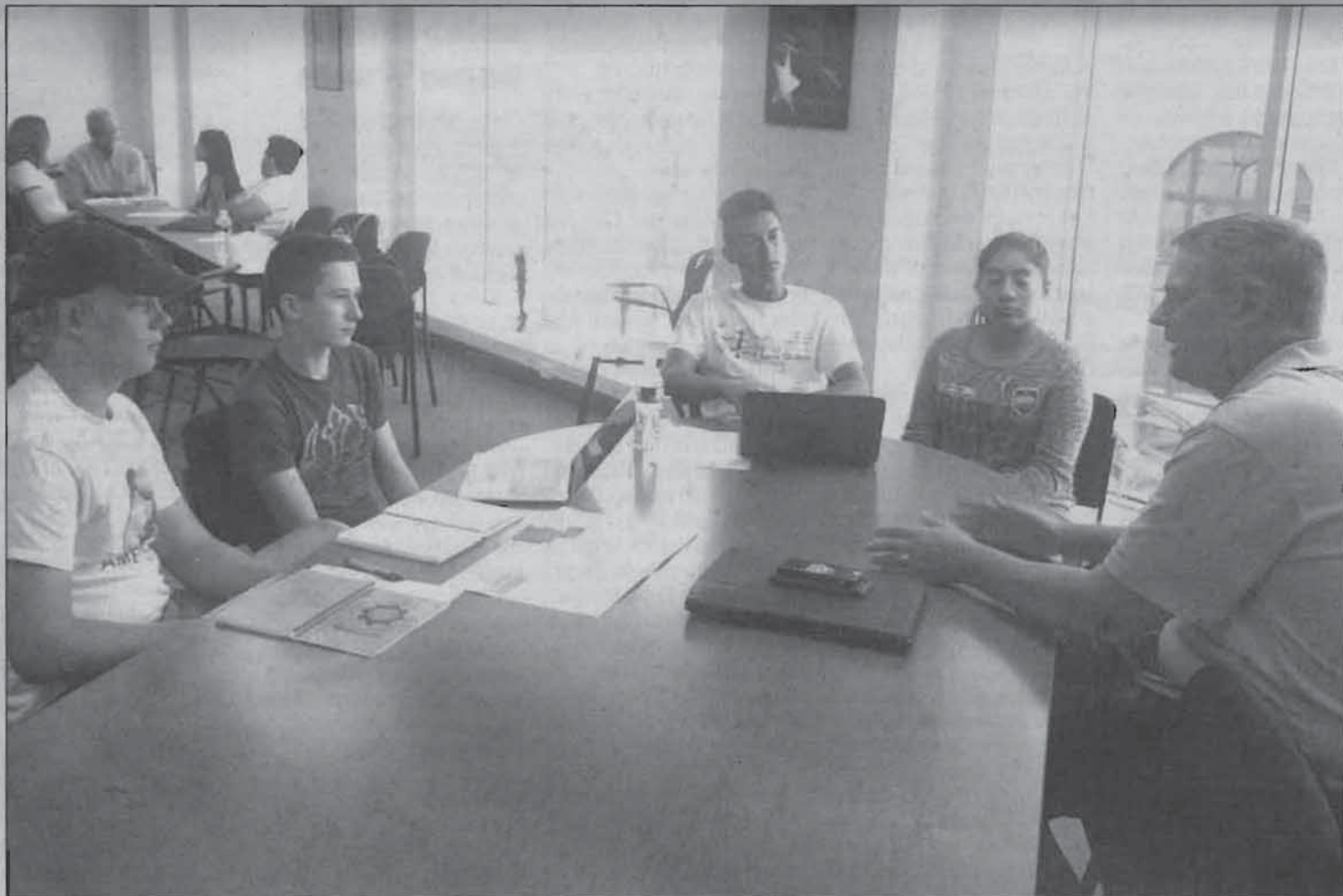
Both nonprofit organizations are considering possibilities for staffing the welcome center, Malone said.

Next steps

The alliance will soon survey businesses and customers and host a series of meetings with community stakeholders and partner organizations about its marketing and business recruitment initiative, Schneider said.

Anyone interested in more information about the upcoming initiatives, the LaunchBox, welcome center or "pop-up" retail opportunities can contact Schneider at 570-455-1509, ext. 109, or kschneider@downtown-hazleton.org.

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KENT JACKSON / STAFF PHOTO

Ken Okrepkie of Ben Franklin Technology Partners, right, talks with high school students taking a summer class on entrepreneurship through Penn State Hazleton. The class meets at the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce and helps students develop ideas for starting businesses.

Business pitch

Local students enter final week of PSU Hazleton course

BY KENT JACKSON
STAFF WRITER

HAZLETON — Composting left-over food into fertilizer takes three to six months, long enough to discourage gardeners, so why not speed up the process? Jessica Zheng wondered.

By shredding waste, adding water and keeping an optimal temperature with solar heating, compost should be ready in a week, Zheng, a high school student, said

'Is there a way to test all those assumptions? It's one thing to say, "I believe it." It's another to say, "I proved it."'

Ken Okrepkie

Ben Franklin Technology Partners manager

when making her business pitch.

"Is there a way to test all those assumptions?" asked Ken Okrepkie, who funds and supports new businesses as a manager at Ben

Franklin Technology Partners.

"It's one thing to say, 'I believe it.' It's another to say, 'I proved it.'"

As Okrepkie and Zheng discussed specifics of creating a trash

can-sized composting bin, students and business consultants sitting at tables throughout a conference room of the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce were talking about other ideas.

The students from local high schools are entering the final week of a six-week course offered by Penn State Hazleton.

In a preview of what Penn State

Please see **COURSE**, Page A11

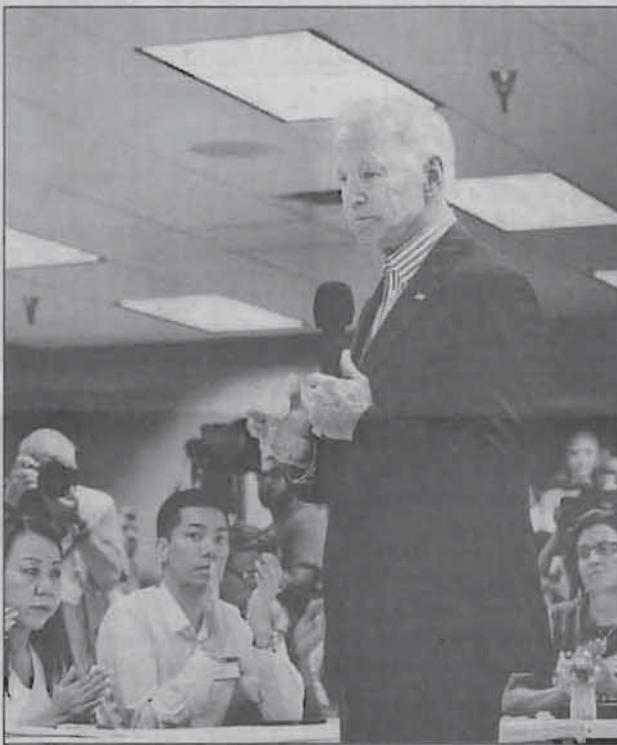
ELECTION 2020

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Biden "the proud
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ERIN SCHAFF / THE NEW YORK TIMES

Former Vice President Joe Biden speaks during a town hall at the Plumbers & Steamfitters Local No. 33 in Des Moines, Iowa, on Thursday. Biden raised eyebrows on Thursday during his speech when he said that "poor kids are just as bright and just as talented as white kids," an apparent gaffe for a Democratic presidential candidate whose record on race has come under intense scrutiny during the primary.

than 20 Democratic presiden-
tial candidates who have
descended on — or soon plan
to arrive at — the Iowa State

Fair in Des Moines. Atten-
dance is all but mandatory,
given that Iowa will be the
first state to vote in 2020.

COURSE: Students required to think up a new business plan

FROM PAGE A1

will offer when it opens a LaunchBox for entrepreneurial studies downtown, the course requires students to think up a new business and develop a plan for starting it.

Next week, they will make their final pitches to a panel. The student with the best presentation will walk away with \$1,000, but the real winner might be the community.

"Maybe someone will have a big idea ... bring in more jobs," said Fermin Diaz Fulgencio, an engineer with a master degree's in construction management who teaches the course with William Andahazy, a doctor of education. One project can spark other businesses and advance Penn State's goals for opening downtown: to help the area grow and employ local graduates locally, Diaz Fulgencio said.

The class also shows the ingenuity that students apply to problems facing the local and larger community.

Emma Rupert said her family buys a case of plastic water bottles every week, but their residence in Zion Grove is 30 minutes from a recycling center.

Her business would let families recycle at home, using a device that shreds, melts and molds plastic into cups or other everyday products.

Brian Simon noticed that the wedding cakes that his mother bakes for her business don't travel well in hot weather.

He proposed selling boxes that would keep the cakes cool in transit.

Nelson Castillo wanted help marketing the construction business of his father, who speaks little English.

Lauren Thomas wants to develop a nutritious food bar for people who overeat.

"My mom and I always wanted to start a business," Thomas said when asked why she took the course. "I wasn't into camps. I always had a boring kind of summer."

Joel Melo and Nicole Castillo teamed up on a plan to transform his family's four-stall garage into a teen center that they'll call The Garage.

Students filled in a start-up canvas, a poster that served as an abbreviated business plan, Andahazy said, with an outline of their idea, skills required, customer base and launch plans.

Entrepreneur Jerry Lisman of Lisman Holdings of Wilkes-Barre, Joceyln Sterenchock of the CAN BE Innovation Center and Okrepkie helped students refine their plans.

Sterenchock told students how to narrow the market for their products and identify competitors.

Okrepkie said he helps entrepreneurs commercialize their ideas.

"It's not about the idea," he said. "It's, how do we find a product people are willing to buy?"

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sal jumps penalty on seven violations from \$40 to \$200

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amending the ordinance.

"Maybe we could've created a new section that includes just the fine that they are focusing on," Cusat said.

No matter how high fines are set, enforcement is difficult, the mayor said.

"We all know that double parking is a serious issue," Cusat said. "However, by the time someone calls it in and the police respond to it, the violator is gone. It's not the monetary value. It's the challenge of catching them in the act."

Cusat said he appreciates council taking the initiative to addressing the problem

would impact law abiding residents.

"It's all about balance when you do this," Speziale said. "If double parking is an issue in certain areas, I understand that. But, what happens to the person who has never ever double parked and gets slammed with a \$200 ticket and is a resident here for 70 years? I don't know if that's a real balance."

Strict enforcement could be an alternative, the chief said.

"If you use strict enforcement on double parking, regardless of \$40 or \$200 it's the enforcement measures," Speziale said. "You've got to

State earmarks: Millions of dollars, mystery, controversy



OPENING SOON

Inside a downtown landmark, work is nearing completion on the Hazleton Art League's new home.

BY JIM DINO
STAFF WRITER

The new home of the Hazleton Art League will have double — and eventually triple — the space it has now.

Sometime later this year, the league will move from its long-time home at 225 E. Broad St. to the former Security Savings building at 31 W. Broad St.

Kathy Bestwick, co-president of the art league's board of directors, who founded and ran an art league in Phoenixville, Chester County, said the move will be made when the second of three phases of construction are complete later this year.

"The gallery space on the first floor of the new building will double what we have now," Bestwick said. "On the lower level, the ceramic studio will be much improved from what we have now. There will be a stained glass and fused glass studio. We have a very robust stained glass and fused glass group of artists."



Work continues on the new city arts center in downtown Hazleton. Above is the main floor as it looks now; at right is how an exhibit might appear.



Drawings at top show what the arts center's children's studio, left, and kitchen might look like once the new home of the Hazleton Art League is complete.

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DRAWINGS COURTESY OF HEMMLER + CAMRYD ARCHITECTS

Tavern, job incubator also taking shape

BY JIM DINO
STAFF WRITER

Three projects in the makeover of West Broad Street in downtown Hazleton should be completed this year.

They include the new city arts center, Broad & Barrel tavern and the Penn State Launch-Box. A fourth project, the renovation of Dragon Chinese Restaurant, is complete.

restaurant, is complete.

Broad & Barrel, an Irish-style pub, is slated to open this summer at 21-23 W. Broad St., in a building formerly occupied by Remember When.

The tavern will have indoor and outdoor seating and performance stages in the former pocket park between it and the new arts center. The outdoor

facility also will have fire pits.

It will be like nothing the Hazleton area has seen, said Kathy Chiriboga, who is leading the development team for the business.

"The inside of the pub will be modern, like a steakhouse and an Irish pub," she said. "Our menu will be farm-to-table fresh and will be made up

of different types of foods you see in a larger city. There will be live music."

Chiriboga's father, Ken Gottstein, of Gottstein Corp. — an industrial and mechanical contractor specializing in the food and beverage industry — will build the pub interior.

Please see **TAVERN**, Page A9

ARTS: Work set to begin on renovating bank lobby into art gallery

FROM PAGE A1

With the building's electrical, plumbing, mechanical and fire suppression systems up to code — and new handicapped-accessible restrooms — construction will begin to transform the former bank lobby into the art gallery, where exhibits and other special events will be held.

Krista Schneider, executive director of the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress, said the \$1.2 million in grants raised for the first phase of the project, code renovations, was matched by \$1.2 million in private funds raised for the second phase of the project, renovations to the first floor and basement.

In the third and final phase of construction — for which funds have not yet been identified — the second floor will be renovated.

"The gallery is open on two floors," Bestwick said. "They are going to make a catwalk around the outside perimeter of the room, off the balcony of the board room. There will be a second level. We will double the exhibit space from when we initially got into the building. This (new) gallery is bigger than the gallery we have. Once they put the mezzanine in, it will double the whole thing again."

Bestwick hopes the new gallery will do for Hazleton what the Barona Factory did for Bethlehem.

"A visual arts center was created there because there



Eastbound motorists on Broad Street will see this view of the new city arts center now under construction in the former Security Savings building in downtown Hazleton. The artist's sketch was included in a booklet for the Banking on the Arts capital campaign.

was money that was earned through Musifest and needed to be reinvested in the community," she said. "Then they got funding from Crayola to create a second gallery space. When they added that second gallery space, and could have two exhibits running concurrently, revenue from art sales and the excitement from their presence in the community went sky high."

Dr. Carl Frankel, art league co-president, said the expanded gallery will give the organization a chance to show off all it has.

"We have a large permanent collection," Frankel said. "We can't exhibit it. We have some of it on the walls (at its present location), but this is a small fraction of what we have. So the increased space will allow us

to have more of our permanent collection on exhibit."

The back of the first floor — where bank offices were located — will become a digital arts studio, a children's classroom and a kitchen.

"It's a big step for us to have a dedicated children's classroom, because now we can put them wherever we can put them," Frankel said. "We've never had a digital studio."

Bestwick said the art league has many plans for the kitchen, including working with colleges in the area and allowing catered events as a fundraiser.

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to have more of our permanent collection on exhibit."

The downtown alliance received a \$50,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to build the kitchen, Schneider said.

The computer arts classroom, also on the first floor, also will have many uses, Bestwick said, including being open to local colleges.

It is unlike anything the art league has now. "There has already been funding donated for the hardware and software. We will have the ability to offer graphic arts and photography. So much is done with digital photography these days," Bestwick said. "If you

have a computer classroom, and you wanted to work with senior centers and bring people in, there are so many opportunities."

The art league hasn't yet made plans for one part of the first floor and the entire second floor.

Office space on the first floor is duplicated on the second floor, which includes the old bank's boardroom. It has a marble fireplace with mahogany accent, and mahogany halfway up the walls. There is stained glass above the boardroom, overlooking the old bank space.

Randi Pachence is designing a stained glass pane for the Broad Street entrance, Bestwick said. "With the phase three space, we want to see what the community brings forward, what interests they develop, specifically,

what type of art classes are requested."

One area that will be a big part of the new arts center is the park next door.

"The main entrance will be facing the new city park at Broad and Laurel streets, and it will be canopied," said Ali McKittrick, the art league's executive director. "The park already has funding through DHAP to be completely renovated, so it is really going to add value to the space."

"The cool thing about this center is that it opens up onto the park, and we are planning to make use of the park for outdoor-in-door festivities," Frankel said.

McKittrick said the arts center, Broad and Laurel pub, Dragon Chinese restaurant and Penn State LaunchBox job incubator represent a \$40 million investment.

"It was the most vacant block in the whole downtown, and now it's going to be really alive," Frankel said.

Parking will be available in the Northside Parking Plaza to the rear and along nearby streets.

The current art league building is up for sale. "It is on the market, and a lot of people have come to see it," Bestwick said. "We have an interested buyer, but we are just in the beginning stages of negotiation. Anyone who buys it would not occupy it until we move out."

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The renovation of Dragon Chinese Restaurant was the fifth facade project undertaken by the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress.

Facade grant aids restaurant owners

A restaurant that moved out of the downtown after a fire in 2012 is back in its original location.

The Pan family relocated to the Hazleton Shopping Center after the fire, but decided they wanted to be back downtown.

When the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress learned of the family's plans to renovate the former Golden City Chinese Restaurant at 19 W. Broad St., the organization offered the owners a facade grant to make the building fit in with other

properties currently under renovation on that block.

It reopened in October as Dragon Chinese Restaurant.

"What's wonderful about this project is that the owners invested a significant amount of time and money to bring their business downtown, but they are also renovating the upstairs apartment as new living space for their family," Krista Schneider, executive director of the alliance, said in a news release. "And its converts a formerly vacant and blighted building into productive use."

The brick building, which dates to the early 20th century, underwent masonry repairs and new windows were installed to match the size of the historic window openings.

New cornices, sign and historical style lighting were added to reflect the building's original design.

Dragon Chinese Restaurant is the alliance's fifth facade renovation project. Schneider said facade and owner financing combined for the five properties represents a \$100,000 investment.

The others include the restoration of 13 E. Broad St., Iglesia Cristiana Monte de Sion/Mount Zion Christian Church, in 2015; 21-25 E. Broad St., the McNelis Law building, and 110 W. Broad St., both in 2016; and 40 N. Wyoming St., Prestigio Restaurant, in 2017.

The alliance's facade renovation grant program is funded by the state Department of Community and Economic Development's Keystone Communities Program and the First Federal Foundation.

TAVERN: Inside work set to start

FROM PAGE A1

"We will manufacture just about everything in there," Gottstein said. "We are waiting for drawings and to obtain permits to continue with the inside renovations. Construction will start any day. At first, we anticipated a winter opening. We are now looking at a late spring or early summer opening. We will have valet parking."

Broad & Barrel is not the firm's first tavern. They also built and operate the Tap at Humboldt Beer Depot along Route 94 in Humboldt, which has 25 beers from all over the world on tap, plus a number of bourbons, single-malt scotch, as well as hot and cold sandwiches and flatbread pizza.

The company also built and operates Elevate Fitness & Wellness center in the former Hazle Twp. High School at North Church and 15th streets.

Gottstein Corp. employs 300 at seven locations in the United States and Mexico, and gen-

erates \$9 million annually for the local economy, according to Gottstein.

LaunchBox

Also scheduled to open this year is a job incubator that is a partnership between Penn State Hazleton, CAN DO Inc., the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress and the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce. It will be located in a former bingo hall at 13-15 W. Broad St.

CAN DO renovated the building's exterior. The downtown alliance recently advertised for bids for interior work for the Penn State LaunchBox, which will be known as The Hazleton Innovation Collaborative.

"The first set of bids came in high," Krista Schneider, executive director of the alliance, said. "So we had to take some of the items out, and redo it."

The rebid has pushed back the target to open the new incubator — where entrepreneurs can start a business,

with professional help — about six months, to this summer, Schneider said.

Its first floor will be flex space with movable walls and tables, and conference rooms. There will also be areas common to all incubator tenants — a cafe area with counter-tops, coffee makers, microwaves and a refrigerator, and small "maker space" with 3-D printers and other office equipment.

Jocelyn Steneshock, director of entrepreneurial services for CAN DO, said although the LaunchBox has not yet opened, the program is in operation.

It consists of a four-week "boot camp" twice a year (the first began in the fall) and a 15-week accelerator program once a year in the spring.

Steneshock called the program "the meat and potatoes" of how entrepreneurs will learn to grow a successful business.

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Community Bank, N.A., recently presented \$5,000 to the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress. The donation is part of a larger Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development Neighborhood Assistance Program, Special Project Priorities tax credit application. From left are John Dorneman, Community Bank vice president and commercial banking officer; Krista Schneider, downtown alliance executive director; and Barbara Macculloch, Community Bank president of Pennsylvania banking. The alliance will dedicate the funds to 2019 entrepreneurship education programming of the Penn State LaunchBox, which is scheduled for completion this summer.

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WARREN RUDA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

An artist's rendering of a proposed renovation of CAN DO Community Park on Broad and Laurel streets, Hazleton. The latest phase of renovations could begin as early as July.

A PARK THAT CAN DO

Facility to be named after area economic development agency

BY SAM GALSKI
STAFF WRITER

HAZLETON — A park that community stakeholders say is key to revitalizing the downtown will be named for an economic development agency that will maintain it over the next five decades.

The latest phase of renovations planned for the facility could begin as early as July, according to an official who is familiar with the project.

Representatives from CAN DO, the CAN DO Community Foundation,

Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress, Mayor Jeff Cusat and other stakeholders announced beneath a tent on a rainy Tuesday afternoon that the park at Broad and Laurel streets will be named "CAN DO Community Park."

Last April, CAN DO and its community foundation each pledged \$25,000 for completing park renovations and entered a 50-year maintenance agreement in exchange for naming rights.

CAN DO board Chairman Bill

Magnotta said the park will complement projects that include an Irish-style pub called Broad and Barrel eyed for the former Remember When building, work to convert the former Security Savings building into Hayden Family Center for the Arts, and a partnership to promote entrepreneurship through the Hazleton LaunchBox facility at 13-15 W. Broad St.

"For the past 63 years, the CAN DO

Please see **PARK**, Page A11

PARK: CAN DO will maintain grounds over 50 years

FROM PAGE A1

board has taken great interest in helping to establish our region as the ideal place for companies to locate their business operations," Magnotta said. "When our founder, Dr. Edgar L. Dessen, helped organize a donation campaign that asked residents to tape dimes along Broad Street to help get the organization off the ground, I'm not sure if he could even begin to imagine those efforts would lead us to standing here today along that very same thoroughfare announcing a park that will bear CAN DO's name."

CAN DO President and CEO Kevin O'Donnell recalled the organization accompanying local stakeholders as they toured cities across Pennsylvania to get a sense for what businesses and people wanted to see in downtown districts.

Business space, food and entertainment areas, arts and education, open space and culture topped the list, he said.

"Today is a great day for Hazleton as we unveil plans for this beautiful park that will be a cornerstone of our downtown," O'Donnell said. "This is truly a team effort and we are proud to be a part of it."

Plans

A sketch plan that was



WARREN RUDA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Gary Lamont, president of the CAN DO Community Foundation, speaks at the unveiling of the CAN DO Community Park proposed renovations Tuesday.

unveiled during the naming ceremony shows the park after a second phase of renovations are completed, according to Krista Schneider, executive director for the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress.

The naming rights payments from CAN DO and its Community Foundation and four grants will cover engineering and permitting fees, along with construction of a plaza, sidewalks, electrical and storm water improvements, ornamental lighting and landscaping, she said.

So far, organizers secured a \$115,000 Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program

grant, \$100,000 from Luzerne County's Local Share Account, \$200,000 from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and a \$135,000 Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grant, Schneider said.

Bids for the second phase of park improvements will be opened at a public city council meeting on May 22 and prices will determine if work will be completed in phases or if additional fundraising is needed, she said. Work includes a new plaza, sidewalks, electrical, storm water and ornamental lighting improvements, and landscaping.

According to Schneider,

sidewalks on the Laurel Street side of the park will remain but a tree will be removed and an existing paved area near the tree reconfigured. That area will serve as an elevated "performance area" that could accommodate musical acts and will have steps that lead down to an oval lawn area.

A future phase could include raising money for a fountain at the center of the park, she said.

The back of the park will be fenced while the east side will be accessible from the arts center.

The primary entrance will be stairs at Broad and Laurel that lead to a fenced area with brick pavers. Retainer walls would separate the front area with pavers from the oval lawn.

Schneider said she's anxious to get the project completed. Construction could begin in July, she said.

"It's a huge milestone and an important one," she said. "I look forward to getting this project underway and moving things along."

Cusat said the project is the result of a "great collaboration." He thanked former Mayor Joseph Yannuzzi for his efforts to secure the park property through eminent domain.

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Tour Highlights Downtown Hazleton Redevelopment Projects

08.03.2018

Hazleton, PA - After a whirlwind walking tour of downtown Hazleton revitalization projects Monday, a state official said he was impressed.

"This really did exceed my expectations," said Richard P. Vilello Jr., community affairs and development deputy secretary at the state's Department of Community and Economic Development. "Keep up the good work."



The group visited eight sites in a two-block stretch of West Broad Street, starting at The Pines Restaurant in a building that businessman George Hayden said once faced the wrecking ball.

The tallest building in the city's downtown, the 11-story structure is now known at the Hayden Tower at the Markle — the last word a nod to its original construction as the Markle Banking & Trust Company Building.

With a combination of private and public funds, the building has been refurbished and boasts an occupancy of more than 90 percent, said Hayden, who owns the property along with members of the DeAngelo family under the umbrella of Downtown Hazleton Development LLC, or DHD.

Next on the tour was the nearby former Traders Bank building, a seven-story Gothic Revival structure with a two-story annex in the rear, both also owned by DHD, according to Hayden.

Lackawanna College has moved into approximately 15,000 square feet in the annex and main building, Hayden said. His company is working with clients to “fill up the rest of the building” now that exterior restoration and other renovations have been completed, he said.

Crossing Broad Street, the group stopped at a 1930s building that once housed restaurants, the Darling Shop and later a bingo hall in the 1990s. It is set to become Penn State Hazleton’s LaunchBox innovation center to foster new businesses.

DHD donated the former bingo building to the nonprofit Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress, which is spearheading efforts to create a downtown arts and innovation district to spark further economic development.

After admiring exposed brick and windows once hidden behind siding on the facade of the new Dragon Chinese Restaurant, the group stepped inside an adjacent former antique shop being converted to an Irish style pub and restaurant called Broad and Barrel. The establishment includes doors that will lead to an outdoor patio deck area in an adjacent lot.

On the opposite side of the lot is a former bank building that will house the new City Arts Center to be operated and managed by the Hazleton Art League. Upgrades are underway, and half of the \$2.4 million renovation target has been raised, officials said.

The group proceeded to a city-owned corner lot that will become a park and plaza for the arts center, with landscaping and murals attached to the center building, said downtown alliance Executive Director Krista Schneider.

Owned by DHD, the eight-story, former Hazleton National Bank building was the final stop. It was built in 1924.

Renovation has wrapped up on several floors, and the building is about half occupied, Hayden said. The company is speaking to banks, restaurants and other prospective tenants for the majestic first-floor bank lobby, he said.

This building and the former Traders Bank structure have Keystone Opportunity Zone, or KOZ, tax exemption through 2022. To improve parking, DHD also bought a medical building with a 100-spot lot behind the former Hazleton National Bank building, Hayden said.



Hazleton innovation hub named for local leader Pasco Schiavo

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Penn State Hazleton Chancellor Gary Lawler, left, and Linda Schiavo unveil the logo for the Hazleton LaunchBox, which will be named after Linda's brother, the late Pasco L. Schiavo. *Image: Penn State*

April 11, 2019

HAZLETON, Pa. — Penn State and the Invent Penn State initiative are honoring the late Pasco L. Schiavo, a longtime philanthropist for Penn State Hazleton and the surrounding community who passed away Dec. 29, 2018, by naming the Hazleton LaunchBox in his name. The naming recognizes Schiavo's stature in the region and a \$1 million gift from his estate to the campus.

The LaunchBox is one of 21 innovation hubs Penn State has opened across the Commonwealth to provide early-stage startups with viable plans for growth and the support and resources needed to build a sustainable and scalable business. To recognize Schiavo's gift, the University will name the facility "The Hazleton LaunchBox, Supported by Pasco L. Schiavo, Esq."

"Pasco was deeply committed to Penn State Hazleton and the Hazleton community, and this transformative gift will serve both," Penn State President Eric Barron said. "The innovation hub that will carry his name will help drive economic growth in this region and across the Commonwealth. We're very pleased to honor Pasco and extend his incredible legacy in this significant way."

The Hazleton LaunchBox, scheduled to open later this year at 13 W. Broad St. in downtown Hazleton, is a community collaboration with partners including the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress; CAN DO; CAN BE; the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce; the Society of Hispanic Business Professionals; and other organizations engaged in The Hazleton Innovation Collaborative (THInC). The LaunchBox will offer a variety of services to community members, students and faculty who aspire to become business owners.

As part of "A Greater Penn State for 21st Century Excellence," the University's current fundraising campaign, each of Penn State's 21 innovation hubs has the opportunity to secure \$1 million in matching support from the University when gifts to the hub's endowment reach \$1 million. The combined funds will provide operational funding to the innovation hub each year, ensuring that it continues to spark economic development and support entrepreneurship in perpetuity.

In 2018, the University announced \$1 million grants from PNC Bank and the Hite Family to fund and name the Happy Valley LaunchBox, Powered by PNC Bank, and the Altoona LaunchBox Supported by the Hite Family. The LaunchBox at Penn State Hazleton is the third innovation hub to reach its \$1 million goal and secure a \$1 million match from the University.

"Pasco was very proud of the Hazleton community and was very involved in many organizations," said his sister, Linda Schiavo. "He always looked for ways to provide and enhance opportunities for residents of the Greater Hazleton area. He would be very pleased to have this center for entrepreneurship bear our family's name."

Born and raised in Hazleton, Schiavo earned a bachelor's degree from Lafayette College in 1958 before entering the U.S. Army Reserve and receiving a juris doctor degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1962. During his lifetime, he became Luzerne County assistant district attorney, a member of the Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and a designated "Super Lawyer" with his own legal practice. Schiavo's involvement with Penn State Hazleton spanned more than 50 years as a donor, president and member of the campus advisory board, advocate and instructor. He chaired "For the Future: The Campaign for Penn State Students at Penn State Hazleton," helping to raise more than \$7.6 million, and was named an honorary alumnus in 2015. After a \$1 million gift in 2014, the campus administration building was named after Schiavo as Pasco L. Schiavo Hall. Schiavo also endowed four scholarships for students at the campus and served as an adjunct instructor in law and Spanish.

"Pasco Schiavo was a tireless advocate for educational opportunities and for community development — all to benefit residents of the area. We are grateful for his involvement with the campus and the University, and we are thankful for this additional gift," said Penn State Hazleton Chancellor Gary M. Lawler. "All of the organizations collaborating on the LaunchBox eagerly anticipate the impact and success that the facility will bring to the Hazleton area business community and economic development. We hope that downtown Hazleton will continue to be revitalized by the resources available at The Hazleton LaunchBox, Supported by Pasco L. Schiavo, Esq."

Invent Penn State is a Commonwealth-wide initiative to spur economic development, job creation and student career success. Invent Penn State blends entrepreneurship-focused academic programs, business startup training and incubation, funding for commercialization, and university/community/industry collaborations to facilitate the challenging process of turning research and discoveries into valuable products and services that can benefit residents of the state and all humankind. Learn more at invent.psu.edu.

Schiavo's estate gift will advance "A Greater Penn State for 21st Century Excellence," a focused campaign that seeks to elevate Penn State's position as a leading public university in a world defined by rapid change and global connections. With the support of alumni and friends, "A Greater Penn State" seeks to fulfill the three key imperatives of a 21st century public university: keeping the doors to higher education open to hard-working students regardless of financial well-being; creating transformative experiences that go beyond the classroom; and impacting the world by fueling discovery, innovation and entrepreneurship. To learn more about "A Greater Penn State for 21st Century Excellence," visit greaterpennstate.psu.edu.

Last Updated April 12, 2019

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Owner Brian Williams poses in his Grateful Roast Coffee location in Nanticoke.

New specialty café coming to center city

A new specialty café is moving into downtown Hazleton where a former restaurant operated.

Grateful Roast Coffee, a café featuring specialty coffees made with an in-house coffee roaster, is set to open in April at 9 E. Broad St., previously occupied by Dragonfly Café.

Along with its signature coffee, Grateful Roast also will have a menu including pastries and breakfast and lunch items.

It is the latest new business in the downtown, about a block away from the recently reopened Dragon Chinese restaurant.

The Hazleton café is Grateful Roast's second location, following the opening of its first in Nanticoke three years ago. Owners Brian Williams and Sarah Kratz expect the hours to be the same as the Nanticoke location: Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

As a native of Portland, Oregon, Williams grew up in the coffee culture of the Pacific Northwest area. When he and Kratz moved to Northeast Pennsylvania to be closer to her family, they quickly realized the region needed a quality coffee alternative to what was being served at chain coffee and donut shops.

Williams began studying coffee roasting, building a business idea and making plans to open a café.

"I knew pretty early on that if we really wanted a coffee culture, we needed to build it ourselves," Williams said. "I took whatever start-up money we had saved and purchased a little 2-kilo (4-pound maximum batch size) coffee roaster. I put that on my sun porch, purchased a few delicious coffees and taught myself how to roast."

When asked what makes Grateful Roast stand out from the competition, he said rather than its coffee



and unique food items, is the local community.

"We stay mindful of our place in a community," he said. "We feel that we have a responsibility to give back to the community we serve in and we can use our coffee as a vehicle for change, so we do. We often host events aimed at raising funds or awareness for various local causes."

In Hazleton, Grateful Roast Coffee already is working with Brandon's Forever Home by roasting Brandon's Brew. When someone purchases a bag of Brandon's Brew from the foundation, \$5 is donated to Brandon's Forever Home.

The coffee is roasted in-house, and that the menu items feature high-quality, locally sourced ingredients.

"We are the only place in Luzerne County that actually roasts our own coffee locally, in our own café," Williams said. "You can come into the café and actually see the coffee roaster and smell the beans roasting."

"We place an emphasis on high-quality and locally sourced whole foods. We use local artisans, bakers and farms to produce the foods that we offer. The more local foods we can offer, the better we feel about the business we're doing. It's very important to support local because we're all in this together."

Williams said the spirit of Grateful Roast Coffee seems to fit with the downtown revitalization Hazleton is experiencing, Williams said.

"I love what Hazleton and the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress are doing,"

he said. "The downtown looks great and is only getting better. One night after visiting the space, before we signed the lease, we were driving down Broad Street heading to Interstate 81 and I noticed how all the trees were lit up with lights; not even just downtown, but all down the street. It's things like this that really show a city's pride. I am very proud to be a new business in this revitalizing city."

Turning the thought of a second Grateful Roast Coffee location in Hazleton from an idea to reality was a team effort involving the city of Hazleton, the downtown alliance, CAN DO and other organizations supporting downtown.

Jocelyn Sterenchock, CAN DO's coordinator of entrepreneurial services, assisted Williams in navigating the licensing and permitting process, leaning on the relationships developed with the city.

"Working to bring this business to downtown Hazleton took a lot of teamwork and it could not have been done without the support of those partnerships we rely so heavily upon," she said. "I'm passionate about having new and young businesses in downtown Hazleton. I think Grateful Roast Coffee will be a complement to the many long-established restaurants that are already in our community."

Williams said Sterenchock's assistance throughout the entire process had an integral role launching the second location.

"Jocelyn is amazing," Williams said. "She kept us informed throughout the entire process and spearheaded everything from start to acceptance. I can't say enough about how awesome she's been. Running a café is crazy enough, and trying to open a second is insane, but she made it happen and, for that, we are truly grateful."

Downtown group reaches out to Hispanics

BY JIM DINO
STAFF WRITER

HAZLETON — In five years, the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress has made the downtown a destination, and created an environment complete with 160 new jobs, a job incubator, a new arts center, and a brighter look with murals and a facade restoration program, its executive director says.

Krista Schneider hosted a workshop Wednesday night aimed at the Hispanic business community, as she was getting feedback on where the downtown effort should go from here.

Schneider summarized DHAP's accomplishments,

which were translated into Spanish, as was the entire presentation.

Some of the accomplishments — the new city arts center and the job incubator — are slated for completion this summer, Schneider said.

Mary Veronica Sweeney, the city native who created the mural behind Hazle Drugs on North Wyoming Street, said one of the new murals planned — a 24-foot by 60-foot mural — will be on the side of the new arts center facing the city park at Broad and Laurel streets. "We're working with the local schools to develop the murals," Sweeney said.

Please see **DOWNTOWN**, Page A11

DOWNTOWN: Ideas generated

FROM PAGE A1

"Art has the power to tell many stories."

Schneider showed a sketch of the new park, which will feature a brick plaza along Broad Street, and a performance stage on the Laurel Street side of the park.

She also showed an artist's rendering of a new streetscape program planned in the first two blocks of North Wyoming Street.

"We wanted to make downtown a destination," Schneider said. "We have made a destination for education, with Luzerne County Community College and Lackawanna College."

She also discussed the new Penn State LaunchBox job incubator expected to be completed this summer, which will give would-be businesses their start.

"If you can't afford space to start a new business, the LaunchBox will provide space, free Wi-Fi, and meeting rooms," Schneider said.

The downtown has also become a destination for business, Schneider said.

In the five years of the existence of DHAP, Schneider said 100 new businesses created about 160 jobs have come downtown.

Last summer, a survey of 42 Hispanic businesspeople identified a need for a more welcoming environment, better communication, ways for Hispanic businessmen to develop leadership skills so they can become more involved in the community, and also opportunities for Hispanic businesswomen to also become more involved in the community.

A need for a marketing program to expand the downtown's potential was also identified in last year's survey.

The workshop

The workshop was held to give DHAP more updated information to develop its goals, Schneider said.

"Five years ago, we had several workshops to get input so that we could come up with a plan," Schneider said. "We are trying to update the feedback we got five years ago."

Wednesday night, the group that attended the workshop — about 75 people — were divided into five groups — arts and cultural programs; entrepreneurship and education; how to bring Hispanic businesspeople leadership skills; marketing and business retention; and physical improvements.

The recommendations of the groups included:

■ Businesses lacking in the

downtown had to be identified, to give prospective businesspersons new opportunities;

■ Marketing had to be targeted toward creating things to do for families, particularly children;

■ There is a lack of parental involvement with children;

■ Children graduating high school have to be given skills to find jobs in the local workforce;

■ A how-to guide has to be developed to start a business, and capital to do it;

■ A way to create jobs downtown has to be found.

Schneider also had Wednesday night's attendees fill out a questionnaire asking them to prioritize from a list of a dozen topics: expanding arts and culture; entrepreneurship and business assistance; Hispanic business integration and community leadership development; blight remediation and facade improvements; new business recruitment; downtown branding and marketing; mural and public arts; downtown housing; Wyoming Streetscape improvements; parking; educational expansion, and any other topic they thought was important.

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Artist's sketches show what the Hazleton Arts Center, left, and Lackawanna College's new Hazleton center might look like.

HAZLETON AREA

Is hiring policy obeyed?

BY KENT JACKSON
STAFF WRITER

HAZLE TWP. — Two candidates for the Hazleton Area School Board raised issues about the policy for hiring teachers with the current board members.

Dr. Robert Childs, a former board member seeking to regain a seat in the Nov. 7 election, said during a meeting Thursday that applicants for teaching jobs are being identified earlier than intended by the policy, which was written to keep them anonymous for fairness.

Childs also said a principal wasn't involved in selecting teachers for his school, which also doesn't follow the policy.

Retired teacher Linda DeCosmo, who is also on the ballot, said a board member attends interviews in violation of the policy, and prospective teachers get too much notice before teaching a sample lesson as part of the hiring process.

The policy says for each job opening in their school, principals will select at least three applicants from a roster of candidates who meet minimum criteria and are listed by number, not name.

Next, a committee chosen by the superintendent interviews the job applicants, who say answers to some questions and write answers to others. Based on the answers, the committee decides which candidates will advance to the next round in which they teach a sample lesson.

After watching the applicants teach, the committee

Signs of progress

State grants, donations funding work in downtown

BY JIM DINO
STAFF WRITER

There will be a lot of construction activity on West Broad Street, between Laurel and Wyoming streets, in the next few weeks.

Work has begun to stabilize the former bingo hall at 13-15 W. Broad St. thanks to a state grant matched by tax credits created by donations from five area banks.

The renovations will convert the building into a business incubator.

In the same block, work also is underway at three buildings that long stood vacant: the former Security Savings, the former Remember When and a former Chinese restaurant.

And renovations continue at two downtown high-rises, the former Hazleton National and Traders bank buildings.

Financing

For the bingo hall project, Wells Fargo Bank last week donated \$110,000 to go along with a \$100,000 donation from Mid-Penn Bank, \$10,000 each from Luzerne Bank and FNCB Bank and a \$2,000 donation from First National Bank.

The money was used to get a



ELLEN F. O'CONNELL / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

An employee of Richard Angelo Construction works in the former bingo building at 13-15 W. Broad St. in downtown Hazleton on Wednesday.

matching \$232,000 Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development Neighborhood Assistance Program 2016-17 tax credit award for phase one renovations to the bingo hall, a long-vacant and blighted property.

The tax credits in turn were used to match a \$200,000 Keystone Communities Program grant. The program is designed to encourage the creation of partnerships between the

public and private sectors and further the revitalization initiatives of the local Main Street program.

"We are glad to see that public funding in these revitalization initiatives is paying off in terms of encouraging private investment," said state Rep. Tarah Toohill, R-116, Butler Twp. "The intent of these programs is to serve as a catalyst."

Work costing approximately \$400,000 will stabilize the building by

repairing its blighted conditions, which includes necessary structural repairs, a new electrical system, code upgrades and a new roof.

The second floor and basement will be addressed in subsequent phases of the project, according to Krista Schneider, executive director of the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress.

Please see **DOWNTOWN**, Page A4

Please see **HIRING**, Page A4



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Wells Fargo Bank presented the Downtown Alliance for Progress \$110,000 that is part of \$232,000 in tax credits to begin refurbishing the former bingo hall on West Broad Street. From left are Neal DeAngelo III, DHD Development and downtown alliance chairman; George Leitner, an alliance board member and leasing agent for DHD; Dr. Gary Lawler, Penn State Hazleton chancellor; Joe Clifford, the Community Association for New Business Entrepreneurship (CAN BE) advisory committee; Mark Grochowski, chief of staff for state Sen. John Yudichak, D-14, Plymouth Twp.; Krista Schneider, alliance executive director; Joseph Boretski, Wells Fargo Bank; Charles McElwee, CAN DO; Hazleton Mayor Jeff Cusati; Richard Angelo Jr., Richard Angelo Construction, which is doing the project; Tommy Kearns, Joseph Rominski Architecture; and Debby Reznick, representing state Rep. Tarah Toohil, R-116, Butler Twp.

DOWNTOWN: Business incubator planned

FROM PAGE A1

"The building is not historically significant, but it would cost more to tear it down than to renovate it," Schneider said.

DHD Realty, which owned the building until a use could be determined, donated the property to the alliance to create a small business incubator or technology center that will encourage small business entrepreneurship within the Hazleton area.

The downtown alliance is working with Penn State Hazleton, CAN DO Inc. and other partners to develop a plan to establish an Invent Penn State "LaunchBox" within the building once it is ready for occupancy. Penn State currently operates 14 such business incubators throughout the commonwealth and three more, including Hazleton, recently received planning grants.

"It's part of the present initiative for entrepreneurship throughout the commonwealth," said Dr. Gary Lawler, chancellor of Penn State Hazleton. "We're very excited to provide the kind of services pre-incubator and incubator small businesses in downtown Hazleton need."

The incubator will not be for any one kind of business, Lawler said.

"It's really going to be open to all new businesses," he said. "We're really looking to do that, and also to be a one-stop shop for people who want that business plan process — to let them know what permits they need to get, where they get them and how they go about doing what they are doing, depending upon where they are located. We'll be doing business seminars and things of that nature as well."

The downtown alliance intends to apply for additional tax credits for 2017-18 which will fund phase two of the project. Estimated to cost \$300,000, this work will include the installation of necessary plumbing, fire



ELLEN R. O'CONNELL / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Bob Gruber, of Zook Interiors, places tiles on the ceiling of the sixth floor at the former Hazleton National Bank building Wednesday.

suppression, and heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems needed to bring the building up to code, as well as interior renovations for its new use as a business incubator.

The application is due Sept. 15. Any corporation interested in partnering with the alliance to receive the state tax credits can contact Schneider at 570-455-1509, or kschnneider@downtownhazleton.org before Aug. 30.

Other projects

On the same block of West Broad Street, work has begun to renovate the Security Savings building at 31 W. Broad St. into a new city arts center.

The building has been vacant for well over a decade. The downtown alliance bought it in 2013 and has been working to raise funds for its renovation ever since, obtaining several state grants.

Phase one renovations are expected to be complete by next summer, after which the Hazleton Art League intends to relocate its operations there.

On the other side of an empty lot adjacent to that building is the former

Remember When at 21-33 W. Broad St., which also is set for renovations. CAN DO, the area's economic development organization, owns that building.

Phase one of that project will include facade renovations and should be underway within a month. Plans are to prepare the building for a new tenant. The empty lot may be used to augment either the arts center or the CAN DO project.

The building east of Remember When, 19 W. Broad St., is being rehabilitated by its owner, Hong Wei Pan, who intends to reopen his Chinese restaurant within the building, Schneider said.

Fire, attributed to arson, hit the building in 2012. The blaze was contained and some renovation work was initiated, but never finished. The building has been vacant since that time.

Meanwhile, phase two renovations at the former Hazleton National Bank building, 101 W. Broad St., are wrapping up. The work involved over \$1 million of private investment by DHD Realty.

According to George Hayden of DHD, the improve-

ments included exterior masonry renovations and new windows throughout the seven-story structure, as well as new HVAC and electrical systems and new handicapped-accessible restrooms on each floor of the building.

George Leitner, the leasing agent for the building, said two offices were taken away on each floor to make way for the restrooms. Previously, there were only two restrooms in the entire building.

Interior renovations were also made to floors six and seven, with sensitivity to the historic architecture. "We worked hard to save the original woodwork and doors in the corridors and the terrazzo floors," said Hayden.

The upper floors, Leitner said, are almost completely occupied with approximately 10 new tenants.

When DHD took over, the building was only 11 percent occupied. It is now over 33 percent occupied, Leitner said. Plans are underway to renovate floors four and five, as well as the lobby and first floor, where the bank was located.

On the other side of West Broad Street, Hayden Tower at the Markle — the first building in that block to be renovated almost two decades ago — has essentially the top floor left to be occupied.

Across Wyoming Street, Lackawanna College is making its new home on half of the first floor of the former Traders Bank and in a former bank office building at the rear.

Several new murals are planned in the same block with all the projects, including some near the new City Park at Broad and Laurel streets.

The downtown alliance also has grant applications pending to fund phase two of the City Park development and continues to assist downtown property owners with facade renovations.

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HIRING: Director says list isn't anonymous

FROM PAGE A1

recommends whom to hire to the superintendent, who forwards the names to the board.

"The list isn't anonymous," said current board member Robert Mehalick, who developed the hiring policy with Childs and now-retired administrator Donald Bayzick in 2012. "The entire spirit of the policy has been destroyed."

After one year, Mehalick said the practice of keeping applicants' names secret from the principals changed, information that surprised Childs even though he was on the board through 2015. This year, Childs also said at least one principal told him that he wasn't shown a list of applicants from which to choose.

One or more principals are selecting for the rest, said Childs, adding that weakens the grounds for evaluating principals based on the teachers they choose.

Board President Jared O'Donnell, however, said people lobbying for teacher applicants now make appeals directly to principals, just as they used to buttonhole board members.

Board member James Chapman, a retired principal, said the board altered the hiring policy to give additional advantage to teachers who work as substitutes in the district.

"You couldn't do that anonymously," said Chapman, adding that he believes substitutes automatically should be invited to the first round of interviews and, perhaps, allowed the next round, too.

Childs said some substitutes are strong teachers, whereas others didn't excel in the application process. To qualify for an interview, the policy says teachers must accumulate at least 10 points through a scoring system based on factors including their time as substitutes, their college grades, advanced degrees and certifications.

DeCosmo said board members are not to interfere in the interviews.

Board member Vincent Zola said he was asked to attend interviews.

"We're not allowed to participate. We're allowed to observe. Come on," Zola said to DeCosmo. "I'm not going to argue."

DeCosmo said some teachers had two weeks' notice before teaching sample lessons, whereas she thinks that asking the applicants to teach without any notice would be a better test of their ability.

It's up to the board to keep or change parts of the policy such as when to unveil applicants' names, whether board members should attend interviews and how much time applicants should have to prepare a sample lesson.

"Those are the details you iron out," said Childs, adding he wants the board to return to a "fair policy."

Later during the meeting, Zola explained that the board is temporarily suspending a different policy for hiring maintenance workers. Facilities Manager Andre Marchese saw no need to go through the interview process when he had qualified substitutes from whom to hire.

"We do away with the policy when it suits us?" school board member Marie Kay asked.

"When it suits the district," Zola said.

Following the discussions, the board voted to hire three special education teachers for \$41,174 apiece.

They are Jeanne Cannon, Theresa Gajlas and Mark Nemok.

Also the board appointed Joanne Astorino as an elementary teacher for a \$43,881 salary.

The appointments of two other teachers, Hillary Pratz and Shelby Chase, were rescinded.

The board hired Gina Yocum as a speech therapist for \$43,981 and Sherry Daughtry as a school nurse for \$43,981.

John Samoyedny resigned as head of the guidance department but he will remain a guidance counselor, and Michelle Dudley resigned as a teacher at Drums Elementary/Middle School.

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BOSTON: 27 arrested

FROM PAGE A1

One of the planned speakers of the conservative activist rally said the event "fell apart."

Congressional candidate Samson Racioppi, who was among several slated to speak, told WCVB-TV that he didn't realize "how unplanned of an event it was going to be."

Some counterprotesters dressed entirely in black and wore bandannas over their faces. They chanted anti-Nazi and anti-fascism slogans, and waved signs that said: "Make Nazis Afraid Again," "Love your neighbor," "Resist fascism" and "Hate never made U.S. great." Others carried a large banner that read: "SMASH WHITE SUPREMACY."

Chris Hood, a free speech rally attendee from Dorches-

ter County, said 27 arrests were made — mostly for disorderly conduct while some were for assaulting police officers. Officials said the rally drew about 40,000 people.

Trump applauded the people in Boston who he said were "speaking out" against bigotry and hate. Trump added in a Twitter message that "Our country will soon come together as one."

Organizers of the conservative event, which had been billed as a "Free Speech Rally," had publicly distanced themselves from the neo-Nazis, white supremacists and others who fomented violence in Charlottesville on Aug. 12. A woman was killed

Program sparking city's growth

Hazleton again receives vital Main Street designation

The Main Street program has helped 80 new businesses get started in downtown Hazleton, and has also resulted in \$6.5 million in new investment.

Many of those new businesses were started by Hispanic entrepreneurs, so an effort is being made to further incorporate them into downtown revitalization, the director of the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress says.

On Friday, DHAP announced it has once again been designated as an accredited Main Street America program for meeting rigorous performance standards set by the National Main Street Center.

Each year, the National Main Street Center and its coordinating program partners announce the list of accredited Main Street America programs in recognition of their exemplary commitment to preservation-based economic development and community revitalization through the Main Street approach.

Last year the Alliance's Main Street District was recognized as one of the top 10 performing programs in the Pennsylvania. The results haven't been tabulated for 2017 yet, but the committee is hopeful that Hazleton again will be listed among the best.

The Main Street program is designed to foster downtown development by people working together to get it in top physical shape, selling its positives, and finding new or better purposes for Main Street enterprises.

While the majority of the \$6.5 million in private investment downtown in 2017 was attributed to improvements made by DHD Realty as they undertake renovations of the former Traders Bank and Hazleton National Bank, many smaller commercial properties were also fixed up by individual owners. In addition, approximately \$650,000 in state grant funding went to support several ongoing improvement projects being spearheaded by the Alliance, including the new arts center and small business incubator. Both of these are currently under renovation.

Most of the 80 new businesses — which have created 140 new jobs — are small start-up companies, employing only one person, or in many cases relying on part-time workers as they grow their new businesses. In some cases, the owner has launched a new start-up

company as a second job and an investment in their future, relying on a full-time job elsewhere to support their new endeavor. This is the case with the Eli Matos, owner of The Dapper Room. A Cintas employee by day and operator of a vintage men's clothing store on Broad Street by night and on weekends, Matos took advantage of affordable real estate and favorable business climate to make his dream of small business ownership come true.

Others are Two Sister Logistics, who just opened in the newly renovated HNB Bank building, or Manuel's Empañada's, a new restaurant on Wyoming Street that serves traditional Latin foods. Others are larger businesses that have opened branch offices in the downtown or relocated from another community, such as Innotek Computer Consulting, who is based in Bloomsburg, and saw a market opportunity to expand its services to the Greater Hazleton area. Likewise, Keselicka State Farm Insurance is expanding into the Hazleton market, and Ripa Jewelers recently reopened a store downtown after being away for nearly 20 years.

Help them succeed

Krista Schneider, DHAP's executive director, said a 2016 report from the Kauffman Foundation found immigrants launched nearly one-third of all new businesses in America. In Hazleton the available data shows approximately half of all new downtown businesses are Hispanic-owned.

"Much of the economic growth in the downtown is attributed to the Hispanic community and newcomers making investments in new business," Schneider said. "There is definitely a strong entrepreneurial and community spirit within the Hispanic community," said Fermin Diaz, a member of the Alliance's economic development committee and owner of ACE Construction, a new start-up engineering and construction services company that Diaz and his wife, Gladys, founded last year. Diaz also help found the Society of Hispanic Professionals of the Hazleton Area in 2016, which looks to assist Hispanics with college degrees from their home country navigate the paperwork or identify the additional coursework needed to receive certifications to work in their chosen profession.

Recognizing that the growth of the Hazleton economy will rely upon new business startups and success of the Hispanic business community, the Alliance, along with its partners, is doubling its efforts to attract entrepreneurs and investment to the downtown and help them succeed.

A key partner of The Hazleton Innovation Collaborative, the Alliance is working together with Penn State Hazleton and CAN DO to establish a new business incubator on Broad Street. Penn State Hazleton will operate the incubator as the Hazleton Launch-Box, which is expected to open in 2019, where they will offer entrepreneurial education programs and support services in partnership with CAN BE.

Also in the works is a business integration strategy designed to build relationships between the traditional business community and the Hispanic business community. "This is admittedly a challenging task, but one certainly worth undertaking," said Joe Clifford, chairman of the committee and former PPL executive, "As our history tells us, the most important factor for building a thriving and vibrant community are strong relationships built on a foundation of trust. We are making sure that the demographics of the community are represented in our committee membership."

These efforts, along with the new arts center, park, renovated offices, two colleges (Luzerne County Community College and Lackawanna College), and several restaurants will comprise what the Alliance will brand as the Arts and Innovation District, which comprises the core of the downtown. To compete with other cities for attracting entrepreneurs or simply retaining homegrown college graduates, the Alliance sees this district as key to attracting millennials who, more so than other generations, value urban environments, cultural diversity, creative expression, and a dynamic work environment.

"It's going to take time," said Neal DeAngelo, chairman of the Alliance, "but we are committed to making Hazleton a better place." The DeAngelo family and the Hayden family, which comprise DHD Realty, have invested several million dollars into improving the commercial building stock of the downtown.

Banking on the future



FRANK BARR / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

The lobby of the downtown Hazleton arts center is shown from a second-floor balcony prior to an open house Saturday.



Ali McKittrick, associate director of the Banking on the Arts capital campaign, and Mary Veronica Sweeney, director, pose near the vault of the former Security Savings Bank.

Arts center fund drive already has raised \$1M

BY KELLY MONITZ
STAFF WRITER

HAZLETON — People got a sneak peak at the work being done to transform the former Security Savings Bank building into the city's new arts center Saturday afternoon during the Hazleton Art League's annual Art Youth Expo.

The first phase of the transformation should wrap up this spring, said Krista Schneider of Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress, which owns the building. The Banking on the Arts capital campaign is working on raising the \$1.2 million to fund the next

phase, which will make the center fully functional.

The campaign, which has been selling naming rights for various aspects of the arts center, has already raised nearly \$1 million through private donations and pledges, said Mary Veronica Sweeney, who is director of creative capital.

The area's economic development agency, CAN DO, and its CAN DO Community Foundation this week donated \$50,000 for naming rights to a park at West Broad and Laurel streets,

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ARTS: Businesses stepped up as sponsors

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where the grand entrance to the arts center will be located. Many other naming opportunities have also been scooped up, Sweeney said.

"We're aiming high. We're almost to our goal," she said on Saturday before the tours started.

Sweeney is excited about the campaign and the area businesses that stepped up to sponsor different areas. First Quality Nonwovens, for instance, is sponsoring a washroom and providing supplies for it, she said.

"It's great to see the generosity and creativity in the community," Sweeney said.

Now, they want to open the campaign up to the community and are seeking additional donations to hopefully hit their goal by the end of May.

Sweeney said a couple overheard her talking about the arts center at a local restaurant and gave her a \$20 donation. She said she was so moved that you would have thought they gave her \$20,000.

The main gallery, which is the original banking room of the 1909 building, had been carved up into offices. It was opened back up in the first phase of construction, which brought the building up to code. Floors and windows still need to be restored and that will come in the next phase, Schneider said.

"We're trying to restore as much as we can," she said.

A second-floor balcony and stained glass windows above it were uncovered during the work. The group is working with a stained glass artist to come up with a design for a large arching window at the Broad Street side above what

used to be the bank's main entrance, Sweeney said.

Behind the balcony is the bank's original board room, which still has the original wood wainscoting and green marble fireplace. The room will be used as a meeting room, Schneider said. They hope to extend balconies out from the original for a second-floor gallery that is open to the main gallery below, she said.

Classrooms for painting, drawing and a children's studio are located at the back of the building on the first and second floors. North-facing windows bring in the type of natural light artists prefer, Sweeney said. The lower level will have pottery and stained glass studios.

Outside, two murals will flank the new entrance into the former Center City Park. Sweeney, who created the downtown alliance's first

mural behind Hazle Drugs, is working with high school and college students to create a second mural for the center, titled "The Hazleton Way."

The Hazleton Art League, which has been providing art instruction in the community for more than 65 years, will call the arts center its new home, as it has outgrown its current East Broad Street location. The league hopes the new location in the center of the city's proposed Arts and Innovation District will allow them to do more events, offer more programs and attract new members.

For more information on the capital campaign or to make a donation, people can contact Sweeney at 570-491-8101, ext. 108 or bankingonthearts@gmail.com.

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Downtown program ranked among best in the state

BY JIM DINO
STAFF WRITER

The Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress has been named one of the top-10 downtowns in Pennsylvania for creating economic development opportunities.

The Pennsylvania Downtown Center named DHAP its sixth-best performing Main Street program of 2016.

This award recognizes those programs that have demonstrated an "across the board" capacity to generate new jobs, new businesses, public and private investment and volunteer hours. The downtown programs are ranked by measuring activity in 16 different categories.

Krista Schneider, DHAP's executive director, said the Main Street program is meant to revitalize downtowns and central business districts in several ways.

"The Main Street program advocates revitalization of old, historic, urban downtown centers for redevelopment and adaptive re-use," Schneider said. "There is a four-pronged approach — a good organization,

strategy for marketing and promotion, strategy for economic vitality and revitalization, and a strategy for design and physical improvements."

The award is based on statistics she provides to the program monthly, Schneider said.

"Those statistics include businesses that opened or closed, and jobs created or lost," Schneider said. "We look at building permits to see private investment by business owners, and money we put in for facade improvements. We also provide information on events we hold, and participation in them."

The leading Main Street downtown was Easton, followed by Ebsburg, Cambria County; Ardmore, Delaware and Montgomery counties; Kennett Square, Chester County; Oil City, Venango County, and Hazleton. Allentown finished 10th with its 7th Street program. This year there were more than 40 organizations eligible for evaluation.

The Pennsylvania Downtown Center, the coordinating program to the National Main Street Center for Main Street programs in Pennsylvania, said the 10 pro-

grams met or exceeded goals they set for themselves.

Each top-10 Main Street community has also met the ten performance standards established by National Main Street Center to be a nationally accredited Main Street Program. These standards include topics such as training requirements, planning methods and community involvement.

The 10 communities with the best Main Street programs are also among the 32 accredited communities. In the northeast region, Downtown Shenandoah Inc. and the Danville Business Alliance were recognized.

"Downtown Hazleton is a Pennsylvania-designated Main Street program, and we are a national Main Street affiliate," Schneider said.

Founded in 1987, the mission of Pennsylvania Downtown Center is to build and support the capacity of local nonprofit organizations, municipalities and individuals to enhance the overall well-being and sustainability of Pennsylvania's communities.

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STANDARD-SPEAKER FILE

Krista Schneider, executive director of Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress, stands in front of the former Security Savings building on West Broad Street. The building now houses an arts centers thanks to DHAP's efforts. The Pennsylvania Downtown Center named DHAP its sixth-best performing Main Street program of 2016.